

DATA PAPER

Actor participation in the Arctic Council, 1998–2025: a new data set

Anna Ivanova

School of Politics, Philosophy, and Public Affairs, Washington State University, Pullman, WA, USA

Abstract

The Arctic Council, once the primary forum for Arctic governance, has been facing significant disruptions since 2022, raising questions about the future direction of regional cooperation. Stored at the Arctic Data Center in the US, the ArcticPart data set covers over 25 years of participation in 171 meetings of the Arctic Council, including Ministerial, Senior Arctic Officials and selected working, expert and task force groups. It offers the most complete and systematically organized record of actor participation from 1998 to 2025. This data set provides opportunities to analyse the evolution of Arctic governance, including changes in member state participation after 2022, the shift of meetings to the working group level, the changing role of observers and non-state actors in maintaining cooperation and the effects of chairship rotation.

Keywords

Arctic governance; observers; attendance records; international cooperation

Correspondence

Anna Ivanova, School of Politics, Philosophy, and Public Affairs, Washington State University, 710 Johnson Tower, Pullman, WA 99164-4880, USA. E-mail: anna.ivanova@wsu.edu

Abbreviations

AMAP: Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (Arctic Council working group)
EPPR: Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (Arctic Council working group)
PAME: Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (Arctic Council working group)
SAO: Senior Arctic Officials
STAPAC: Stakeholder Participation in Arctic Council Meetings (data set)
TFAMC: Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation (Arctic Council)
TFBCM: Task Force on Black Carbon and Methane (Arctic Council)
TFTIA: Task Force on Telecommunications Infrastructure in the Arctic (Arctic Council)
TFOPP: Task Force on Arctic Marine Oil Pollution Prevention (Arctic Council)

Introduction

The Arctic is often seen as an exceptional region on account of its geographical remoteness and history of peaceful cooperation at the interstate level. Still, it faces the same challenges as other regions, including environmental instability, political disagreements and competing interests. Established in 1996, the Arctic Council is an intergovernmental forum that promotes cooperation among the Arctic states and Arctic communities on common interests such as sustainable development and environmental protection (Arctic Council 2023). Over the years, involvement in the Arctic Council has remained one of the few consistent elements of Arctic governance despite occasional international disruptions.

One way to track this involvement is by analysing actor participation in Arctic Council meetings at different levels. Participation patterns allow us to see not only the levels of engagement across different actors, but also the political context in which it occurs. In some cases, non-participation becomes a form of political statement. For example, in April 2014, both Canada and the US boycotted the TFBCM meeting in Moscow to protest the annexation of Crimea. For the US, this boycott was part of a broader set of decisions made in spring 2014, including its suspension of military cooperation with Russia, the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration's suspension of contacts with Russian partners and efforts by the US and its allies to exclude Russia from the forum of leaders of major industrialized democracies known as the Group of Eight. The US government did not issue an

official public statement regarding the Arctic Council, whereas Canada's decision to boycott the TFBCM meeting in Moscow was officially announced the day the meeting was held (Government of Canada 2014; The White House 2014).

Another example can be found in the participation of observers in the Arctic Council. Observers are actors that have been officially granted observer status by the council. Observers are normally invited to attend meetings, unless the SAOs—the officials appointed by the member states' ministries of foreign affairs to manage the council's activities—decide otherwise (Arctic Council 2013a, b). The chair of each Arctic Council subsidiary body sends invitations in advance of a meeting and may limit the number of participants per delegation. Meeting attendance reflects both the observers' willingness to participate and the decision of the member states to include them in the discussion. Invitations to meetings are often extended after observers themselves request to participate. For example, a newly admitted observer, Singapore, asked to participate in the November 2013 EPPR meeting to share its expertise on an oil spill incident that had occurred in Singapore. This proposal was accepted, as noted in the working group's report (EPPR 2013).

The need for a new data set about the Arctic Council

Stakeholder participation in the Arctic Council was compiled by Sebastian Knecht in a data set—STAPAC—that covers actor participation in major meetings up to 2015 (Knecht 2017). This data set serves as an important starting point for studying institutional engagement in the Arctic. Since then, several studies have examined specific actors or meeting types. For example, Chater (2024) analysed observers' engagement by type within the Arctic Council from 2016 to 2020. Veselova (2025) provided data on the participation of India, Japan, China, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Italy in meetings at the SAO level. Tsaritova (2024) looked at non-state observers' participation in PAME, SAO and ministerial meetings. Wehrmann (2017) tracked non-state actors involvement in the TFOPP and EPPR meetings.

A full picture of the post-2015 transformation in Arctic governance remains to be formed. The temporary suspension of collaboration with a key member state is a significant event that highlights the need to further analyse how member states, permanent participants, observers and other actors engage in Arctic governance and how they Participation and its absence can indicate shifts to other platforms or the fragmentation of cooperation in the face of institutional crisis and accelerating

environmental change. For example, during Norway's chairship of the Arctic Council in 2023–25, much of the attention shifted to the work of working groups and task forces, as ministerial and SAO-level meetings could no longer be held in the usual way. At the same time, actors in the Arctic have increasingly turned to bilateral formats and alternative platforms (e.g., the annual Arctic Frontiers conference) or thematic forums of the United Nations, International Maritime Organization and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The number of formal meetings of the Arctic Council has declined in recent years and research reflects a range of reassessments of its role in Arctic governance (Kuus 2025), including more cautious or pessimistic views (Dyck 2024; Hansen-Magnusson & Gehrke 2025). Tracking participation would help reveal how consistent Arctic cooperation has been during periods of institutional disruption.

The ArcticPart data set

ArcticPart extends STAPAC data by 10 years. Focusing on recorded presence instead of formal status, the ArcticPart data set includes all observers from the moment they first appeared at the meetings, even before receiving official status. It includes participants who joined the council's meetings after 2015, as well as new participant categories such as invited experts, projects and companies. Tracking observers participation before official acceptance enables researchers to analyse their integration process and assess the impact of early engagement on long-term institutional involvement. Including the *invited_entity* variable allows for the analysis of non-state actors' participation. ArcticPart offers the most complete and systematically organized record of actor participation in the Arctic Council from 1998 to 2025 at ministerial, SAO, PAME, AMAP, EPPR, TFTIA, TFAMC, TFOPP and TFBCM meetings. Although informed by the STAPAC data set, ArcticPart was built independently. It is not intended to replace the earlier data set but to offer another perspective on participation.

The data set (doi: 10.18739%2FA24T6F52J) is stored in the Arctic Data Center, a data repository for the Arctic section of the US National Science Foundation's Office of Polar Programs. The data collection process, the data set's structure, including information on variables, the approach used to verify the data's accuracy and the data set's limitations are described below.

Sources

During the preliminary analysis, the STAPAC data set (Knecht 2017) was reviewed and served as a helpful reference. When compared with official sources,

a few minor inconsistencies were found. For example, STAPAC does not show the presence of the World Wide Fund for Nature at the 1999 PAME meeting in Ottawa or the presence of the EU at the September 2014 PAME meeting, although official reports list both as present. The STAPAC data set does not include invited actors who participated in the meetings before gaining formal status.

The ArcticPart data were manually extracted from Arctic Council official reports and summaries of ministerial, SAO-level and working group meetings retrieved from the Arctic Council website and from the official websites of the working groups. Attendance was determined on the basis of the participant lists in the reports. In cases where reports were missing, meeting minutes and related materials from the working groups and chronological lists of meetings were used. In a few instances, official public announcements and news updates, including the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North publications, were used to complete the data. Metadata tables, such as information about the actors, meeting locations and dates, were added separately. If actor names were incomplete or their affiliations were absent or unclear in the reports, the missing details were found by searching online or examining earlier participant lists. For example, this helped distinguish representatives of Greenland and the Faroe Islands from those representing Denmark.

Formats, categories and variables

The ArcticPart data set is available in XLS and CSV. It follows Knecht’s (2017) format. However, new variables and meetings have been added, participation coding has been corrected and metadata on meeting dates and locations are included in a separate file: Actor_Info. The data are organized into 11 separate CSV files. An XLS file combines all tables on individual sheets within a single document (Table 1).

Each CSV file lists actors (states, Indigenous organizations, working groups, non-governmental organizations, intergovernmental and interparliamentary organizations, invited actors) in rows, with columns showing their meeting participation. For each meeting, the data set records whether the actor was present (1 = yes, 0 = no, NA = no information), and how many representatives the actor sent, using the corresponding variable *actor_count_XXX* followed by the meeting number.

In recent years, most meetings have been held in a hybrid format. An actor was marked as present (1) regardless of whether participation was in person or virtual. The meeting abbreviation indicates the type of

meeting, such as *mm* (ministerial meeting), *sao* (SAO meeting), *eppr* (EPPR meeting) and *amap* (AMAP meeting), and the number following shows the sequential number of that specific meeting. For example, *eppr25* refers to the 25th meeting of the EPPR working group, held in Reykjavik, Iceland, in December 2019. The corresponding variable *actor_count_eppr19* indicates how many representatives each actor sent to this meeting. For example, Canada sent four representatives to this meeting.

In all tables, meetings are listed in chronological order. For example, ministerial meetings are labelled *mm01* to *mm14*, reflecting the order from the first to the 14th meeting. The file *Location_Date.csv* collects information about the start and end dates (*start_date* and *end_date*) and the location (*meeting_location*) of each Arctic Council meeting.

The file *Actor_Info.csv* provides background information about the actors. The *actor_name* column contains their full names; *actor_abbr* provides short identifiers for each actor, including ISO country codes for states and acronyms for organizations and Arctic Council bodies. The column *actor_category* refers to the category or type of participant, for example, a member state (*member_state*), permanent participant (*permanent_participant*), working group (*working_group*), secretariat (*secretariat*) or one of the following types of observers: state (*observer_state*), intergovernmental and interparliamentary organization (*observer_igo*) or non-governmental organization (*observer_nigo*). Table 2 lists all actor categories.

Table 1 Overview of files in the ArcticPart data set.

File name	Description
MM	Ministerial meetings (1998–2025), 14 meetings
SAO	Senior Arctic Officials (1998–2021), 45 meetings
PAME	Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (1999–2024), 42 meetings
AMAP	Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (1998–2023), 23 meetings
EPPR	Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (2005–2021), 29 meetings
TFOPP	Task Force on Arctic Marine Oil Pollution Prevention 2014, 5 meetings
TFTIA	Task Force on Telecommunications Infrastructure in the Arctic (2015–16), 3 meetings
TFBCM	Task Force on Black Carbon and Methane meetings 2014, 6 meetings
TFAMC	Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation meetings (2015–2020), 4 meetings
Location_Date	Metadata about each meeting (location, type, date)
Actor_Info	Metadata about each actor
ArcticPart	Excel file compiling all the above files

The category *ad_hoc_observer* refers only to the EU, which has never been officially recognized as an observer but was granted ad hoc observer status at most meetings. The category *AC_secretariat* includes the rotating chairship, representatives of the Arctic Council Secretariat, and the Indigenous Peoples Secretariat. Chairpeople are listed separately, as they are expected to act in a neutral capacity. Vice chairs are not counted under chairship, as their neutrality is not required in their role.

The category *initiative* refers specifically to the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, as only representatives of this initiative were marked as a separate category of participants at EPPR, SAO and AMAP meetings. The category *invited_entity* includes invited individual experts, representatives of specific projects that are not part of the Arctic Council and representatives of companies and organizations.

The variable *formal_entry_year* records the year in which an actor formally joined the Arctic Council. This reflects only the formal date of entry into the Arctic Council, such as the date of recognition as an observer, as in the case of Singapore, or the date of establishment,

as in the case of the PAME working group. The date of formal entry does not always reflect the actual start of engagement in meeting participation. Many actors began participating in Arctic Council meetings even before their formal status was recognized. For example, Japan formally became an observer in 2013 but had been participating in SAO meetings since November 2009. China, which became an observer the same year as Japan, had been participating since November 2007 (Fig. 1).

Missing values

Participation values are missing for some meetings because the reports for them were either uploaded incorrectly on the official website or were not available at all. For example, the same report was uploaded twice for two consecutive meetings, or the reports did not contain lists of participants, or they were not published at all, despite the presence of other documents. In such cases meeting minutes, which recorded discussions and participant activity, were consulted. These documents allowed only confirmation of active participation and not passive presence, which is typical for observers due to the Arctic Council’s participation rules. Therefore, the data set uses the notation NA (not applicable) when the minutes provide no evidence of participation rather than 0 (absent). Only those actors who gave a speech or made comments on presentations were recorded as present (1). In cases where actor activity could be confirmed from the minutes, but delegation size was not reported, the number of representatives was indicated as NA. When even meeting minutes were unavailable, data from working group announcements and news reports were used instead. These sources noted the presence of actors but did not provide a number of participants. For some meetings, such as *sao01* and *sao02*, no sources mentioning participants could be found, so the corresponding columns are fully marked as NA.

Corrections

Some meeting reports had minor issues such as missing actors’ affiliations, small spelling mistakes or mentioning

Table 2 Actor categories.

Actor category	Description
<i>member_state</i>	Member state
<i>permanent_participant</i>	Indigenous organization with permanent participant status
<i>AC_secretariat</i>	Arctic Council Secretariat, including chairperson and Indigenous Peoples’ Secretariat
<i>working_group</i>	Arctic Council working group
<i>expert_group</i>	Arctic Council expert group
<i>task_force</i>	Arctic Council task force
<i>initiative</i>	Specific initiative
<i>observer_state</i>	Observer state
<i>observer_igo</i>	Intergovernmental and interparliamentary observer organization
<i>observer_ngo</i>	Non-governmental observer organization
<i>ad_hoc_observer</i>	Ad hoc observer, used only for the EU
<i>invited_entity</i>	Invited representatives
<i>interpreter</i>	Interpreter
<i>support_staff</i>	Technical and logistical staff

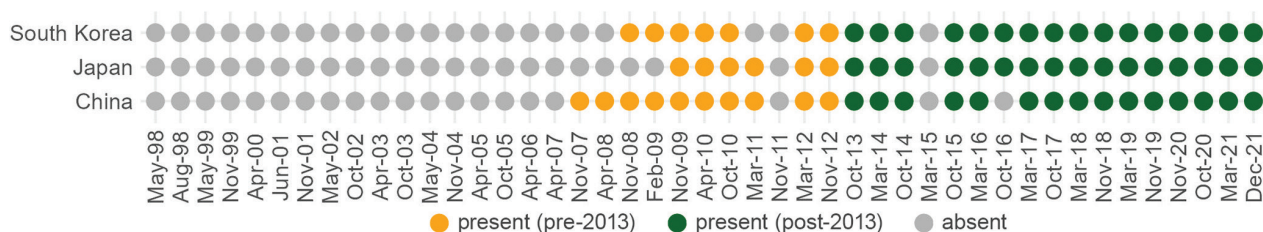


Fig. 1 Participation by China, Japan and Republic of Korea in SAO meetings.

the same actor twice. These were corrected manually. If an actor's name was incomplete or unclear or if the affiliation was not mentioned, additional checks were performed using online searches and previous participant lists. After the data entry was completed, the statistical software R was used to identify duplicate entries and other remaining inconsistencies in the data set.

Limitations

This data set is based solely on publicly available sources, which limit its coverage and level of detail. In some cases, meeting reports did not contain complete participant information, such as the size of delegations or details of their organizational affiliations. In addition, because of the limited available information, the data set covers only ministerial-level and SAO meetings, as well as working and task force meetings of PAME, AMAP, EPPR, TFOPP, TFTIA, TFAMC and TFBCM. ArcticPart does not cover Sustainable Development Working Group meetings, as reliable public data were not available at the time of data collection. For information on these meetings, researchers are encouraged to refer to the STAPAC data set, which includes sessions held up to 2015. Data on other meetings, such as the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna working group, were not fully publicly available. For some meetings, as mentioned in e-mail communication with working group representatives, the information was never intended for public release.

Although actors changed their names or representations over time, a current official name is used for each actor in the data set. This was done to simplify the analysis but may not reflect internal changes in the institutional structure, composition or functions of actors through the study period. Of Arctic Council projects, the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment was the only Arctic Council initiative included in the data set as a distinct actor because it was the only one whose representatives were mentioned across different meeting levels. In addition, participation of the Inuit Circumpolar Council's national branches is grouped under one name, limiting analysis of individual engagement. For simplicity, actors such as GRID-Arendal and EU-affiliated bodies were grouped under the UN Environment Programme and EU, respectively.

Final remarks

Gaps in the data set present opportunities for future research and highlight the importance of more consistent and detailed documentation—made publicly available—by the Arctic Council to support transparency.

The ArcticPart data set may be valuable for researchers as well as those involved in Arctic governance.

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