

JANUARY 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 – JANUARY 2022

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# DECEMBER ANALYSIS – RUSSIAN PRESS AGENCIES AND THE ARCTIC

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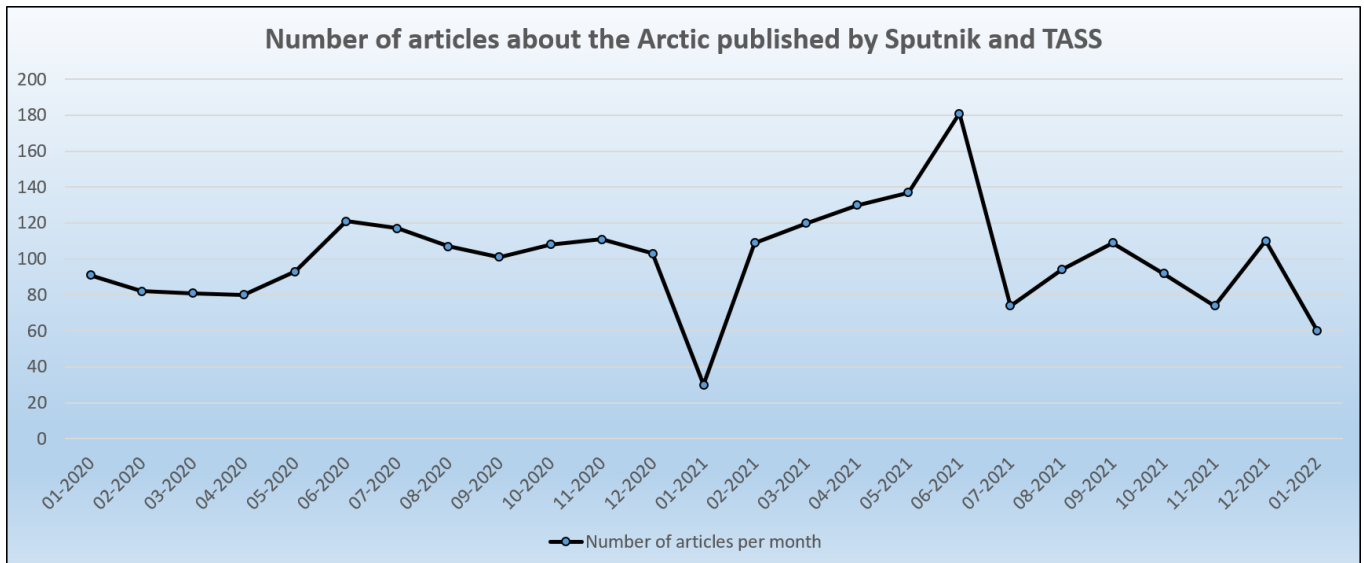
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This analysis studied how Russian press agencies Sputnik and TASS covered Arctic issues during the month of January 2022. The intensity and nature of coverage will be put in perspective to capture trends since January 2020.

**NUMBER OF ARCTIC MENTIONS:** The overall number of Arctic mentions is down from December, from 110 to 60. Although this is the lowest number of mentions in the last year, January of 2021 also saw 60 mentions, while July and November both saw 74, so numbers similar to this have been seen in past. Although the decrease in mentions resulted in a decrease of all categories, political stories dropped from 13 mentions to 1, removing it from the top three topics. This is not uncommon for political stories, which were only in the top three in seven months in 2021.



**THEMES:** January 2022 continued the trend of a focus on military and economic stories. A large number of military-focused stories were discussions of Northern Fleet movement, training, and drills. There were more military mentions in the second of half of the month, with the Northern Fleet still a focus but with an additional focus on military upgrades and a few mentions of Russia-US tension and NATO. Economic stories had a broader focus but many looked at investment and development in the Arctic and the importance of icebreakers for navigation of the Northern Sea Route. Socially-focused stories were most often also economic in nature, discussing tourism or difficulties that development is intended to address.

<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)	<b>APRIL 2020</b> 1- MILITARY (37) 2- ECONOMIC (22) 3- SOCIAL (13)
<b>MARCH 2020</b> 1- MILITARY (37) 2- ECONOMIC (21) 3- SOCIAL (15)	<b>FEBRUARY 2020</b> 1- MILITARY (27) 2- ECONOMIC (19) 3- ENVIRONMENTAL (16)	<b>JANUARY 2020</b> 1- ECONOMIC (33) 2- MILITARY (28) 3- POLITICAL (26)

Table 1: most popular themes per month (with number of articles published in parentheses).

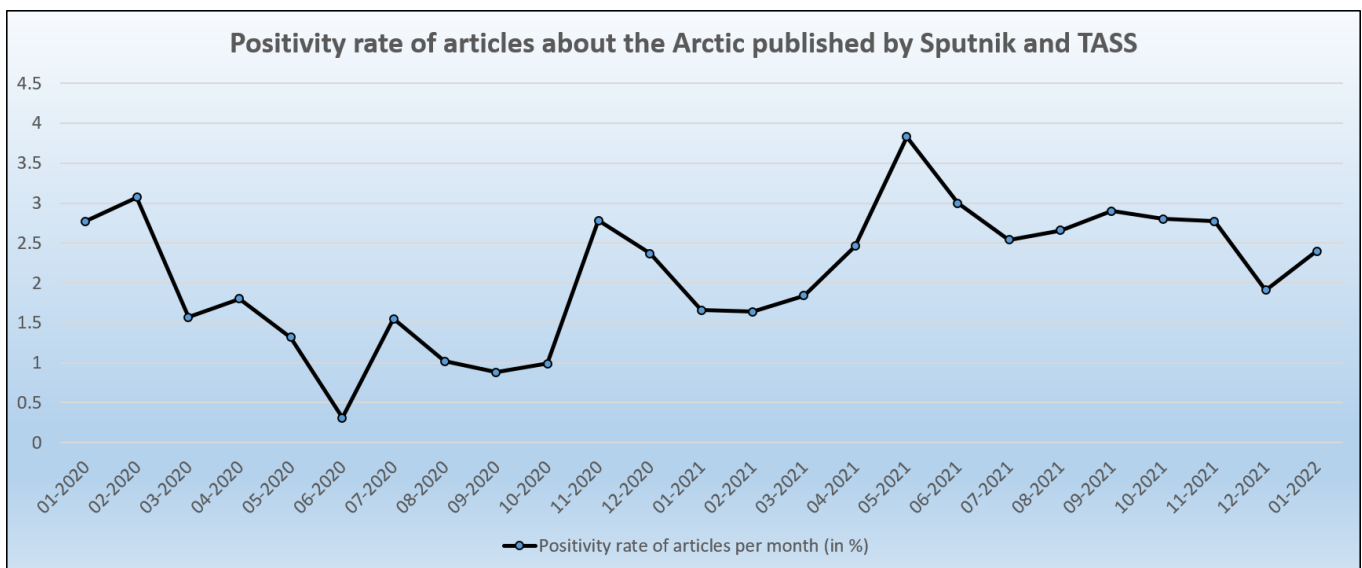
**COUNTRIES:** The overall number of references to other countries was down considerably, with three mentions each for the United States and China, and two for Norway. Stories about China mostly discussed an agreement regarding Novatek’s Arctic LNG 2 project, with the third about US-China competition. Discussion of the US, in addition to the mention of US-China competition, was in reference to NATO and Russia-US tension. One story about Norway as about an EU court case regarding Arctic drilling, while the other was about Russia-Norway joint rescue drills.

<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)	<b>JANUARY 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (12) 2- INDIA (9)

Table 2: foreign countries mentioned per month in Russian press agencies.

**SENTIMENT ANALYSIS:** the positivity rate went back up in January 2022 after it significantly decreased in December 2021.

Very few articles mentioned other countries as coverage tended to dissociate the Ukrainian crisis with Arctic developments. For example, attention was devoted to a NATO exercise in the Arctic region but the emphasis was put on explaining that this drill was not tied to the Ukrainian crisis or talks in Geneva. At other times, Russia was framed positively in how it deals with foreign partners, by presenting Russia as a reliable energy partner of Italy. The Arctic and Ukrainian files were not treated completely separately however, accounting for the positivity rate not coming back to November 2021's level.



## **METHODOLOGICAL NOTES**

Sputnik and TASS articles were retrieved using the Factiva database. 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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