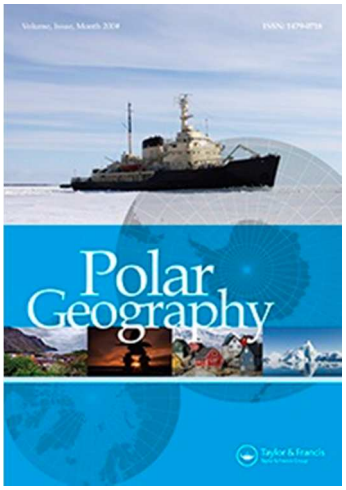

Covering Kiruna: A natural experiment in Arctic awareness

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Abstract
At a time when the Arctic is attracting increasing international attention and a variety of actors are positioning themselves in anticipation of future developments, news reporters across the world face the challenge of explaining why the Arctic is relevant to the lives and realities of audiences, some of whom are far from the region itself. This challenge was felt particularly profoundly in May 2013, when events and controversies surrounding the Kiruna Arctic Council meeting tasked journalists around the world with explaining to their audiences what it means to have a legitimate interest in the Arctic and why the Arctic *matters* at a global scale. Media coverage from the eight Arctic Council member states, six candidate states, and six existing permanent observer states thus presented a natural experiment in Arctic awareness. In this article, an analysis of 280 news stories reporting on the Kiruna meeting is used to reveal how the media frame the Arctic as a region of increasing global significance – a region in which present-day participation is a strategic positioning for the future, and in which political presence holds symbolic significance for geopolitical relations far beyond the region's latitudinal borders.
Keywords: Arctic Council, Kiruna, Media, Permanent observers

The age of the Arctic media event

When the 'age of the Arctic' was heralded a decade ago, few could have foreseen the role that the Arctic and, in particular, Arctic politics, would come to have in the eyes of the world. This phrase was coined by Oshorenko and Young (2005) with reference to policy-makers concerned with military, industrial, environmental, and indigenous interests. However, these policy-makers are also news-makers. Indeed, individuals involved in Arctic policy debates often engage the media to translate their interests beyond the conference center, the boardroom, or the military command post, and enlist public support for what their investors and voters perceive as high-risk ventures in distant regions. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the 'age of the Arctic' has also become the 'age of the Arctic news-making event.'

In this article, we focus on one such Arctic news-making event, the eighth Arctic Council ministerial meeting, which took place on May 15, 2013 in Kiruna, Sweden. In particular, we analyze media stories surrounding the event. In Kiruna, as perhaps never before, news organizations from around the world were prompted to report on Arctic politics. While this was partly due to the scale of the event, it was also because of the meeting's most prominent controversy: the question of granting permanent observer status to fourteen inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and non-Arctic states. Consequently, news media from around the world and, in particular, those based in Arctic Council member states, existing permanent observer states, and states that were seeking permanent observer status were led to opine on why the Arctic *mattered*.

Of course, the dynamics of this coverage played out differently, depending on each country's relationship with the Arctic Council and, more broadly, the Arctic region. The media in member countries with strong Arctic identities (e.g. Canada, Norway, Russia) had to explain to their audiences why the Arctic was not simply a national or regional concern. By contrast, in member countries with less central Arctic identities (e.g. Denmark, the USA), the media were less obliged to defend the sanctity of the

nation's Arctic patrimony. In the (mostly Asian) non-Arctic countries seeking permanent observer status, the media were faced with informing citizens that, according to their governments, their countries had important interests in the distant North. Finally, in the (European) non-Arctic countries already holding permanent observer status, citizens likely were unaware of their government's Arctic interests and reporters therefore had the delicate task of reporting on the controversy over *other* non-Arctic countries' involvement while either educating about or ignoring their own country's role. Thus, in all of these countries, albeit in different ways, the media had to explain to a (usually) distant public why they should care about the Arctic, whether as an Arctic Council member, permanent observer candidate, or existing permanent observer.

As we discuss below, the media frequently carried out these tasks by narrating selective interpretations of Arctic pasts and futures to explain current political conflict that was being waged through the debate over Arctic Council expansion. The portrayal of the Arctic as a space of anticipatory futures, requiring proactive policy responses, is characteristic of Arctic media stories in general (Dodds 2013). However, even as journalists covering the Kiruna meeting spun these 'anticipatory' narratives, they were bound by the need to reaffirm (or construct) among their audiences a sense of why specific state and non-state actors should or should not be understood as having a legitimate interest in the Arctic region. In this article, we analyze 280 Arctic Council-focused stories from the eight Arctic Council member states, six permanent observer candidate states, and six existing permanent observer states, from the weeks immediately before and after the Kiruna meeting, when the news world was abuzz with the Arctic Council expansion debate.

As has been reported elsewhere (Graczyk 2012), positions on Arctic Council expansion range from the argument that it will bring the organization increased influence (Young, 2009) to concern that expansion will dilute the voices of Arctic states and indigenous peoples (Gregoire 2013). Others note that expanding the permanent observer category is of little consequence, since the status grants neither true permanency nor notable powers (Koivurova 2009), and that the trend toward accepting applications by states, but not by non-governmental organizations, is indicative of a more thoroughgoing 'normalization' of the region (Steinberg and Dodds 2013). In this article, however, the expansion debate is less the *object* of analysis than a *vehicle* for understanding how the media, in countries with varying degrees of cultural, economic, and geographic proximity to the Arctic, make sense of this region of increasing global significance, as they explain its current political controversies and anticipate its future. We therefore turn away from the specific debate about the Arctic Council and individual countries' (or quoted politicians') views on expansion. Rather, we are interested in coverage of the Kiruna meeting because it presents a *natural experiment in Arctic awareness*.

Covering the Arctic as political space

As sources of representation, interpretation, and dissemination of knowledge, news media play a significant role in making sense of and communicating distant acts of diplomacy to locally engaged citizens (Sharp 1993, 2000; Ó Tuathail 2002). While the causal power of media representations has at times been exaggerated (Robinson 2011; Pinkerton 2013), news coverage is nonetheless an important source of both spatial and political discourse. Newsfeed thus contributes to the normalization of certain geographical understandings and helps construct (in)visibilities on the global political

stage, thus guiding public opinion and concern (Boykoff 2011; Campbell 2007; Dittmer and Dodds 2008; Sharp 2000).

While the power to frame political space is unevenly distributed between the popular sphere and geopolitical elites, policy-makers are themselves affected by beliefs and ideas circulating in the realm of popular culture (Sharp 2000). Geopolitical categories normalized by news media may be mobilized by elites to render certain policies natural, necessary, or unthinkable. Conversely, news media reproduce and (re)interpret elite discourse. Hence, elite politics and popular newsfeed are complementary and entangled (Adams 2013; Bennett 1990; Kuus 2008; Sharp 2000).

The media's function in interpolating between popular culture and elite politics is particularly evident when a news organization covers a diplomatic event, such as an Arctic Council ministerial meeting. Such events are distant from the everyday experiences and concerns of most citizens, and are therefore understood primarily through media reportage (Christensen 2013). When interpreting an event like the Kiruna meeting, journalists often depend on elite sources, and the resulting media storylines form largely in accordance with parameters established by national and international political elites (see Pinkerton 2013). Additionally, communication flows are channeled by the attitudes and expectations of would-be audiences who both affect the content of news coverage and reinterpret it upon consumption in accordance with their positionalities (Adams 2013; Dittmer and Dodds 2008; Dodds 2006). Media interpretations are, among other things, affected by the 'geopolitical culture' of a state – the way in which citizens see their home country, its identity, and its position in the political world (Ó Tuathail 2006). Hence, media representations not only *shape* public opinions, but may also *reflect* them, and in the process reaffirm national identities.

In the case of an Arctic Council meeting, the social distance between audiences and the politicians making the news is, in most cases, matched by a geographic distance. Few people residing outside the region have first-hand experience of the Arctic, even within the so-called Arctic states. For this reason, media representations play an important role as sources of Arctic identities and geopolitical imaginaries of the national Self, the foreign Other, and the region itself. One-dimensional representations of the Arctic as a frontier of endless dangers and possibilities, with the retracting sea-ice signaling open-ended futures, therefore, have exceptional impact on public perceptions and attitudes (Christensen 2013; Dodds 2013; Woon 2014). As a result, some actors are scripted as 'natural stakeholders', while others are scripted as 'outsiders'. In this fashion, media framings significantly affect processes of legitimizing Arctic policies (Wilson Rowe 2013) and construct the Self and Other as (il)legitimate Arctic players. Coverage of an event like the Kiruna meeting therefore not only imparts information about the event itself; it also (re)produces conceptions of Arctic pasts and uses the anticipation of projected futures to explain uncertain, unstable presents. In short, the media professionals who covered the 2013 Arctic Council ministerial meeting were not just reporting on a high-level diplomatic meeting. Through their framing of the debate, they were also translating and reproducing the meaning of a region.

Journalists covering the Kiruna meeting were riding a wave of Arctic Council-oriented news coverage that had grown steadily over the previous decade. Long a relatively obscure and insignificant organization in a low-profile world region, coverage of the Arctic Council had seen two notable spikes prior to 2013 (Figure 1), each of which was broadly indicative of increased awareness of the Arctic as a space where anticipated futures required present-day political solutions.[1] The first spike in coverage occurred in November 2004, when the Arctic Council's Arctic Monitoring and

Assessment Programme released its Arctic Climate Impact Assessment. An unprecedented number of news stories appeared in the weeks that followed, rising from 38 in the Nexis database for all of 2003 to 190 in just November and December of 2004.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Although coverage dropped slightly after 2004, it leveled off at considerably above the pre-2004 rate, presumably due to increased general awareness of the region amidst climate change. Coverage then increased steadily between 2007 and 2011 as a series of events drew attention to the Arctic and, consequently, the Arctic Council. These events included the planting of a Russian flag on the seabed beneath the North Pole (August 2007), the first recorded summer when the Northwest Passage was briefly suitable for navigation without icebreaker escort (August-September 2007), the five-government Ilulissat Declaration that sought to assure the world of the Arctic's political stability (May 2008), the first non-Russian commercial transit of the Northern Sea Route (August-September 2009), and the signing of the Arctic Council-facilitated search and rescue agreement (May 2011).

Notwithstanding this pattern of continually increasing coverage, there was no precedent for the exceptional spike that occurred in 2013, and particularly in May of that year, in the weeks surrounding the Kiruna meeting (Figure 2). The foreign ministers gathered at Kiruna used the meeting as a backdrop for signing the Arctic Council's second binding agreement – on marine oil pollution preparedness and response. Although the agreement likely would have attracted some attention on its own, Greenpeace heightened its visibility by arguing that, in its view, it fell short of what was needed to protect the region's environment. The meeting also saw a boycott by the Greenlandic delegation, which protested its position as a subset of the Danish delegation. However, the primary reason for the spike in 'Arctic Council' news coverage was the controversy over expanding the Council's roster of permanent observers to include an additional six states (China, India, Italy, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore), four inter-governmental organizations (the European Union, the International Hydrographic Organization, the OSPAR Commission, and the World Meteorological Organization), and four non-governmental organizations (the Association of Oil and Gas Producers, the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists, Greenpeace, and Oceana). Among these, the greatest controversies surrounded the candidacies of China (because of general wariness of its global influence), the European Union (because of its ban on seal product imports), and Greenpeace (because of its strident environmentalist opposition to a range of Arctic activities). The age of the Arctic media event had arrived, and news organizations from around the world were poised to cover it.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

Methodology

In order to assess how the media explained the Arctic's importance in the weeks surrounding the Kiruna meeting, we worked with thirteen research assistants to identify and (when necessary) translate Arctic Council-related articles from the eight Arctic Council member states, six permanent observer candidate states, and six pre-existing permanent observer states. We set a target of twenty relevant news stories

from each of the member and candidate states, and five from each of the pre-existing observer states, for a potential total of 310 news stories.

Conducting media analysis on an international dataset presents several challenges. There are notable differences between national media cultures in terms of, for example, levels of government control, story length, balance of national and regional news outlets, cross-ownership between print and electronic media, political partisanship, and rates of both interest and literacy in the audience population. For all these reasons, even if one could obtain a representative sample of news stories within one country, using a single sampling protocol to obtain a representative sample across twenty countries would be inconceivable.

In lieu of seeking a representative sample, we sought a degree of stratification by instructing research assistants to gather stories from sources that covered a range of formats (print, broadcast, etc.), geographic scope (national, regional, local), political orientation, and audience profiles. However, the only fixed quota for stratification was by language in the five countries where there are significant linguistic minorities or prominent newspapers in a second language (Canada (English/French), Denmark (Danish/Faroese), Finland (Finnish/Swedish), India (English/Hindi), and Singapore (Chinese/English)).[2]

Several of the research assistants failed to meet their quotas, especially in the candidate states, resulting in 280 stories rather than the target number of 310 (table 1). It is difficult to determine the cause of this shortfall. In the candidate states, one factor could have been news organizations' reliance on wire service stories due to the expense of covering a meeting in distant Sweden; certainly several assistants reported that they found the same story reproduced in different news sources. Another reason may have been the nature of the story itself: Whereas news organizations in the member states may have felt that the event was already signified as being of interest due to their country's Arctic Council membership, journalists in the candidate and observer countries may have been unsure that stories about the meeting would attract an audience. Of the 280 articles, 84 were published before the May 15 meeting, 75 on the day itself, and 121 afterwards.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Because the articles were not gathered in a representative fashion, evaluation of the data using analytic statistics was not undertaken. Rather, following their translation, we coded each article based on broad themes identified from an initial reading. Although the codes emerged in a grounded fashion, the guiding focus remained the way in which the Arctic's significance was explained in light of the ministerial meeting. However, the specific meaning of 'significance' necessarily varied depending on the national origin of the article: In some cases it was why the Arctic was significant to 'us', in others why it was significant to 'them' (usually a candidate state), and in still other articles the significance to both was noted. Throughout the research, the aim was to investigate how the chosen articles – in their breadth if not necessarily in their representativeness – presented various framings of the Arctic's importance, and thereby broadly illustrate the ways in which the region's relevance was portrayed at this particular 'news-making event'.

Member states

As journalists explained the significance of the Arctic to domestic audiences in the eight Arctic Council member states, two principal sets of narratives emerged: one characterized by northern protectionism, the other emphasizing global interconnectedness. Both shared the common themes of natural resources, shipping routes, climate change, and international political status, but framed them along different lines depending on whether international interest was seen as legitimate or threatening.

Canadian and Russian news coverage strongly emphasized the national character and identity of the Arctic region. In accordance with Canadian traditions of referencing its indigenous population to affirm sovereign rights in the High Arctic (see Grant 2010), Canadian coverage constructed a hierarchy of 'Arcticness' by, for example, quoting incoming Arctic Council Chair Leona Aglukkaq's statement that 'the Arctic Council was formed by Northerners, for Northerners, long before the region was of interest to the rest of the world' (Canada 7, 16), and that she, as an Inuit, would bring the perspective of 'a *real* northerner' (Canada 7, emphasis added). Russian coverage emphasized Russia's longstanding history of polar science and exploration (Russia 3), in stark opposition to the non-Arctic applicants, who were framed as incapable of Arctic endeavors and described as 'hidden snakes' lying in waiting (Russia 1), following 'devious paths' and 'camouflaging [their] true interests' (Russia 8).

Several stories from both Canada and Russia noted that the Arctic contains vast quantities of untapped resources that could satisfy rising global demand, and that extraction and export of these resources would benefit from the opening of new 'transportation arteries' through the region (Russia 3; see also Canada 3, 15). This emphasis on the region's resource endowment paradoxically constructed the Arctic as both a *national* and an *international* space. On the one hand, as a *future* space of global significance, the Arctic was understood as a gateway to the global political stage. On the other hand, the media maintained that the Arctic presently is a space of *national* development and resource wealth, and that proposals for internationalizing or designating it as the 'common heritage of mankind' are to be dismissed as 'absurd' (Russia 16).

This balance between the Arctic's significance as a space of international prominence and its present-day function as a source of national wealth and identity was achieved in varied ways. Russian newspaper *Trud* took an explicitly nationalist (or protectionist) stance, calling the decision to grant permanent observer status to the six candidate states a 'major geopolitical failure' (Russia 17). However, the expansion was justified elsewhere as a means to control and manage international engagement (Canada 5, 17; Russia 6, 14). Although Russia's Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev dismissed fears of an Asian invasion of the Arctic as mere 'bogeyman stories' (Russia 12), the Russian tabloid *Komsomolskaya Pravda* predicted an 'Arctic WWIII' (Russia 7), and reports heralding the emergence of 'Chinarctica' (Russia 8) were prolific. This reflected the general tenor of much of the Russian as well as Canadian coverage, in which it was argued that it would be necessary to 'protect the Arctic from '"peaceful" expansion' (Russia 3) and 'from its many new friends' (Canada 4). Some of these 'friends' could at best prove to be valuable business partners, but not legitimate Arctic stakeholders (Canada 7; Russia 14, 15). Non-state applicants were regarded with particular suspicion. Despite their diversity, the applicant non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations were often grouped in the same category as the European Union. The EU was generally construed as 'arrogant southerners' (Canada 6;

see also Russia 9; Norway 21) and 'environmentalists' (Canada 7), whose interference in the development and livelihoods of northern regions was unwelcome.

Maps also served to reaffirm the national-territorial status of the Arctic. Russian newspapers consistently used maps displaying Arctic oceanic borders in accordance with the so-called 'sectoral division', which divides the region into wedges joining at 90° north (Russia 7, 9, 15), a depiction of Arctic territory that also frequently appears on Canadian government maps (Gerhardt et al. 2010; Steinberg et al. 2014a). Although the sectoral principle has long been officially abandoned (Byers 2013; Pharand 1988), such imagery effectively maximizes the depiction of Russian territory and implies that there are no unclaimed spaces where others might rightfully enter. In comparison, US coverage used maps highlighting zones of 'international waters' in the Arctic Ocean beyond the 200 nautical mile mark (USA 7, 13). Although the US can most likely claim sovereign rights to seabed minerals beyond this point, the choice of imagery is unsurprising as the US tends to idealize free navigation in the Arctic Ocean and beyond (Steinberg 2014a).

In contrast, journalists from the Nordic states – Denmark (with Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden – as well as those from the USA proved much more likely to stress the global interconnectedness of the Arctic region. Norway's *ABC Nyheter* used the flight patterns of migratory birds to convey a connection between East Asian coastlines and the Arctic region, thus naturalizing Asian interests in the region – or, conversely, Arctic interests in Asia (Norway 6). Climate change was widely used to frame the Arctic as a space of extra-Arctic connections, which justified global interest in the circumpolar north. Melting Arctic ice was linked to the regulation of global temperatures (Norway 2), food production (Finland 9), extreme weather (Denmark 6; Greenland 5), and rising sea levels.

While it was noted that melting sea ice could leave northern borders dangerously exposed (Norway 4; Iceland 7; Finland 1, 2, 11, 15; USA 13), climate change was also touted as a cause for scientific and political collaboration, as scientists from both Arctic and non-Arctic states could use the Arctic as a global climate laboratory. Although it was acknowledged that geographic proximity confers privileges and rights (Denmark 5), the recognition that climate change and the consequences of Arctic politics would not stop at the 66th parallel meant that the region was no longer 'the backyard of the Arctic states but a new ocean where all the world's states have rights, responsibilities, and interests' (Finland 6; see also USA 10). Thus, the future role of the Arctic would be as a space of connection and commerce – a 'polar Mediterranean' – rather than a frozen desert separating five coastal states (see Dodds 2010; Steinberg 2014b). As noted by the Danish newspaper *Berlingske*, this transition could 'shake the traditional role of nation-states – and borders' (Denmark 2).

According to this narrative, which appeared in several media stories from the Nordic member states, the Arctic region would gain global significance by creating precedence for peaceful collaboration among states, like the USA, Russia, and China, that historically have had tense relationships with each other (Denmark 2, 5; Iceland 5; Sweden 3, 15). This theme also appeared in Canadian and Russian coverage, albeit with less frequency (Canada 15, 17; Russia 11). The Arctic Council would serve as a forum where other disagreements, like the Norwegian-Chinese dispute regarding 2010 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo (Norway 21) and Danish-Indian tensions concerning suspected arms smuggler Niels Holck (Denmark 5), could be momentarily suspended for the sake of addressing pressing common concerns such as climate change.[3] Although coverage was rife with war-jargon and references to an 'Arctic battle' (Norway 4;

Denmark 1), the Arctic was framed as a generally peaceful region that could serve as a model for troubled regions elsewhere (Norway 2). As such, the Arctic was construed as a space that would bring states and nations together, not only to address regional concerns, but also to facilitate productive dialogue on other matters of world politics, such as the conflict in Syria (Denmark 5; Sweden 10, 15). For the small Nordic countries, their status as Arctic states would thus allow them to engage in high politics (Denmark 5; Greenland 2; Iceland 5; Sweden 8).

Regardless of whether the Arctic was viewed primarily as a space requiring nationalist protection or one of international opportunity, a common theme through many of the member states' news stories was that the region needs to be protected from an anticipated threat which, especially in the Russian press, was frequently identified as emanating from China(Russia 1, 8).[4] Despite their generally internationalist stance, some Nordic news stories also displayed skepticism regarding Chinese motives, citing China's history of dealing directly with indigenous peoples and its courting of Arctic nations through 'panda-diplomacy' (Denmark 8; see also Norway 20).[5]

Threats were identified as military, in addition to economic and political, especially in US and Finnish coverage. Reflecting a *realpolitik* orientation, several media stories assumed that resource riches and territorial uncertainty would almost inevitably lead to conflict. An illustrative example was an editorial in the Finnish newspaper *Pohjolan Sanomat,* which stressed the importance of Finland being 'active now and in the future, so that the situation would never come to a point where missiles would be flying over Lapland' (Finland 15).

Throughout all eight member states' media coverage, the Arctic was framed as a space of latent danger, a 'vulnerable and demanding environment' (Finland 7). Since it was also agreed that activity was bound to increase in the near future, the region was understood as a space of emergent challenges. As noted by Dodds (2013), such seemingly innocent statements serve as potent arguments for more governance and stewardship. While such a need was agreed upon across the vast majority of the news stories, the question of scale – national, regional or global – was disputed. Arctic geographies are often framed through anticipation of the future, and several articles explicitly noted how both the opportunities and challenges that make the Arctic globally significant are not happening in the *present*, but are expected to occur in the *future* (Finland 3; Denmark 7). Indeed, none of the news stories from the member states questioned the potential for intensive resource extraction and ice-free shipping lanes, even though these are not present material realities, but rather features of anticipation and uncertain forecasts (see Arctic Council 2009; Humpert 2013; Powell 2008). In the Arctic Council member states – the states that one would expect to have the most engaged concern with current Arctic realities – the Arctic was shaped as much by anticipated geographies of the future as by experienced politics of the present.

Candidate states

In countries with no territory above the Arctic Circle, journalists also had to explain the relevance of the Arctic, but with the added challenge of communicating it to audiences geographically far from the region. Journalists in the six candidate states – China, India, Italy, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea – met this challenge by presenting their distance from the Arctic as gradually 'shrinking' in tandem with the Arctic ice cap, thereby prompting increased involvement.

Notwithstanding questions regarding the viability of transarctic sea routes, several news stories from the candidate states highlighted the potential for a more accessible Arctic Ocean providing new links between the Pacific and Atlantic (China 1, 16; India 1, 3, 16; Italy 1, 2; Japan 1, 2; Singapore 11, 12; South Korea 1, 2). In addition to shortening transport routes, which would reduce shipping time and costs, transarctic passage was also projected as having the potential to lessen reliance on the Strait of Malacca and Suez Canal (India 16; Singapore 11; South Korea 11). Although this diversification could pose a threat to port tax income, especially for Singapore (Singapore 9, 12), news media in the candidate states – four of which are major shipping nations – evidenced a keen interest in assessing what might be gained from northern transport routes. This potential was understood in terms of both increasing current market share and enabling entrance into new markets in years to come.

The expected 'opening up' of the Arctic associated with climate change, technological innovation, reduced shipping costs, and increased commodity prices may, furthermore, increase the market for new technology, equipment, and ships. As was noted by the media, this also gives the candidate states an interest in the region. One news story referred to the Arctic as the 'land of promise' for South Korean shipbuilders (South Korea 2), and similar sentiments were expressed in the Singaporean media (Singapore 11). Media also noted that, in addition to ships, there will be increased demand for other specialized equipment, much of which is manufactured in the candidate states.

Although the Arctic's predicted resource wealth featured in most of the news stories, both with reference to commodities of national interest and by way of noting the potential for resource extraction to lead to conflict and pollution, articles from the candidate states rarely focused on the particular economic stakes for the source countries' private companies. For example, the Italian petroleum company ENI's Arctic activities remained notably absent in the Italian media. Instead, the focus of several stories from Italy was on how *other* states (particularly China) 'courted' the Arctic states for admission to the 'most exclusive club on the planet' (Italy 2). Indeed, journalists wrote about *other* states' 'cold fever' (Italy 2), 'cold rush' (India 3; South Korea 13), or 'race' (Italy 4; Singapore 3) to the 'Earth's last treasure trove' (China 5). The Arctic was host to a 'wild rush to the new black gold' (Italy 7; see also South Korea 10, 15) that, in turn, was creating a need to 'keep an eye on those countries not to prioritize development [over environmental protection]' (Japan 3; see also India 6; Singapore 9). In particular, China's application received much concern from the other states. Often China's Arctic interests received more ink than that of the source country itself, and Chinese involvement was in itself stated as a reason why others 'cannot be out of the picture' (Japan 12; see also India 1; Italy 11; Singapore 14). This was also noted in the Chinese media, which criticized outsiders' 'misconception about Chinese intentions' (China 9; see also China 1, 3, 5).

Although the positive economic prospects linked to a more accessible Arctic were frequently reported as motivating non-Arctic states' involvement, the candidate states' media also presented the negative effects of climate change as an important driving force. Many news stories noted that climate change happens twice as rapidly in the Arctic as elsewhere on the planet (Italy 8; Japan 5; Singapore 16). Thus, environmental processes in the Arctic hold significance at a global scale, necessitating research and intervention by non-Arctic states and the world at large. Candidate states further reported that sea-level rise threatens low-lying areas regardless of distance from the melting ice cap (Singapore 2; see also Japan 5). Recognition of the planetary

effects of Arctic melting has prompted all six candidate states to be actively involved in Arctic research, particularly in monitoring environmental and climatic changes. Indeed, in order to be admitted as a permanent observer, a candidate must demonstrate its 'Arctic interests and expertise' (Graczyk and Koivurova 2014). As such, journalists acknowledged that conducting Arctic research is both important for the findings it may yield and for enabling and legitimizing a state's desired level of Arctic status (India 12; Italy 12; Japan 3; South Korea 15).

Various potential economic pull-factors and environmental push-factors have together made the Arctic a region of current – and even more so, expected future – geopolitical importance, something that has not escaped media attention. Although impending conflict in the Arctic has been dismissed time and time again by academics and politicians (Arbo et al. 2013; Wilson Rowe 2013; Ruel 2011), the media still chose to catch readers' attention with references to an impending 'ice war' (China 16; see also Singapore 3). This added urgency to national interest in a distant and seemingly foreboding corner of the world. Indeed, in a reworking of Mackinder's famous aphorism, readers of *China Daily* were dramatically informed that 'he who controls the Arctic, conquers the world' (China 11).

Media sources in all six candidate states highlighted the presence of the global 'great powers' in the Arctic, most notably the USA and Russia. The region's association with high-level diplomacy was developed further by one Italian news source that referred to the Arctic Council as 'the North Pole's G8' (Italy 11). Thus, the Arctic was scripted not only as a zone of potential resources, environmental threats, and geopolitical conflict, but also as one of potential neighborly or bilateral relations. In all of these scenarios, the Arctic was understood as an area of global significance within which any state that aspires to be a global actor must have a seat at the table (even if, in the case of Arctic Council permanent observers, that seat comes without a voice). News organizations in the candidate states thus ascribed the Arctic a symbolic significance as a region where presence-for-the-sake-of-presence matters – a region playing host to a great geopolitical and geoeconomic game that has its roots far from the Pole itself. For the candidate states' media, the Arctic was significant not for what it in and of itself *is*, but for what it may *become,* and for what it *symbolizes*.

Observer states

In the six European states that already had permanent observer status in the Arctic Council prior to the Kiruna meeting – France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom – media were faced with a question that, if confronted directly, would demand some rather uncomfortable soul-searching: If one were questioning non-Arctic Asian states' bids for permanent observer status, then why were no similar questions being asked of European observer states? Rather than addressing this directly, however, most media stories from the observer states avoided the question by framing the expansion debate so that the European states' observer status went unrecognized and, therefore, unquestioned.

Permanent observer states' news stories on the Arctic Council meeting were typically placed in the 'International Politics' section, and reported in much the same manner as an international story from elsewhere in the world. The dominant narrative in these stories was that the rising powers of Asia were seeking a foothold in the region for both economic and strategic reasons. Arctic states were reported as responding to this new challenge through the political arena, as they each adopted particular perspectives on whether or not it would be in their interest to admit new permanent

observers, as well as on the related question of expanding the Arctic Council's policy-making capacity.

The question of who should and should not be granted Arctic Council permanent observer status was thus framed as a reflection of the fundamental geopolitical and geoeconomic rivalry that characterizes 'high politics'. News stories emphasized how this contest was being waged by global superpowers and the other Arctic Council member states, most often focusing on the diplomatic initiatives and underlying interests of an emergent China (Netherlands 5; UK 8, 9). However, the 'high politics' framing was also expressed in more nuanced ways, for instance by focusing on the meeting's significance as a crucial moment for President Barack Obama and newly confirmed US Secretary of State John Kerry (UK 1, 7) or by analyzing the meeting within the context of the ongoing rivalry between India and China for influence in Africa, the Arctic, and other 'resource frontiers' (Poland 5). Furthermore, reporters chronicled the Arctic Council's growing powers as an international organization (Germany 1, 2; Poland 3; UK 5) and highlighted the Council's role as a forum where the world's political and economic elites were charting a course for an emergent region – 'a sort of Davos for the North Pole' (Netherlands 5).

This 'international relations' framing accommodated a range of political positions: Some news stories voiced suspicion of 'Chinese-style politics' in which China was using the Arctic Council to quietly 'move its pawns forward' on the Arctic chessboard (France 2; see also Spain 4; UK 9), while others countered that China's interest in the region was entirely reasonable, and that the country was generally acting according to established norms (Spain 1; UK 6). Still others framed China as a dangerous rival to the West in an ongoing global geopolitical contest, but noted that, as a tactical move, including China in discussions would be the best way of moderating its behavior (Netherlands 3; UK 8). As divergent as these perspectives were, however, they all reflected a general understanding of the Arctic as a space where global powers engage in international diplomacy.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this framing is that it conveniently did away with any need to comment on the privileged status of the current observer states. After all, if the Arctic is just one of many regions where international politics is contested, and if this simply reflects a broader dynamic of global political and economic competition in which all states partake (with varying degrees of effectiveness), then a state's privileged position as permanent observer is entirely unremarkable. It is merely evidence of the state having achieved a minor level of success in the global political arena. Thus there is no need to reflect on this privilege in the context of the debate over *new* states seeking permanent observer status. Indeed, of the 32 news stories analyzed from the six observer states, only sixteen even noted that the news organization's state was already a permanent observer. Furthermore, of these sixteen, only three – all from The Netherlands – went beyond noting observer status, to give a reason for *why* it had been granted to this non-Arctic state.[6] None reflected on why some (European) countries' permanent observer status applications had been approved without question while other (Asian) countries' applications were mired in controversy.

A secondary, though less common framing was one in which the Arctic (and hence, the Arctic Council) was depicted not as a site of 'high politics' but rather as a region beleaguered by environment-development conflict. This alternate framing was most evident in the German media and to a lesser extent in the Dutch. While these stories mentioned the debate concerning the admission of China and the five other state candidates, they frequently gave as much attention to the controversy surrounding EU

membership (Germany 1, 3, 5; Netherlands 1). Discussion of EU membership led to extensive coverage of indigenous peoples' concerns, and the Greenlandic boycott, topics that received little coverage in articles centered on great-power politics. Likewise, stories from Germany and The Netherlands often adopted an environmental angle, focusing on the oil spill agreement and Greenpeace's opposition to it. More generally, these environment-focused articles identified the key tension in Arctic politics not as between West and East, or between Arctic and non-Arctic states, but rather as between those wishing to exploit the region and those wishing to protect it (Germany 2, 4; Netherlands 4). By challenging received notions of the environment as a series of 'resources', two of the German stories (Germany 2, 4) went so far as to question popular understandings of the region's potential as an oil-rich transit corridor. This skepticism was the exception, however, as most news stories from the permanent observer states (and from other states as well) used the region's resource potential as a self-evident background for explaining the Arctic Council's emergence as a locus of global power politics.

Conclusion

In the 'age of the Arctic', when high-level policy-makers from both near and far are directing their attention northwards, news organizations from around the world are challenged with explaining the region's relevance to often distant audiences. When the Arctic Council met in Kiruna, the question of inclusion and exclusion in what was framed as a great geopolitical game for future influence was thrust to the fore. In particular, the admission of six new permanent observer states, geographically distant from the region but with great geopolitical and economic power, prompted global media to articulate why the Arctic *mattered* – to their state, to other states, and to the world writ large.

Across 280 news stories collected from 20 states, hyperbolic headlines sought to catch audiences' attention with references to populist notions of geopolitical rivalry, often focusing on China's growing presence in the Arctic. Journalists from around the world tended to focus on common 'hot topics' – namely, future opportunities, such as natural resources and new shipping routes, and future challenges, in particular relating to climate change.

For journalists from the Arctic Council member states, international focus on the Arctic raised the question of whether to adopt an inclusive or exclusive approach to non-members' interest in the region. On the one hand, global attention could present future possibilities for international interaction and cooperation – in particular with so-called 'great powers'. On the other hand, it could necessitate protection from the very same powers and the threat of their insatiable demands.

Media from the six candidate states presented the same anticipated opportunities and challenges, but the region's significance was connected to wider global interests. While some media in the member states suggested that the threat of unsustainable exploitation was a reason for exclusionary protectionism, media in the candidate states tended to present this threat as a reason why extra-regional involvement was needed. In these non-Arctic states, the region was framed as important due to the political presence of *other* states – both Arctic and non-Arctic – positioning themselves for future developments.

Finally, in the six states already holding permanent observer status, news reports skirted the question of Arctic legitimacy in relation to geographic proximity. Instead, the Arctic was framed as a region that reflected a wider-reaching geopolitical

game in which all of the world's states participated. As such, their focus was on how the Arctic – as a region seemingly distant from the world's centers of power – was now playing host to high-level politics far beyond latitudinal borders, and which, as an ever-imminent space of potential future diplomacy, required the unwavering presence of states from around the world.

Emerging from these news stories was thus a range of seemingly divergent framings of the Arctic's growing relevance. However, despite their differences, media reports from across the world were based on a common understanding that the Arctic is increasingly important not so much for what it *is* as for what it *may become*. Whether for the opportunities it may offer or the challenges it may present, the Arctic was consistently scripted as a region in which states and stakeholders are positioning themselves in anticipation of the future. As such, the significance of the Arctic was understood as transcending its potential for generating material gains or losses; the Arctic also was understood as mattering for the symbolic significance of political presence. As their stories celebrated (or dreaded) anticipated Arctic 'openings', news reporters actively partook in the discursive construction of the region as a space of global significance.

The brief meeting in a small Swedish town was thus an Arctic news event of unprecedented scale, not because of the ministerial decisions *per se* but because of the level of global attention it received. As news stories covering Kiruna traveled across the world, it became clear that the 'age of the Arctic' now extends far beyond the regional policy arena. By painting a picture of a proverbial table at which a seat grants not just observance but *status*, news organizations directed audience's attention northwards, positioning and preparing them to encounter the Arctic as a space where future developments would have *global* implications.

Notes

[1] These figures show mentions of 'Arctic Council', from 552 news sources indexed by Nexis, 471 of which are published primarily in English. Because of the database's English-language bias, inclusion of the equivalent in other languages would have a negligible impact on results. For instance, compared to 'Arctic Council', which appears 5,529 times between 2000 and 2013, 'Arktiska rådet' (Swedish) appears only twice, 'Arktisk Råd' (Danish and Norwegian) appears 81 times, and 'арктический совет' (Russian) appears 141 times. 2014 figures are projections, based on doubling figures from the first half of 2014.

[2] Greenland would have qualified for bilingual stratification, but the main Greenlandic newspaper, *Sermitsiaq*, publishes most stories in both Danish and Greenlandic, so no translation from Greenlandic was necessary. However, the Faroe Islands' newspapers publish only in Faroese, so Faroese-language articles were translated as part of the Denmark/Greenland/Faroes quota. Most stories in *Nunatsiaq News,* the major newspaper in Canada's northern territory of Nunavut, appear in Inuktitut and English so no Inuktitut translation was undertaken. The original intention was to stratify Singapore across three languages (English/Chinese/Malay), but no relevant Malay stories were found. Although the South Korean press is largely monolingual, the research assistant included an extra two stories from the English-language Korean press, so these were included.

[3] Anecdotal evidence suggests that this tendency toward celebrating the Arctic as the leading edge of cooperation has waned due to heightened East-West tensions following Russia's March 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and subsequent conflict with Ukraine. Since then, several news stories have noted how the 'Ukraine crisis' is negatively affecting Arctic political relations (e.g. Breum 2014; Rosen 2014; Stenbæk 2014; Sveen 2014; Weber 2014).

[4] In some cases, this sinophobia was extended to a general wariness about Asia's interest in the Arctic (Canada 4; Russia 3, 7), a framing of the permanent observer expansion issue that left journalists in a quandary when reporting on the one European candidate state: Italy (Steinberg et al. 2014b).

[5] These stories from the Danish and Norwegian media, however, were the exception, as Nordic media (like their governments) were generally supportive of Chinese investment. Faroese and Greenlandic media similarly emphasized the potential benefits of Chinese investment, although also stressing the nationalist need to protect natural resources and control revenues obtained from their extraction (Faroe Islands 4; Greenland 6; see also Norway 21).

[6] Netherlands 2 and 4 noted Dutch involvement in Arctic science, while Netherlands 5 noted the country's potential involvement in Arctic shipping.

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Captions

Figure 1: Mention of the phrase 'Arctic Council' in 552 news sources indexed by Nexis, 2000-2014 (searched August 7, 2014).

Figure 2: Mention of the phrase 'Arctic Council' in 552 news sources indexed by Nexis, 2013 (searched August 7, 2014).

Table 1: Media stories analyzed.

Appendix

News stories in this analysis were gathered between July and September 2013, at the URLs noted. Due to the nature of online news sources, not all news stories remain available online. Screenshots, printouts, transcriptions, or translations are available from the authors on request.

Member states

Canada 3: Normand, F., *Les Affaires*. (May 04 2013). "Le Canada veut renforcer l'encadrement des activités dansl'Arctique" – Richard L. Desgagnés, avocet ["Canada wants to strengthen the framework for activities in the Arctic" – Richard L. Desgagnés, lawyer]. Available from: http://www.lesaffaires.com/archives/generale/le-canada-veut-renforcer-l-encadrement-des-activites-dans-l-arctique---richard-l-desgagnes-avocat/557052.

Canada 4: Giroux, R., *Le Soleil*. (May 19 2013). L'Arctique compte un peu trop d'amis [The Arctic has a few too many friends]. Available from: http://www.lapresse.ca/le-soleil/opinions/chroniqueurs/201305/18/01-4652294-larctique-compte-un-peu-trop-damis.php

Canada 5: Leblanc, E., *Radio-Canada* (May 15 2013). Conseil de l'Arctique : une présidence canadienne axée sur l'économie [Arctic Council: A Canadian chairmanship centred around economy]. Available from: http://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelles/International/2013/05/15/008-arctique-conseil-presidence.shtml.

Canada 6: Koring, P., *Toronto Globe*. (May 15 2013). Canada signals new era for Arctic Council. Available from: http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/canada-signals-new-era-forarctic-council/article11951388/

Canada 7: Koring, P., *Toronto Globe*. (May 15 2013). Canada's Aglukkaq takes hot seat at Arctic Council. Available from: http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/canadas-aglukkaq-takes-hotseat-at-arctic-council/article11923462/.

Canada 9: Gregoire, L., *Nunatsiaq News*. (February 1 2013). Arctic Council should be cautious about new observer hopefuls: Inuit org president. Available from: http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674arctic_council_should_be_cautious_about_new_observer_hopefuls_inuit_or.

Canada 15: *Nunatsiaq News*. (May 08 2013). Editorial: Most Arctic Council applicants pose little risk. Available from: http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674most_arctic_council_applican.

Canada 16: Boyd, A., *Nunatsiaq News.* (May 15 2013). Nunavut's Aglukkaq becomes first indigenous minister to head Arctic Council. Available from: http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674nunavuts_aglukkaq_becomes.

Canada 17: Bell, J., *Nunatsiaq News.* (May 16 2013). Canada wants permanent fix for EU seal hunt dispute: Aglukkaq. Available from: http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674canada_wants_permanent_fix.

Denmark 1: Hannestad, A., *Politiken*. (May 14 2013). Arktisk møde er blevet en kampplads [Arctic meeting had become a battlefield].

Denmark 2: Gården, H., *Berlingske*. (May 14 2013). Et arktisk dilemma – en ny verdensorden [An Arctic dilemma – a new world order]. Available from: http://www.b.dk/kronikker/et-arktisk-dilemma-en-ny-verdensorden.

Denmark 5: Nørgaard, N. and Hannestad, A., *Politiken*. (May 16 2013). Kina lukket ind i den arktiske 'varme' [China let into the 'warmth' of the Arctic].

Denmark 6: Bundgaard, V., *Kristeligt Dagblad.* (May 15 2013). Kina vil med I spillet om Arktis [China wants to join the game for the Arctic]. Available from: http://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/udland/kina-vil-med-i-spillet-om-arktis.

Denmark 7: Maressa, J.E., *Jyllands-Posten*. (May 15 2013). Dansk fremtidsdrøm om Nordpolen [Danish future-dream about the North Pole]. Available from: http://www.jyllands-

posten.dk/protected/premium/international/ECE5472452/dansk-fremtidsdroem-om-nordpolen/.

Denmark 8: Maressa, J. E., *Jyllands-Posten.* (May 13 2013). EU mødes med kulde ved isporten [EU received a cold welcome at the ice-gate]. Available from: http://www.jyllands-posten.dk/protected/premium/international/ECE5462663/eu-moedes-med-kulde-ved-isporten/.

Faroe Islands 4: Joensen, E., *Norðlýsið*. (May 22 2013). Inuittar seta ES skák og mát - Føroyar gera onki [The Inuit put the EU into checkmate – the Faroe Islands do nothing]. Available from: http://nordlysid.fo/inuittar+seta+es+skak+og+mat+foroyar+gera+onki.html.

Finland 1: *Aamulehti*. (May 16 2013). Arktista päätösvaltaa lisää [More Arctic decision power]. Available from: http://www.aamulehti.fi/Paakirjoitukset/1194813636985/artikkeli/arktista+paatosvaltaa+lisaa.html.

Finland 2: Tiri, A., *Aamulehti*. (May 11 2013). Arktisen alueen sulava jää paljastaa rikkaudet – Mitä Suomi tekee? [The Arctic's Melting Ice Exposes Riches – What Will Finland Do?]. Available from: http://www.aamulehti.fi/cs/Satellite?c=AMArticle_C&childpagename=KAL_newssite%2FAMLayout&cid=1194812783630&p=1194596113763&packedargs=packedargs%3DAMArticleCommentThreadDetails%25253AcurrentPage%253D2&pagename=KALWrapper.

Finland 3: Kauhanen, A., *Helsingin Sanomat*. (May 15 2013). Kiirunassa Jaetaan arktista uusiksi [In Kiruna, the Arctic Is Being Redivided].

Finland 6: Koivurova, T., *Helsingin Sanomat*. (May 18 2013). Kiina ja Intia ovat saamassa jalansijaa arktisella alueella [China and India Are Gaining Foothold in the Arctic].

Finland 7: *Helsingin Sanomat*. (May 19 2013). Arktinen neuvosto ei käske [The Arctic Council Does Not Command].

Finland 9: *Inarilainen*. (May 22 2013). Inarinmaan lapinkylä haluaa Arktiseen neuvostoon [Inarinmaa Lapp Village Aspires to the Arctic Council]. Available from: http://www.inarilainen.fi/inarinmaan-lapinkyla-haluaa-arktiseen-neuvostoon

Finland 11: Luotola, T., *Keskisuomalainen*. (May 15 2013). Pohjoisen lumo kasvaa [Lure of the North Is Growing].

Finland 15: *Pohjolan Sanomat*. (May 05 2013). Kiirunassa haetaan arktiselle suuntaa [In Kiruna, Direction for the Arctic is Being Sought].

Greenland 2: Mølgaard, N., *Sermitsiaq.* (May 15 2013). D: Det er pinligt [D: It is embarrassing]. Available from: http://sermitsiaq.ag/d-pinligt.

Greenland 5: Stenbæk, M., *Kalaallit Nunaata Radioa*. (May 26 2013). Indien vil forstå forandringer I Arktis [India wants to understand changes in the Arctic]. Available from: http://www.knr.gl/da/nyheder/indien-vil-forst%C3%A5-forandringer-i-arktis.

Greenland 6: Krebs, M.L., *Kalaallit Nunaata Radioa*. (May 13 2013). Oprindelige folk kræver rettigheder forud for Arktisk Råds møde [Indigenous peoples demand rights prior to the Arctic Council's meeting]. Available from:

http://www.knr.gl/da/nyheder/oprindelige-folk-kr%C3%A6ver-rettigheder-forud-arktisk-r%C3%A5ds-m%C3%B8de.

Iceland 5: Unnarsson, K. M., *Visir.is*. (May 15 2013).Ísland við háborðið með stórveldunum [Iceland takes centre stage together with world Superpowers]. Available from: http://www.visir.is/island-vid-habordid-med-storveldunum/article/2013130519324.

Iceland 7: *Ríkisútvarpið*. (May 08 2013). NATO verður ekki við óskum Norðmanna [NATO will not comply with requests made by Norway]. Available from: http://www.ruv.is/frett/nato-verdur-ekki-vid-oskum-nordmanna.

Norway 2: Prokosch, P., *Aftenposten*. (May 12 2013). En visjon for Arktis [An Arctic vision]. Available from: http://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/kronikker/En-visjon-for-Arktis-7198807.html.

Norway 4: NTB, *E24*. (May 13 2013) – Arktisk råd er ikke helt som Woodstock [- The Arctic Council is not quite like Woodstock]. Available from: http://e24.no/makro-og-politikk/leder-arktisk-raad-er-ikke-helt-som-woodstock/20345564.

Norway 6: Vernes, T., *ABC Nyheter*. (May 14 2013). Kongerekene du spiser, kan true fuglelivet I Arktis [The scampi you eat may threated bird life in the Arctic]. Available from: http://www.abcnyheter.no/nyheter/2013/05/14/kongerekene-du-spiser-kan-true-fuglelivet-i-arktis.

Norway 20: Hansen, K., *Aftenposten* (March 03 2013). [Putin gives China a foot in the door to the Arctic]. Available from: http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/uriks/Putin-gir-Kina-fot-innenfor-i-Arktis-7158055.html.

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Figure 1

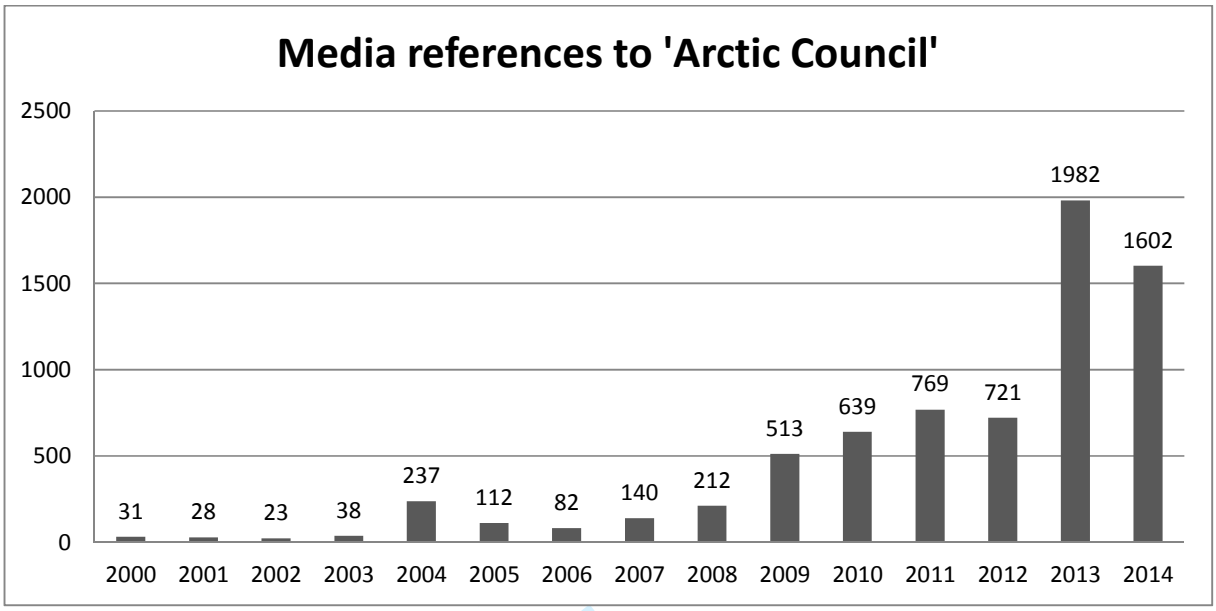

Figure 2

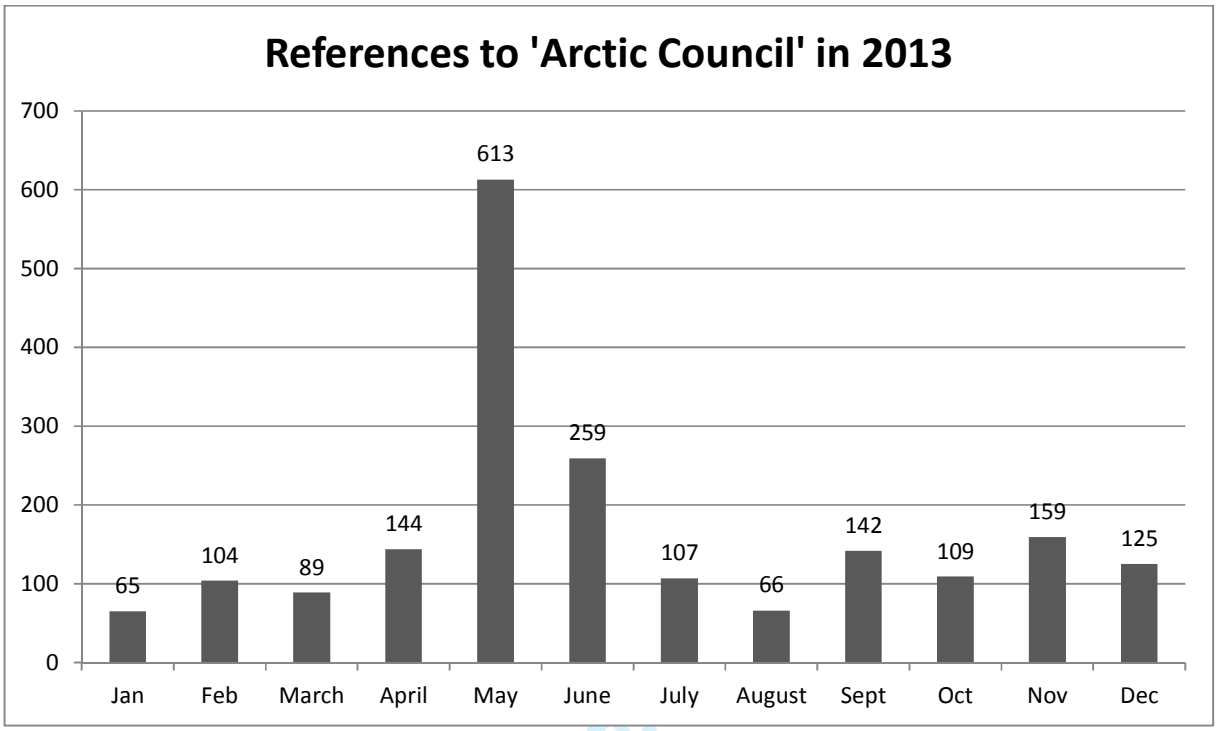

Table 1: Media stories analyzed by status, country, number, and language

Status	Country	Number	Language
Member states	Canada	20	15 English / 5 French
	Denmark/Greenland/Faroe Islands	24	20 Danish (8 from Greenland, 12 from Denmark) / 4 Faroese
	Finland	18	13 Finnish / 5 Swedish
	Iceland	20	Icelandic
	Norway	21	Norwegian
	Russia	21	Russian
	Sweden	20	Swedish
	USA	13	English
Candidate states	China	15	Chinese
	India	21	9 Hindi / 12 English
	Italy	13	Italian
	Japan	12	Japanese
	Singapore	15	11 English / 4 Chinese
	South Korea	15	13 Korean / 2 English
Permanent observer states	France	4	French
	Germany	5	German
	The Netherlands	5	Dutch
	Poland	5	Polish
	Spain	4	Spanish
	United Kingdom	9	English