

AUGUST 2022 ANALYSIS –  
RUSSIAN PRESS AGENCIES  
AND THE ARCTIC

OBSERVATOIRE DE LA POLITIQUE ET LA SÉCURITÉ DE L'ARCTIQUE (OPSA) and  
OBSERVATOIRE DES ADMINISTRATIONS PUBLIQUES AUTOCHTONES (OAPA)



OBSERVATOIRE DE LA POLITIQUE  
ET LA SÉCURITÉ DE L'ARCTIQUE



**OAPA**  
Observatoire des administrations  
publiques autochtones

## RUSSIAN PRESS AGENCIES AND THE ARCTIC – AUGUST 2022

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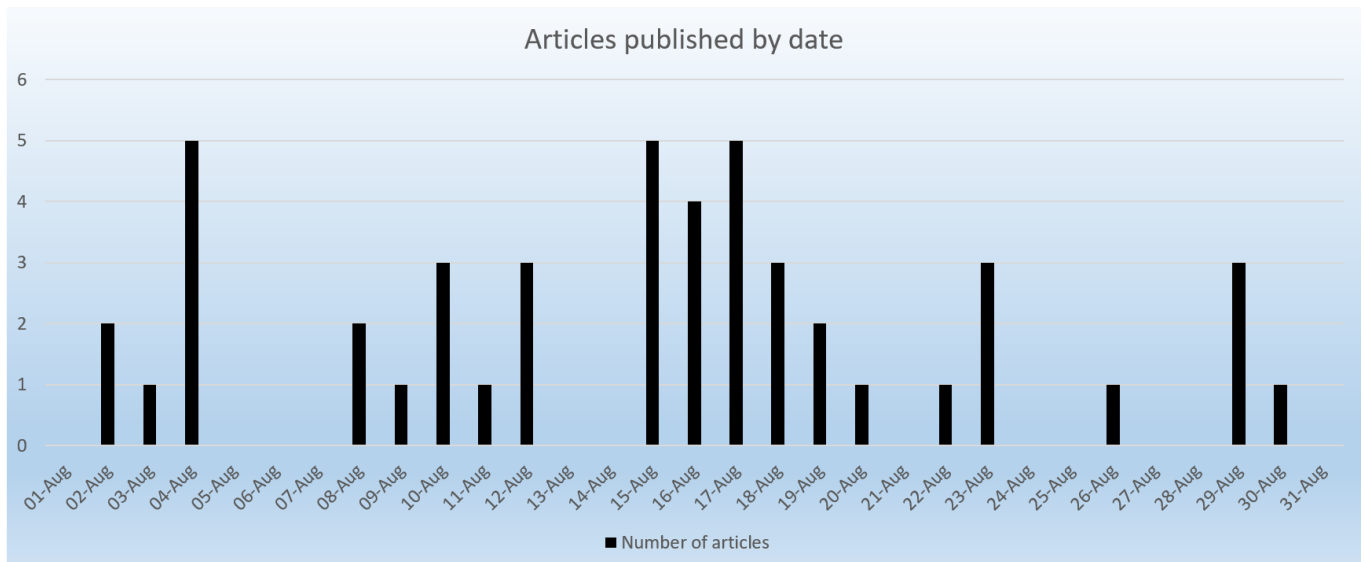
# AUGUST 2022 ANALYSIS – RUSSIAN PRESS AGENCIES AND THE ARCTIC

*Team members:*

- Mathieu Landriault (Adjunct professor, École nationale d'administration publique)
- Jean-François Savard (Associate professor, ÉNAP)
- Isabelle Caron (Assistant professor, Dalhousie University)
- Louis Poulin-Langlois (Master's student, ÉNAP)
- Alexandre Millette (Doctoral candidate, ÉNAP)

This analysis studied how Russian press agencies Sputnik and TASS covered Arctic issues during the month of August 2022. The intensity and nature of coverage will be put in perspective to capture trends since January 2020.

**NUMBER OF ARCTIC MENTIONS:** there were very few salient moments in August 2022 when coverage peaked. The only one was from August 15 to 18 and occurred as a result of many different stories. On the one hand, several articles covered domestic news focusing on environmental protection (permafrost, cleaning operation) and development (land allocation for example). On the other hand, military and foreign policy news were also numerous during that time period. The (now monthly...) warning of Russian defense review as a result of Finland/Sweden joining NATO, the manoeuvre of a spy plane by the United Kingdom close to Russia and the organisation of the Army Forum near Moscow were covered.



**THEMES:** Social news category is the most recurring theme for the month of August. News linked to social initiatives such as volunteer work or applications for free plot of land were reported.

Environmental news is the second most recurring theme as many stories linked to cleaning initiatives and scientific expeditions with environmental purposes were published. Economic news were also present as several stories related to infrastructure development were reported.

<b>AUGUST 2022</b> 1- SOCIAL (17) 2- ENVIRONMENTAL (14) 3- ECONOMIC (12)		
<b>JULY 2022</b> 1- ENVIRONMENTAL (17) 2- ECONOMIC (15) 3- POLITICAL (15)	<b>JUNE 2022</b> 1- ECONOMIC (19) 2- POLITICAL (19) 3- ENVIRONMENTAL (14)	<b>MAY 2022</b> 1- ECONOMIC (19) 2- POLITICAL (16) 3- ENVIRONMENTAL (15)
<b>APRIL 2022</b> 1- ECONOMIC (33) 2- POLITICAL (17) 3- MILITARY (16)	<b>MARCH 2022</b> 1- ECONOMIC (21) 2- ENVIRONMENTAL (12) 3- POLITICAL (11)	<b>FEBRUARY 2022</b> 1- ECONOMIC (24) 2- MILITARY (20) 3- POLITICAL (17)
<b>JANUARY 2022</b> 1- MILITARY (34) 2- ECONOMIC (23) 3- SOCIAL (7)	<b>DECEMBER 2021</b> 1- MILITARY (42) 2- ECONOMIC (39) 3- POLITICAL (13)	<b>NOVEMBER 2021</b> 1- ECONOMIC (26) 2- POLITICAL (18) 3- MILITARY (17)
<b>OCTOBER 2021</b> 1- MILITARY/POLITICAL (28) 2- ECONOMIC (26) 3- ENVIRONMENTAL (21)	<b>SEPTEMBER 2021</b> 1- MILITARY (31) 2- ENVIRONMENTAL (25) 3- ECONOMIC (24)	<b>AUGUST 2021</b> 1- MILITARY (37) 2- ENVIRONMENTAL (29) 3- ECONOMIC (16)
<b>JULY 2021</b> 1- ENVIRONMENTAL (30) 2- MILITARY (19) 3- POL/SCIENT (11)	<b>JUNE 2021</b> 1- POLITICAL (58) 2- MILITARY (56) 3- ECONOMIC (39)	<b>MAY 2021</b> 1- POLITICAL (54) 2- MILITARY (41) 3- ECONOMIC (27)
<b>APRIL 2021</b> 1- MILITARY (52) 2- ECONOMIC (45) 3- POLITICAL (16)	<b>MARCH 2021</b> 1- MILITARY (46) 2- ECONOMIC (40) 3- SCIENTIFIC (14)	<b>FEBRUARY 2021</b> 1- MILITARY (44) 2- ECONOMIC (20) 3- ENV/POL/SCIENT (17)
<b>JANUARY 2021</b> 1- MILITARY (23) 2- ECONOMIC (22) 3- ENVIRONMENTAL/POL (7)	<b>DECEMBER 2020</b> 1- MILITARY (38) 2- ECONOMIC (37) 3- SOCIAL (12)	<b>NOVEMBER 2020</b> 1- ECONOMIC (37) 2- MILITARY (36) 3- POLITICAL (19)
<b>OCTOBER 2020</b> 1- MILITARY (44) 2- ECONOMIC (29) 3- ENVIRONMENTAL (15)	<b>SEPTEMBER 2020</b> 1- MILITARY (58) 2- ECONOMIC (25) 3- SCIENTIFIC (13)	<b>AUGUST 2020</b> 1- MILITARY (52) 2- ECONOMIC (17) 3- SOCIAL (16)
<b>JULY 2020</b> 1- ECONOMIC (43) 2- MILITARY (36) 3- ENVIRONMENTAL (14)	<b>JUNE 2020</b> 1- MILITARY (46) 2- ENVIRONMENTAL (35) 3- ECONOMIC (28)	<b>MAY 2020</b> 1- MILITARY (43) 2- ECONOMIC (26) 3- POLITICAL (11)

Table 1: most popular themes per month (number of mentions is in parenthesis).

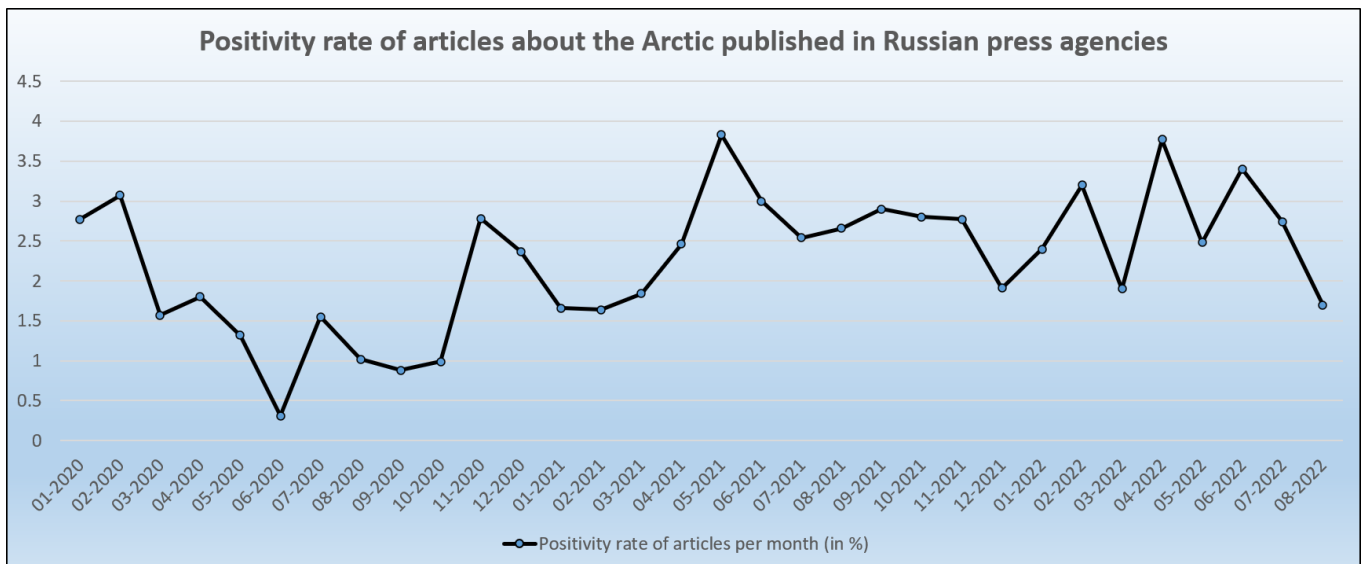
**COUNTRIES:** China and the United Kingdom were the two most mentioned countries during the month of August. The United Kingdom was mentioned 3 times with reference to a spy plane flying close to Russian territory. China was mentioned twice. Both articles cover the Russian-China cooperation in the Arctic region, mostly from an economic perspective. Finally, Sweden and Finland are mentioned once with an article concerning the Scandinavian countries' relationships with NATO.

<b>AUGUST 2022</b> 1- UNITED KINGDOM (3) 2- CHINA (2)		
<b>JULY 2022</b> 1- NORWAY (7) 2- UNITED STATES (6)	<b>JUNE 2022</b> 1- UNITED STATES (5) 2- CANADA, CHINA (4)	<b>MAY 2022</b> 1- FINLAND, SWEDEN (9) 2- UNITED STATES (7)
<b>APRIL 2022</b> 1- UNITED STATES (10) 2- FINLAND, SWEDEN (8)	<b>MARCH 2022</b> 1- UNITED STATES, UKRAINE (6) 2- FRANCE, CANADA, DENMARK, FINLAND, ICELAND, NORWAY, SWEDEN (3)	<b>FEBRUARY 2022</b> 1- CHINA (6) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (5)
<b>JANUARY 2022</b> 1- UNITED STATES, CHINA (3) 2- NORWAY (2)	<b>DECEMBER 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (11) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (4)	<b>NOVEMBER 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (14) 2- CHINA (7)
<b>OCTOBER 2021</b> 1- NORWAY (8) 2- UNITED STATES (4)	<b>SEPTEMBER 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (10) 2- FINLAND (5)	<b>AUGUST 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (8) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (5)
<b>JULY 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (22) 2- UNITED KINGDOM, NORWAY, GERMANY (2)	<b>JUNE 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (57) 2- CHINA (14)	<b>MAY 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (50) 2- CHINA (9)
<b>APRIL 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (24) 2- CHINA, FINLAND (7)	<b>MARCH 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (16) 2- CHINA (9)	<b>FEBRUARY 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (24) 2- NORWAY (8)
<b>JANUARY 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (8) 2- CHINA, SWEDEN (3)	<b>DECEMBER 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (21) 2- CHINA (4)	<b>NOVEMBER 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (18) 2- NORWAY (6)
<b>OCTOBER 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (16) 2- NORWAY (6)	<b>SEPTEMBER 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (11) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (6)	<b>AUGUST 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (17) 2- CHINA (4)
<b>JULY 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (14) 2- CHINA (6)	<b>JUNE 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (10) 2- CHINA (5)	<b>MAY 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (15) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (11)
<b>APRIL 2020</b> 1- DENMARK (6) 2- NORWAY (5)	<b>MARCH 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (9) 2- JAPAN (3)	<b>FEBRUARY 2020</b> 1- NORWAY (11) 2- UNITED STATES (10)

Table 2: foreign countries mentioned per month in Russian press agencies (number of mentions is in parenthesis).

**SENTIMENT ANALYSIS:** we observed a dip in positivity in August 2022. This change did not seem to be caused by the continuation of Western sanctions or the spotlight being turned on struggling projects. Rather, articles focusing on environmental and social problems occurring in Russia such as wildfires, plastic pollution and labor shortages in the North have caused this drop.

Sustained attention was also devoted to perceived threats, whether a UK spy plane flying close to Russia or Finland and Sweden accession to NATO. The “NATO in the Arctic” was also a recurring theme, presenting NATO as a destabilizing force in the region.



## **METHODOLOGICAL NOTES**

Sputnik and TASS articles were retrieved using the Factiva database from January 2020 to March 2022. Due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Sputnik articles were no longer accessible: only TASS articles were gathered from April 2022 onwards. All articles containing the keyword “Arctic” were included in the sample. We manually removed articles that were duplicates from the same outlet as well as stories included in “news digest” articles that were not related to our keyword.

Themes present in these articles were manually coded. We looked for dominant themes in each article: more than one theme could be detected per article. For example, an article about a scientific study on the evolution of climate change was coded as both environmental and scientific. The six themes that emerged were: military, economic, political, social, environmental and scientific.

As for foreign countries mentioned, we only focus on sovereign states and did not include regional ensembles or international organisations. Hence, references to NATO, the EU, the Barents Euro-Arctic Region or the Nordic Council were not accounted for.

The sentiment analysis was conducted using the Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary, as discussed by Stuart Soroka (see the following link for details: <http://www.snsoroka.com/data-lexicoder/>). The R package Quanteda was used to generate the analysis. On a month-to month basis, the number of positive words was subtracted to the number of negative words and then divided by the number of words in total; the output is referred to as the positivity rate. For example, the positivity rate for the month of June 2021 was 3% while it was 0.31% for June 2020. Hence, the closer you are to 0, the more negative the articles in a given month were.



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