



Rethinking the Top of the World: The Arctic Council

**Canada Centre for
Global Security
Studies
At the
Munk School of
Global Affairs**

And the

**Walter & Duncan
Gordon Foundation**

May 2011

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74% of Canadians think that there are penguins in the Arctic and 69% think that Canadians in the North live in igloos, according to a [recent poll](#) conducted by [Up Here](#), a Northern Canadian-based magazine¹. With this lack of basic knowledge about the Arctic, perhaps it is not surprising that large numbers of Canadians have never heard of an important organization that is meeting in Nuuk, Greenland today (May 12) to discuss Arctic issues – the [Arctic Council](#). Canadians can take comfort in the fact that their Arctic neighbours don't fare much better. This is according to data collected by the [Canada Centre for Global Security Studies](#) at the [Munk School of Global Affairs](#) and the [Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation](#) for the study [Rethinking the Top of the World: Arctic Security Public Opinion Survey](#), released in January 2011².

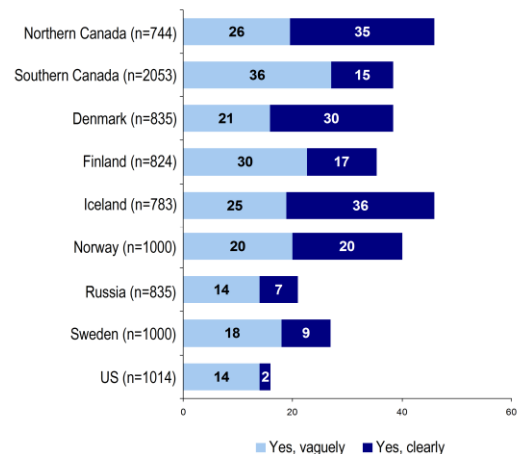
Have you heard of the Arctic Council?

Respondents from all eight Arctic Council member states (Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Russia and the United States) were asked if they had heard of the Arctic Council.

Awareness is highest in Northern Canada (61 per cent say they are either clearly or vaguely aware of the Arctic Council) and Iceland (61 per cent). Roughly half of

Awareness of Arctic Council

"Have you ever heard of an intergovernmental forum or group called the Arctic Council that is made up of eight countries with Arctic regions?"



EKOS Research Associates Inc.

WDGF Canadian Arctic Survey – North/South, 2010

¹The [Up Here](#) "North Poll" surveyed 303 Canadians in February. The survey was demographically balanced with a margin of error of +/- 5.6 at 96% confidence levels.

² [Rethinking the Top of the World](#) involved nine separate surveys across the eight Arctic Council member states:

	Sample Size	Margin of Error
Canada (North)	744	+/- 3.6 – 19 times out of 20
Canada (South)	2,053	+/- 2.2 – 19 times out of 20
United States	1,012	+/- 3.1 – 19 times out of 20
Russia	835	+/- 3.4 – 19 times out of 20
Denmark	835	+/- 3.4 – 19 times out of 20
Finland	824	+/- 3.4 – 19 times out of 20
Norway	1,000	+/- 3.1 – 19 times out of 20
Sweden	1,000	+/- 3.1 – 19 times out of 20

Further information on methodology and a full copy of the report can be found at:

http://www.wdgm.ca/sites/default/files/publications/Ekos_2011-01-20_ArcticSecurityPublicOpinionSurvey.pdf.

respondents from Denmark (57 per cent), Southern Canada (51 per cent), and Finland (47 per cent) say they have heard of the Arctic Council. Awareness of the Arctic Council is relatively lower in Norway (40 per cent) and Sweden (27 per cent). It is lowest in Russia (21 per cent) and the United States (16 per cent). Respondents were even less likely to have heard of the Arctic Council if they were under the age of 25.

What is the Arctic Council?

The Arctic Council is a high-level intergovernmental initiative that addresses common issues and concerns faced by Arctic governments and Indigenous peoples of the High North. It is the most active intergovernmental forum concerned with the Arctic and the only one to be comprised of all eight Arctic nations. The Arctic Council is primarily concerned with the promotion of environmental protection and sustainable development of the region.

The Council was conceived as a high level intergovernmental forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of the Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic.

Why should I care about the Arctic Council?

If you are from the North...

As part of *Rethinking the Top of the World*, focus groups were carried out in [Cambridge Bay, Nunavut](#) in December 2010. In the words of one of the participants: “*there’s more and more people outside of Canada who are interested in the Inuit people*”. It is true that interest in the Arctic – from governments and from ordinary citizens across the globe – is increasing, as climate change vastly transforms this region. The Arctic Council is a forum where Inuit and other Indigenous peoples across the Arctic can speak directly to the representatives of these outside interests through the structure of the Permanent Participants. The Permanent Participants represent the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic and what they say in their name should be of interest to Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic.

The Arctic Council should not only be of interest to the Indigenous Peoples of the North, but all Northerners, as it is increasingly taking on issues that are of direct relevance to Northerners. At the May 12 ministerial the Arctic Council member states will sign an agreement on [Search and Rescue](#), an issue that was brought up by participants at the focus groups in Cambridge Bay. For example one participant explained:

I know that last summer that we had two major ships that had some problems over our Northwest Passage and it worries me when foreign ships ... one of them was an oil

tanker actually delivering fuel... if there had been a disaster there. It would have been a catastrophe for our environment if there was an oil spill. And the other one was hit and damaged, but still, it's dangerous. If we have trained search and rescue teams... trained people or environmental officers, guides, that know how to map this out, maybe, we might be able to prevent such disaster in the future. That's what worries me, you know.

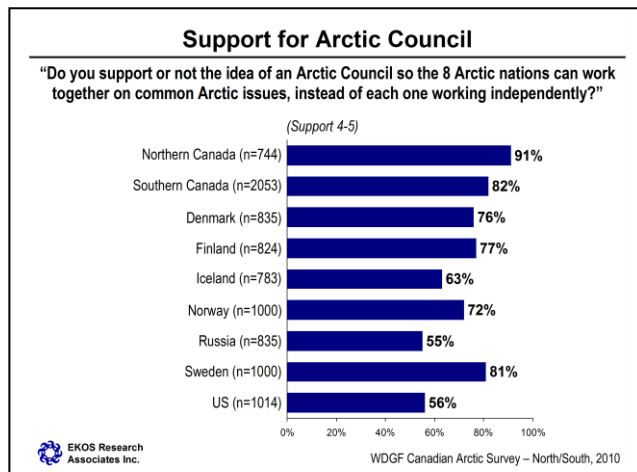
The Arctic Council was able to come up with an agreement on this issue that will affect how search and rescue is carried out in individual communities across the Arctic and therefore, the lives of those who live there. This impact should encourage an interest in the Arctic Council among those who live in the Arctic.

If you are from “the South” ...

While the North features prominently in Canadian mythology, few Canadians understand the region or will ever visit there. Dr. Lloyd Axworthy, a former Canadian Foreign Minister, put forth the argument at a Munk-Gordon Speaker Series event on April 14, 2011 that “With the implications of climate change on the Arctic ecosystem, for indigenous and northern communities or for Canada’s sovereignty, the Arctic will be one of Canada’s most important foreign policy priorities in the 21st century”. If Canadians are serious that the Arctic is an important part of their country, then they should take a serious interest in learning more about the region – starting with the basics like penguins do not live in the Arctic and graduating to an understanding of the international forces at play there.

Do you support the *idea* of the Arctic Council?

While most had not heard of the Arctic Council, when they were given a brief description of what the Council is and does, they were overwhelmingly in support of the organization. Support was highest in Canada, where an overwhelming 91% of Canadians in the North and 82% in the South support the Arctic Council. Support was lowest (though still a majority) in the United States (56%) and Russia (55%).



How was the Arctic Council created?

On September 20th, 1989, at the behest of the government of Finland, officials from the eight Arctic states gathered to discuss potential cooperative actions for the environmental protection of the Arctic. On June 14th, 1991, the [Arctic Environment Protection Strategy \(AEPS\) and Declaration](#) was formally adopted. The Arctic nations committed to the AEPS joint Action Plan, which concentrated on cooperation in scientific research and sharing of data on effects of pollution, as well as the assessment of potential environmental impacts of development activities. The AEPS was a unique organization at the time: first, because it was one of the few forums to bridge the Cold War divide, and second, because it was one of the few intergovernmental organizations to include the participation of Indigenous peoples from the outset.

The Arctic Council was an outgrowth of the AEPS. A Canadian initiative, it was formally established with the signing of the [Ottawa Declaration](#) in 1996. The [Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation](#) was instrumental in this process, having done substantial work on sketching out the framework for such an organization beginning in the early 1990s and supporting key figures in its creation, including [Mary Simon](#), who became Canada's first Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs.

What does the Arctic Council do?

The mandate of Arctic Council is generally limited to technical areas, centered on environmental issues. There are currently six working groups including:

[Arctic Contaminants Action Program \(ACAP\)](#)
[Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program \(AMAP\)](#)
[Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna \(CAFF\)](#)
[Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response \(EPPR\)](#)
[Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment \(PAME\)](#)
[Sustainable Development Working Group \(SDWG\)](#)

Working Groups are responsible for carrying out the programs and projects set by the Arctic Council Ministers. These are set out in Ministerial Declarations.

How does the Arctic Council make decisions?

The Arctic Council uses the consensus model, which means that there are no votes. All states must agree for a decision to be taken.

Who makes up the Arctic Council?

The Arctic Council has three categories of "participants": member states, permanent participants, and observers.

Member States

There are eight member states of the Arctic Council:

Canada	Denmark	Finland	Iceland
Norway	Russian Federation	Sweden	United States

Permanent Participants

In addition to the Member States, the Arctic Council includes the category of Permanent Participant. This category was created to provide for the active participation of, and full consultation with, indigenous representatives within the Arctic Council. This principle applies to all meetings and activities.

Despite the unique status these organizations hold within the Arctic Council, barriers remain to their full participation, including the high cost of travel and the specialized character of many of the proceedings.

The Permanent Participants are supported by the [Indigenous Peoples Secretariat](#).

Permanent Participants

[Aleut International Association](#)

[Arctic Athabaskan Council](#)

[Gwich'in Council International](#)

[Inuit Circumpolar Council](#)

[Saami Council](#)

[Russian Arctic Indigenous Peoples of the North](#)

Observers

Observer status in the Arctic Council is open to non-Arctic states, regional and global intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Currently six non-Arctic states have the status of Permanent Observer: France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Non-Arctic States	Intergovernmental Organizations	Non-Governmental Organizations
France	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies	Advisory Committee on Protection of the Seas
Germany	North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission	Arctic Circumpolar Gateway
Poland	Nordic Council of Ministers	Association of Reindeer Herders
Spain	Nordic Environment Finance Corporation	Circumpolar Conservation Union
The Netherlands	Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region	International Arctic Science Committee
United Kingdom	United Nations Commission for Europe	International Arctic Social Science Association
	United Nations Development Programme	International Union for Circumpolar Health
	United Nations Environment Programme	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
		Northern Forum
		University of the Arctic
		World Wildlife Federation Global Arctic Program

Who chairs the Arctic Council?

The chairmanship of the Arctic Council rotates every two years. The inaugural chairmanship was held by Canada in 1998. It is currently held by Denmark and will be taken over by Sweden in 2011. **Canada will assume chairmanship for the second time in 2013**, followed by the United States in 2015.

Where does the Arctic Council go from here?

The Arctic is undergoing many changes as a result of climate change. These changes are occurring rapidly and are bringing the Arctic to the attention of many outside observers. One of the items on the [agenda](#) at the Nuuk Ministerial is “The Changing Arctic: Challenges for the Arctic Council” where “Ministers and Permanent Participants Heads of Delegations will address key challenges and priorities for the Arctic Council as a consequence of a changing Arctic.” What are some of the issues that they might discuss?

Should the Arctic Council expand its mandate?

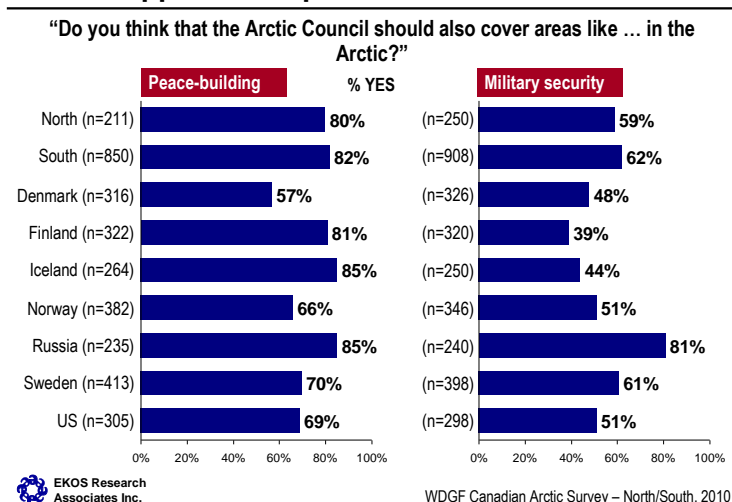
At the time of the Council’s creation, peace and security were deliberately omitted from its mandate in order to secure American support for the project. Today, the receding sea ice is opening up the Arctic to new security challenges, with the potential for terrorists, drug smugglers and illegal immigrants to access North American soil through an unsecured North. Furthermore, increased marine and air traffic has the potential to result in accidents, which current capabilities would be unable to effectively manage. Should the Arctic Council’s mandate be expanded to include peace-building and military security in order to meet these challenges?

Some experts argue that by providing a venue to discuss these security issues will ensure that conflict in the cold Arctic will not “heat up”. Others argue that there are other existing security organizations that can more effectively deal with peace-building and military security issues, including NATO or the UN.

According to *Rethinking the Top of the World*, a majority of respondents in all countries support the idea of expanding the Arctic Council’s mandate to include peace-building measures. Direct opposition to the idea was quite low. It was strongest in Denmark, where 34% of the population were opposed.

Russians were overwhelming in support of the Arctic Council taking on a military security mandate with 81% in support. A majority in

Support for Expanded Council Mandate



Canada, Sweden, Norway and the United States support expanding the mandate, as well. Finland was the only country in which a majority was opposed (54%).

Which states and organizations should be admitted as permanent observers?

As mentioned above, the Arctic Council gives observer status to a number of non-Arctic states, international organizations and NGOs. The status of observer is open to non-Arctic states that have a keen interest in Arctic research. Japan has applied for observer status, as has the European Union.

Some argue that additional states should not be given permanent observer status. They believe that it should be left to the states which have sovereignty in the Arctic to make decisions concerning the region. Others are concerned about the effect that well-funded and well-staffed states, such as China or India, would have on the ability for the Permanent Participants to be able to be heard in the Arctic Council.

Alternatively, some argue, that non-Arctic states should be admitted as permanent observers, as they have legitimate interests in the region as growing consumers for the region's natural resources and as key shipping countries. They are concerned that if non-Arctic states are not allowed into the fold in the Arctic Council, then they will bring up their concerns in other forums where Arctic states are the minority, such as the United Nations General Assembly.

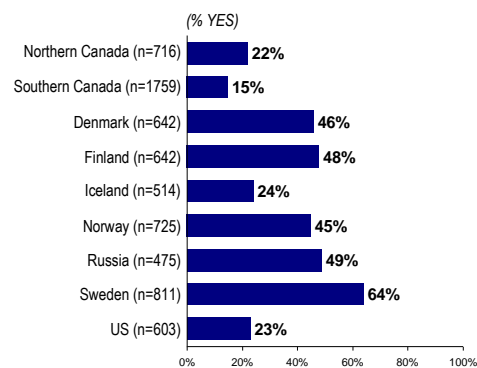
Rethinking the Top of the World did not find enthusiastic support for giving non-Arctic states a role at the Arctic Council or a say in Arctic affairs. Canadians were most pessimistic, with only 15% of Canadians in the South and 22% of Canadians in the North in support. American (23%) and Icelandic (24%) numbers were equally low. Only in Sweden was there a majority in favour of including non-Arctic states in an expanded manner.

What role is there for the “Arctic 5”?

In 2008, Denmark (who is an Arctic state, as a result of the fact that Greenland is a Danish overseas territory) convened a meeting the first meeting of the “Arctic 5” in [Ilulissat, Greenland](#). The Arctic 5 consists of the five Arctic littoral states; that is, the five Arctic states, which border on the Arctic Ocean. This excluded Finland, Sweden and Iceland from the discussions, as well as, the Arctic Council Permanent Participants. Responding to fears that conflict would result over the existing maritime boundary disputes in the Arctic, the Arctic 5 met to discuss the way forward. The Arctic 5 issued the “[Ilulissat Declaration](#)” which stated that the littoral states would abide by international law, specifically the [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea](#), to resolve this dispute.

Support for Inclusion of Non-Arctic States

“Do you think non-arctic states, like China or organizations like the European Union, should be invited to join the Arctic Council and have a say in Arctic affairs?”



EKOS Research Associates Inc.

WDGF Canadian Arctic Survey – North/South, 2010

While there is general consensus on support for the Ilulissat Declaration, when Canada convened a second meeting of the Arctic 5 in Chelsea, Quebec in 2010, some feared that the littoral states were attempting to [either bypass](#) the Arctic Council or set up a [rival organization](#). Some argued that this was because of a desire to avoid Indigenous participation. Others argued that Arctic 5 meetings are useful, because it is a chance to talk about issues that the Arctic Council is not currently well-placed to discuss, because of the limitations on its mandate.

How should the Arctic Council be paid for?

The Arctic Council does not have any permanent sources of funding. Projects are paid for on an ad hoc basis, based on individual contributions from the Member States. Some argue that this is prohibitive for the Arctic Council to do its work. Should the Arctic Council be paid for by membership fees? How should it be decided how much each member or observer should pay?

Should the Arctic Council have a permanent secretariat?

The United Nations is based in New York and the International Monetary Fund in Washington. The Arctic Council, however, has no such “home base”, as it has no permanent secretariat to organize meetings and oversee the day-to-day operations of the Council. Instead, each chair of the Arctic Council sets up a temporary secretariat in their state for two years. Should the Arctic Council have a permanent secretariat? Where should it be? Norway and Canada have both expressed an interest in housing the permanent secretariat. Canada has put forth Ottawa, because of the advantage of being in close proximity to the diplomat corps of the other members. Norway, alternatively, has argued that the secretariat should be in Tromsø, because it is important that this Arctic organization be based in the Arctic.

How should the Permanent Participants be supported?

The Arctic Council is unique in terms of international organizations, in that it has a permanent structure to ensure representation of Indigenous peoples. While this helps to make sure that the Indigenous voice is heard at this level, there are some barriers for full participation, including a lack of both financial and human capital. Indigenous organizations represent a small population that is tackling some very big challenges: climate change, low educational attainment, high suicide rates and the preservation of culture. Often the personnel of the PPs are expected to have expertise on an extraordinary number of different files. Currently, the Canadian PPs, for example, only receive some funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. How can these organizations be adequately supported?

Want to know more?

If you are interested in learning more about the Arctic Council and engaging in discussions about its future role in the place of Arctic governance, you are invited to participate in the January 17th conference [*The Arctic Council: its place in the future of Arctic governance*](#) hosted by the Canada Centre for Global Security Studies at the Munk School of Global Affairs, the Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation, and the [Northern Institute for Minority and Environmental Law](#) at the [University of Lapland](#). The Conference will feature original research contributions, but will also seek to engage decision-makers to debate these new ideas proposed by the [researchers](#).

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