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CANADIAN  
EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY

# ARCTIC NARRATIVES AND POLITICAL VALUES

RUSSIA, CHINA AND CANADA IN THE HIGH NORTH

PREPARED BY THE  
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# Canada's Arctic Strategy

This is a summary of research based on a discourse analysis of official statements, speeches, and policy documents published by the Government of Canada in English from 2013-2018. The narratives derived from the discourse are coded according to the different national power dimensions and political values which they communicate. Sources were identified through a key word search of these publicly available resources.



# Introduction

Exercising national sovereignty and promoting resource development are often considered the two cornerstones of Canada's Arctic Strategy; themes which featured prominently in Canada's most recent Arctic Policy papers of 2009 and 2010, as well as in the new Liberal Defence Policy of 2017. Since the publication of their last Arctic Strategy however, there has been a change of government in Ottawa and a general shift in the way in which the Arctic (or the 'North') is framed in public communications. Canada's Northern Strategy has traditionally emphasized the country's deeply engrained historical relationship to the North and the important role the Arctic plays in forging the Canadian national identity. For the Harper Administration, (esp. in its last two years 2013-15, when Canada chaired the Arctic Council), these romanticized historical ties played a particularly pivotal role in administration's Arctic messaging strategy, reflecting Harpers more hawkish attempts to force a 'northern dimension' of national identity. The Trudeau administration is still

in the process of creating the framework for their new Arctic Policy, yet their new defence policy, and the speeches and press statements regarding the Arctic since 2015 seem to indicate a discernable shift in their messaging priorities. Framing Canada as the global leader of climate research and responsible 'steward' of the North has come to characterize Trudeau's Arctic communications thus far. Other dimensions, such as balancing the concerns of Northern stakeholders and incorporating the Indigenous community into Arctic decision making have remained a consistent focus for both administrations.

This executive summary identifies the dominant narratives of Canada's Arctic communications strategy over the last 5 years and the specific political values they communicate. These narratives are focused on reinforcing Canada's Arctic identity, framing relations with both domestic and international actors and shaping perceptions of the region as whole.



'Now more than ever, the world will count on Canada as the responsible steward of this great barometer of our planet.'

Former Canadian Foreign Minister Dion, Ottawa Sept 2016.





## The Canadian Arctic Archipelago and Northwest Passage



Canada's former foreign minister  
delivering a speech on the 20th  
anniversary of the Arctic Council,

Sept 2016

# Dominant Canadian Narratives

## CANADA'S 'NORTHERN SOUL'

### Political Values – Leadership, Patriotism & Co-operation

Whilst Canada's Arctic identity has traditionally been tied to the idea of their 'Northern soul' and centuries of Indigenous inhabitation of the Arctic, the country's self-image has slowly diversified over the last five years. Positioning itself as a leader in Arctic research and governance and a

responsible 'steward' of Northern affairs has become a recurring theme in Canada's Arctic communications. These narratives, and the different values associated with them, have been expressed exclusively through the political dimension.





leadership  
patriotism  
cooperation  
environmentalism rule of law  
**territorial integrity**  
social obligation stewardship  
inclusivity  
respect

Canada





The Trudeau administration has been keen to paint Canada as a global leader in Arctic affairs. In many of their Arctic statements, Canada positions itself as the responsible steward of Arctic governance and scientific research. As global attention shifts towards the Arctic following the opening of shipping channels and increased access to resources, Canada continues to seek

opportunities to secure a leading role in regulatory / co-management systems and to strengthen its image as an 'Arctic knowledge leader'. Implicit in this narrative is the suggestion that Canada is shouldering global responsibility for tackling climate change issues, and thus deserves to be seen as a leading Arctic nation.



'Canada is an Arctic nation- the North is an essential part of Canada's collective heritage, our identity and our future.'

Former Canadian Foreign Minister Robert Nicholson, Iqaluit, April 2015.

Leadership is one of the key roles that Canada envisions for itself in the Arctic. Much of this rests on the perception that Canada, the second largest Arctic nation and home to a considerable Northern population, has the highest stakes in Arctic governance and the most to lose from irresponsible exploitation of its resources. The Arctic is presented as an 'essential' part of Canada's future, implying that Canada deserves a leading voice in Arctic governance and in the management of its natural resources.

Although Canada's Arctic messaging has evolved considerably over the last five years, it has always emphasized Canada's inherently 'Northern character.' Repeated references are made to Canada's Arctic heritage and the thousands of years that Indigenous people have lived and thrived in the Canadian Arctic. Creating an emotional and almost mythological connection to the North helps cement its identity as the most authentically 'true' Arctic nation.



Canadian scientists examining evidence of temperature change on glaciers at Baffin Island,

Sept 2012.

# The Fragile Arctic

Overall the Arctic is portrayed as an environmentally fragile and ‘high stakes’ region. Although sovereignty plays a lesser role in shaping perceptions of the Arctic than it once did, the Harper and Trudeau governments both acknowledge the contested nature of the Arctic Archipelago and frame the Arctic as an increasingly competitive region. Environmentalism, rule of law, and territorial integrity are the main political values communicated. Canada’s national power in the Arctic and attempts to shape perceptions of the region are overwhelmingly political in character.

Exercising national sovereignty and emphasizing the regional rather than international nature of the Arctic has always been the cornerstone of Canada’s Arctic policy, particularly during the Harper years. Despite softening other aspects of their Arctic messaging, the Trudeau administration places similarly strong emphasis on defending Canada’s Arctic sovereignty, with their 2017 defence policy promising greater military presence and surveillance equipment in the Arctic Archipelago. As global interest in the Arctic continues to mount, protecting Canada’s Northwest Passage and deterring any hostile ‘projections of force’ has become a central priority.



‘As the ice melts, the debate over the sovereign rights of the Arctic nations heats up. The contested waterway brings to light a variety of concerns including strategic defence issues related to potential incursions into the Canadian Arctic.’

Government of Canada, Ottawa, 2017

# Mending Arctic relations

## Political Values Social Obligation and Co-operation.

**Overall Canada frames its relations with other actors in the region in terms of cooperation and reconciliation. In the economic dimension, Canada portrays its Arctic development as an inclusive and mutually beneficial process, promising to address the socio-economic needs of the Indigenous population and close the infrastructure gap. In the political dimension, Canadian messaging is split between promoting a more conciliatory stance towards Russia and taking a more cautious position towards non-Arctic states and their involvement Arctic governance.**

Improving relations with the Indigenous community has been the central focus of their Arctic communications strategy- for the Harper and Trudeau administration in particular. The Trudeau government is due to publish a new Arctic framework later this year and has already gone to great lengths to demonstrate the inclusive and respectful nature of the development process. Canada's Arctic policy intends to not only accommodate indigenous interests but also offers the opportunity to participate actively in decision-making. Trudeau's emphasis on improving relations with the Northern population has tilted Canada's Arctic policy increasingly inwards and more domestically focused.

As global interest in the Arctic mounts, Canada's messaging has become increasingly focused on cementing the authority of Arctic states and managing their relations with non-regional actors. Whilst most statements express a sense of tolerance and cooperation towards non-Arctic states, the Harper administration in particular stressed that the participation of non-Arctic states in the Arctic Council should not diminish or threaten the central role of permanent members and participants. The Arctic Council is often framed as the foundation for responsible governance and 'preeminent' forum for collaboration in the Arctic. Presenting the Arctic Council as the only form of legitimate governance is a strategy used to limit the influence of China and other 'encroaching' Arctic observers.



Prime Minister Trudeau and President of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami Natan Obed talk as they overlook Iqaluit, Nunavut.

February 2017





Former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Russian President Vladimir Putin at the G20 Summit in St Petersburg, 2013.

Although tensions with Russia peaked in 2014, the Harper administration made no reference to Moscow's aggression in Ukraine in the context of Arctic cooperation. When the Trudeau government came into office at the end of 2015 however, Foreign Minister Dion made a rare speech that openly acknowledged Russian aggression in Eastern Europe, yet also emphasized the government's intention to compartmentalize the Kremlin's foreign policy and work towards closer bilateral cooperation in the Arctic. As the other principal stakeholder in the region, Russia is framed as Canada's 'unavoidable partner' in the Arctic and one that, for the sake of national interest, would be 'irrational' to marginalize.

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'Almost 50% of the North is Russian and some 25% is Canadian. Between us we control 75% of the North. To sever the links with Russia, our neighbour, serves the interests of no one.'

Foreign Minister Dion, Ottawa, Sept 2016.

It is a domestic political priority to address the socio-economic needs of Northerners.

Canada is the responsible steward of the North.

Russian aggression in Ukraine should not compromise cooperation in the Arctic.

The sustainable development of natural resources is at the core of Canada's Arctic strategy.

Canada must protect its Arctic sovereignty and increase military presence in the North.

It is a domestic political priority to address the socio-economic needs of Northerners.

The Arctic Council is the leading and most effective structure of Arctic governance.

Canada's vast territory and indigenous population means that it has the highest stakes in the Arctic.

The climate change is disproportionately impacting Canada, challenging Northerners way of life.

Canada's Arctic policy will be co-developed by the Indigenous community.

The Arctic plays a fundamental role in shaping Canadian national identity.

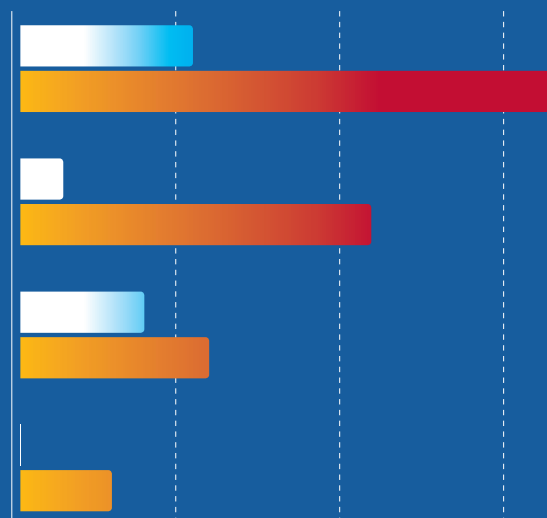


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Russian aggression in Ukraine should not compromise cooperation in the Arctic.



2013-2015

2016-2018





## REGION

2 NARRATIVES



The climate change is disproportionately impacting Canada, challenging Northerners way of life.

Canada must protect its Arctic sovereignty and increase military presence in the North

## SELF

4 NARRATIVES



The Arctic plays a fundamental role in shaping Canadian national identity.

Canada is the responsible steward of the North.

Canada's vast territory and indigenous population means that it has the highest stakes in the Arctic.

The sustainable development of natural resources is at the core of Canada's Arctic strategy.

## OTHER

4 NARRATIVES



Canada's Arctic policy will be co-developed by the Indigenous community.

It is a domestic political priority to address the socio-economic needs of Northerners.

The Arctic Council is the leading and most effective structure of Arctic governance.

Russian aggression in Ukraine should not compromise cooperation in the Arctic.

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