

FEBRUARY 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 – FEBRUARY 2022

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OPSA and OAPA would like to acknowledge the financial support of the Ministère des Relations internationales et de la Francophonie of the Government of Quebec and the Department of National Defence through its MINDS program.



# DECEMBER ANALYSIS – RUSSIAN PRESS AGENCIES AND THE ARCTIC

## Team members:

Mathieu Landriault (Adjunct professor, École nationale d'administration publique)

Jean-François Savard (Associate professor, ÉNAP)

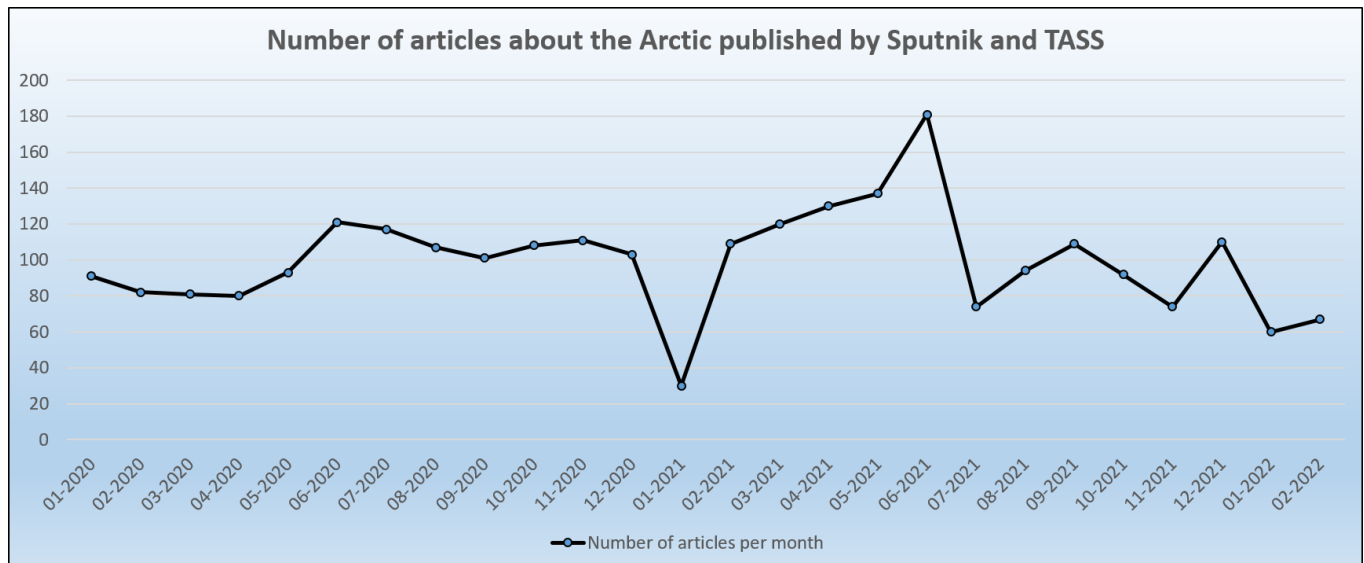
Isabelle Caron (Assistant professor, Dalhousie University)

Gabrielle LaFortune (Doctoral candidate, University of Ottawa)

Alexandre Millette (Doctoral candidate, ÉNAP)

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

**NUMBER OF ARCTIC MENTIONS:** February saw a slight increase in the number of mentions when compared to January, up from 60 to 67. The majority of these (44) occurred in the first half of the month, with the websites of these press agencies down following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The increase in the number of mentions is owing to a rise in categories other than military, especially in the political category, which is up from 1 mention last month to 17 this month. There were also notable increases in mentions of the environment (up from 4 to 9) and science (up from 3 to 9), though their numbers remain small.



**THEMES:** As with previous months, economic and military stories made up the bulk of the Arctic mentions, followed by political stories. Many of the economic stories focused on Arctic development issues, such as investment, food delivery, and LNG projects. Military stories, as in previous months, focused primarily on Northern Fleet drills, alongside other military exercises (these accounted for half of the military stories). There were also several stories about threats to Russia, including NATO drills, neutral state involvement in NATO, and US expansion in the Arctic. Finally, political stories focused on a number of relationships. Early in the month, Russia and China issued joint statements on science and the Arctic. Canada also made several appearances owing to an interview with Russia’s ambassador to Canada, a Russian call to de-politicize Arctic cooperation with Canada, and a meeting to discuss Ukraine.

<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)
<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 most-mentioned country in February was China, followed by the UK. The mentions of China were largely owing to the joint statements regarding science and the Arctic mentioned above, in addition to a story about US legislation meant to increase US competitiveness with China. Stories about the UK mostly involved the interception of a Russian bomber, in addition to a UK statement calling for a decrease in Russian aggression. This is the first time since April 2020 that the US has not been one of the top two most-mentioned countries, but it is worth noting that the US (along with Canada and Ukraine) only had one fewer mention than the UK.

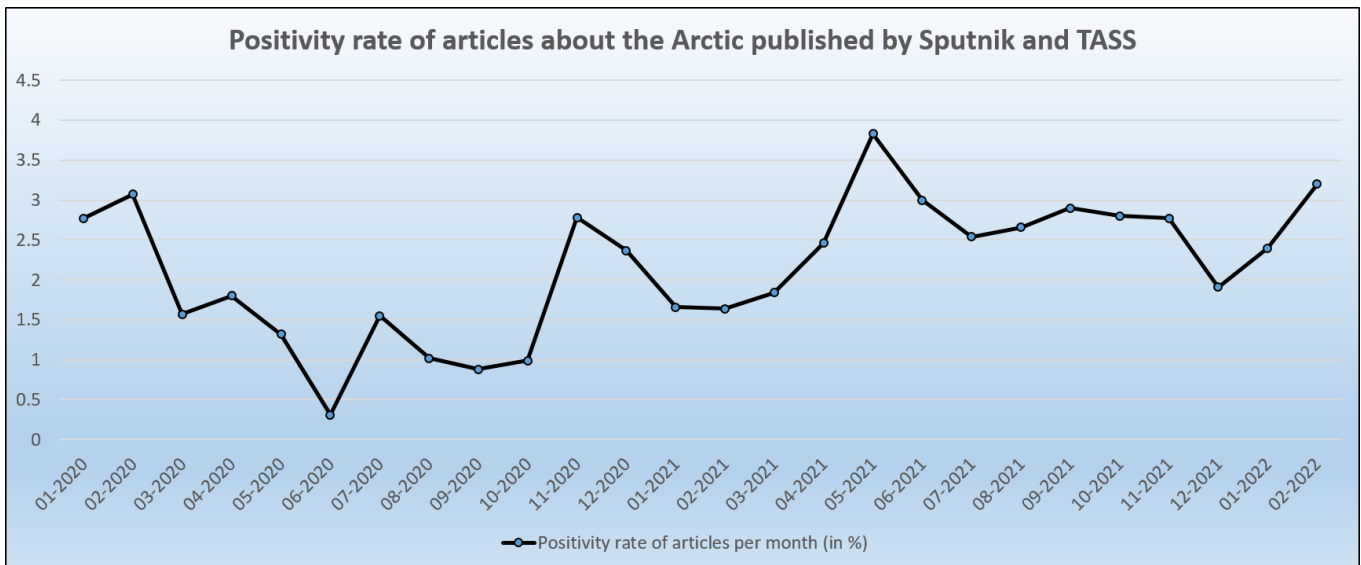
<b>FEBRUARY 2022</b> 1- CHINA (6) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (5)		
<b>JANUARY 2022</b> 1- UNITED STATES, CHINA (3) 2- NORWAY (2)	<b>DECEMBER 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (11) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (4)	<b>NOVEMBER 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (14) 2- CHINA (7)
<b>OCTOBER 2021</b> 1- NORWAY (8) 2- UNITED STATES (4)	<b>SEPTEMBER 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)
<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 continued its upward trajectory in February but there was an important divide between the first half and the second half of the month due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The positivity rate of the first half of February 2022 was at 3.7%, which is comparatively high when looking at peaks from January 2020. The usual stories of cooperation and partnerships, especially on natural resources exploitation but also science, were numerous and occupied a significant portion of the Arctic coverage. Here, we can clearly see an effort from Russian press agencies to dissociate Arctic developments to broader geopolitical tensions.

However, the positivity rate dipped to 2.2% for the second half of February as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine but more importantly the important sanctions imposed by Western countries. This should be a sign of what is to come for the March coverage as the consequences of the invasion and the sanctions are likely to have a spillover effect into Arctic matters.



## **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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