

How to control Arctic foreign politics: political oversight and the case of the Faroe Islands

Abstract. The countries in the Arctic region are facing uncertainty regarding the implications of the rapid ongoing political development. The most important political institution in the region, the Arctic Council, has turned into a complex multilevel governance system that achieves attention from a multitude of different political actors. This raises the question how to conduct political oversight. This paper focuses on MPs strategies in order to oversee Arctic foreign politics. The paper argues that political oversight depends on institutional opportunities as well the salience and electoral connection of the Arctic foreign policy. The empirical focus is the case of the Faroe Islands, which is one of the political units facing the Arctic uncertainty. Looking into the black box of this autonomous political unit, the paper investigates MPs engagement in Arctic control activity and the salience of Arctic politics. The results show that even though the national institutional settings in fact do empower Faroese MPs to engage in control of Faroese foreign Arctic politics, Faroese MPs and political representatives instead use the transnational parliamentary strategy as well as the arena of the Danish Folketing to oversee Arctic politics.

Introduction

Increasing attention is directed towards the Arctic region from a multitude of different political actors. Previously, the Arctic was a no man's land except for research visits for scientific purposes. For some years now, there has been an undergoing process of political region building, and today the region is attracting attention from the world's superpowers. Hereby, the development has turned the region into a geopolitical hotspot (Olsen & Shadian, 2016, 232). On the one hand, the region is facing changes related to climate change that call for protective measures related to the societies and inhabitants in the region. On the other hand, the melting of ice means new sailing routes and access to oil, gas and mineral reserves, which means changes providing new opportunities for different actors to exploit.

The most important decision-making institution in the Arctic is the inter-governmental institution of the Arctic Council. The importance of the council seems to be increasing,

considering the tendency for council member states to agree on binding international agreements, the establishment of a permanent secretary, and the increasing attention the council is receiving from different types of political actors, who aim for observer status in the council. In other words, the Arctic Council to an increasing extent is turning into a complex multilevel governance system.

A typical challenge following the development of multi-level governance systems is decoupling of legislatures, which raises democratic legitimacy issues. However, previous experiences show that legislatures have fought back in this type of situation. MPs might create transnational or regional parliamentary assemblies or MPs activate and/or develop relevant control institutions in national parliaments in order to improve their oversight of government actions in international institutions (Raunio, 2014).

This paper focuses on and investigates the strategies that MPs use to oversee Arctic Council activity. The paper argues that the extent of MPs control of Arctic Council activity depends on the institutional settings as well as the salience and electoral connection related to Arctic foreign policy.

The empirical focus is the case of the Faroe Islands (Eythórsson & Hovgaard, 2018)¹, which is a country within the Arctic region² and considered having a key position in relation to new sea routes. The Faroe Islands are facing opportunities for trade and industry, but also challenges related to the changes happening in the Arctic region. For instance, increased activity at sea means challenges in the field of civil security (Jákobsstovu & Berg, 2012, Bailes & Jákobsstovu, 2013)³.

The Faroe Islands is, however, not a state, but a part of the Danish Realm, and therefore the Faroese actions and strategies related to the development in the Arctic also depends on the relationship to Denmark. This means that even though this article's focus on institutional settings and political incentives offers general knowledge, a study of Faroese foreign policy and related control activity has idiographic elements.

The paper starts out with a section about the institutional development of the Arctic Council. Thereafter, the paper presents the theoretical framework about parliamentary and MPs response and political incentives. Finally, the paper presents the investigation of MPs control strategies related to Arctic foreign policy in the Faroese case.

¹ The Faroe Islands consist of 18 islands that make up 1,396 km² of landmass and is surrounded by a large sea area of 274,000 km².

² The authors refer to a definition of the Arctic region by AHDR 2004, Nordregio.

³ Other examples are the future management of fisheries in the Arctic and effects of climate change.

The institutional development of the Arctic Council

The strength and importance of the Arctic Council has developed over time. If we start from the beginning, the time for the establishment of the Arctic Council as a special forum for intergovernmental deliberation was in 1996. As for the council, scholars refer to the status as rather weak. One illustrating example is the definition of the council as a “high level forum”, which is not a very concise description of intergovernmental collaboration. Another important characteristic explaining the reference to weak institution is the lacking authority to make binding decisions (Knecht, 2013; Kankaanpää & Young, 2012).

The council has, however, demonstrated a strong “knowledge-producing” mandate delivered in form of scientific assessments and monitoring reports released by its working groups (Knecht 2013). Another special characteristic is that in addition to the founding members, the Arctic Eight, indigenous peoples have a special status in the council. Indigenous peoples’ representations are so-called “Permanent Participants” that hold full consultation rights. In addition, many non-Arctic observers enjoy partial participation rights, including states, intergovernmental, inter-parliamentary as well as non-governmental organisations (Knecht 2013, 11-12). In other words, these representative elements and their rather central position in the council seems to have given the council a certain status despite the somewhat unclear mandate. Scholars also state that the effectiveness of the council has exceeded the expectations (Kankaanpää & Young, 2012).

In addition to the strong “knowledge” producing and representative elements, a formal institutional development has taken place as well. The call to establish a Permanent Secretariat (in Norway) in 2011 signalled a new level of authority for the Arctic Council and a higher degree of institutionalized cooperation in the region (Exner-Pirot, 2012: 235). In the same way, the increasing tendency for the Arctic states to use legally binding instruments indeed signals an institutionally strengthened Arctic Council (3 agreements from 2011 to 2017). Moreover, it is also clear that the council receives a steady increasing political attention, considering the participation and presence of foreign ministers from the world’s superpowers at Arctic Council meetings, which signals strong political awareness of Arctic Council activity (Exner-Pirot, 2012: 235). Related to this, scholars also state a development where the roles of the states in the Arctic Council is being strengthened. Olsen & Shadian (2016) refer to a time of Arctic Westphalianisation.

Overall, the most important Arctic Council characteristic is the governmental collaboration focus, and even though the council has strong representative elements, there is no direct link to national representatives. The following section addresses challenges related to this and focuses on options for a parliamentary response.

Parliamentary response

Scholars typically problematize the development of multi-level governance system, since it activates accountability challenges (Papadopoulos, 2015). Decoupling of national legislatures is a typical challenge when it comes to multi-level governance systems, as stated by Raunio in the following way: "...legislatures tend to be excluded from inter-governmental policy coordination and negotiations that dominate decision-making in multilevel systems of government" (Raunio, 2014: 559). One example is the international institution of the European Union and the debate about "deparliamentarization" (Raunio, 2014: 553).

However, the fact is that parliament delegates authority to government⁴, also in foreign policy, and MPs have the option to engage in control of government's affair in foreign policy issues and government's participation in international collaboration. Nevertheless, a typical assumption is that parliaments exercise a higher degree of delegated discretion for foreign policy issue areas (Raunio, 2014:544). This might question how well parliamentary democracy functions in foreign policy, and that the problem of informational asymmetry to a higher extent relates to foreign policy (Arthur Lupia, 2003).

We have, however, seen that parliaments address this informational asymmetry related to international institutions by engaging in control, and Raunio also refers to examples of parliament's introducing procedural innovations or reforms of parliamentary institutions in order to improve MPs options to engage in political oversight (Raunio, 2014: 552). In addition, Raunio 2014 refers to MPs joining forces with other national MPs by creating transnational or regional parliamentary assemblies

In the case of the European Union, parliaments responded and implemented institutional changes, typically in shape of upgrading European Affairs Committees (EAC) and involving specialized committees (Raunio 2014: 553-554). One example is the Danish case, which is an example of strong parliamentary EU control developed over time (Blom-Hansen & Olsen, 2015, Raunio 2014). In the Arctic Council case, we have seen MPs using the transnational parliamentary strategy, considering the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians

⁴ This article focuses on parliamentary systems.

of the Arctic Region (SCPAR). The SCPAR has achieved observer status in the Arctic Council, and this means that MPs can use this forum to access information and to engage in control of Arctic Council activity.

Institutions and political incentives

Institutions facilitate political action (Tsebelis, 2002, Scharpf, 1997). Although parliamentary systems are subject to a multitude of different parliamentary system setups and varying types of institutions in parliament, parliamentary systems typically empower parliaments by a broad range of control institutions (Bergman et al, 2003). This means that MPs have the option to engage in control of government's foreign policy by activating parliamentary control institutions. In other words, the question is to what extent political representatives in parliament take interest in and engage in control of foreign affairs policy issues. In other words, the response from democratically elected political representatives, MPs, depends on the parliamentary institutionally settings as well as the political incentives related to engagement in international affairs.

When it comes to MPs' decisions about whether to engage in control or not, different scenarios are possible. MPs might decide to abdicate and refrain from overseeing government's actions, or MPs do decide to oversee government's policy and engage in parliamentary oversight (Pollack 2002, Lupia & McCubbins, 2000). There are, however, different ways for MPs to engage in control of government's foreign policy. This paper distinguishes between two different parliamentary control strategies. MPs might decide to engage in transnational parliamentary assemblies, where MPs join forces with MPs from other member states/countries in their oversight of international institutions. Another strategy for MPs is a more national oriented strategy to activate control institutions in national parliaments and/or to make institutional innovations designed to improve MPs opportunities to oversee government's activity in a specific international institution.

The before mentioned assumption that parliaments exercise a higher degree of delegated discretion for foreign policy issue areas supports the abdicating hypothesis. The reason for MPs abdicating is that international issues are less relevant for voters, which reduces MPs incentives to engage (Raunio 2014: 543). Supporting this, Aldrich et al 2006 make references to low awareness among the mass public on international issues according to Gallup's "most important problem" measure.

However, scholars also state that the degree of delegated discretion varies in relation to different types of foreign policy, being higher for security and military policy than for foreign economic policy (Raunio 2014: 552). In addition, the increasing interdependencies between countries and states means that political decision makers face increasing global and regional questions like trade, energy, environmental policies and immigration, which means that the political agenda leaves room for international issues, which to an increasing extent seem to have distributional consequences for constituencies (Raunio 2014: 551).

Even though, the Arctic Council in terms of institutional development is not comparable to the EU, there has, as previously described, been a tendency for institutional development and strengthening of the Arctic Council. In addition, the issues treated by the council are becoming more and more salient considering the steady increase in the political awareness for activity in the Arctic Council. The question explored in this article is whether the institutional development in the Arctic Council is followed by institutional responses and MPs engaging in political oversight.

The expectation is that the extent of MPs engagement in parliamentary control of Arctic politics and Arctic Council activity is salient and has an electoral connection (Aldrich et al 2006). Previous research about parliamentary control in general shows that MPs are more likely to engage in parliamentary control if the MP's party is an opposition party, the issue at stake is salient (media coverage) and subject for political controversies (West, 2018). However, as mentioned, foreign policy to a less extent is expected to engage voters and hereby political representatives in parliament compared to other policy issues. Aldrich et al 1989 stress that in order for foreign policy to influence electoral outcomes, foreign affairs attitudes do not only have to be present, but parties and candidates also have to present citizens with different policy choices rather than converging to the same options (in Aldrich et al 2006:489). If political parties converge to the same policy views for international policy, the lack of political controversies means a lack of an electoral connection. From this follows the paper's hypothesis:

H1: The more salient and the higher degree of political controversies related to the foreign affairs policy issue, the more MPs prioritize engaging in control of government's foreign policy related to the issue.

Investigation

This paper investigates MPs engagement in control of government's foreign policy related to Arctic politics in the Arctic Council. The empirical focus is the Faroe Islands and Faroese MP strategies when it comes to political oversight of Arctic politics. First, the investigation clarifies whether Faroese MPs abdicate and refrain from engaging in control of the Arctic politics in the Arctic Council. Second, for the question about control strategies, the investigation clarifies if Faroese MPs make use of the transnational as well as the national control strategy or if Faroese MPs prefer one of these strategies over the other.

For the question about MP control activity, the investigation focuses on control activity related to the Arctic in the foreign affairs committee, but also if parliament has conducted any institutional changes like to establish a working group or some ad-hoc committee to deal with Arctic politics specifically. In the Faroese case, the Danish parliament, Folketinget, is an alternative control option, since the Faroe Islands are a part of the Danish Realm and elect two political representatives for the Danish parliament, the Folketing. Therefore, the investigation also looks for institutional traces of Arctic politics in the Folketing and participation by Faroese political representatives.

For the question about the salience and electoral connection related to Arctic politics, the investigation focuses on political statements in the political parties' election programmes. However, the initial question must be, considering the lack of Faroese state status, to clarify the extent of foreign affairs authority limitations related to Arctic Council activity and to clarify if there is an Arctic Faroese foreign policy for parliament to oversee.

The data for the investigation are different formal documents, parliamentary data, election programmes, and foreign affairs reports. The Faroese parliament's webpage www.logting.fo offers access to parliamentary data, like minutes from foreign affairs committee meetings and government's foreign affairs reports. The election programmes are collected from the political parties' webpages.

The Faroese case and Faroese Arctic foreign policy

The Faroe Islands is as previously stated not an independent state, but an autonomous area within the Danish Realm. Despite the lack of formal state status, the Faroe Islands still has an independent political system and a complete political institutional infrastructure, like a parliamentary system, government institutions, political parties, interest organisations and media system (Hoff & West, 2008; West, 2018: 115).

Today, the Faroese voters elects 33 MPs to the Faroese parliament, the Løgting, in a PR one constituency open list system. The MPs represent seven political parties, which means that the political system is a multiparty system and that Faroese governments are coalition governments. The defining party formation dimensions are separatism versus unionism related to the relationship to Denmark and the classic left-right dimension. The four larger parties constitute the bulwark of the party system and represent the four corners in the two-dimensional party system. The smaller parties cluster in the centre of the left-right scale and in varying degrees towards separatism on the Unionism-Separatism dimension⁵. In addition, Faroese voters elect 2 MPs for the Danish parliament, the Folketing.

Overall, the Faroe Islands have a very high degree of autonomy and the Faroese political system handles most jurisdiction (Adler-Nissen, 2014; Jákupsstovu, 2013). In 2005 the ‘Takeover Act’ building on the Home Rule arrangement from 1948 stated a limitation of only five jurisdictions that cannot become Faroese Home Rule jurisdiction. These jurisdictions are the constitution, citizenship, the Supreme Court, currency, and foreign-, security- and defence policy (§1,2, Act no. 79 from 2005). This, however, means that when it comes to international relations, the Faroe Islands face limitations in formal authority.

Nevertheless, in 2005 the ‘Foreign Policy Authority Act’ (no. 80 from 2005)⁶ was implemented together with the “Takeover Act”, defining how, despite the limitations on foreign policy, the Faroe Islands still can act in the international arena. The Faroe Islands can negotiate and enter agreements relating to Home Rule jurisdictions (§ 1). There are several examples of Faroese authorities engaging in international networks and conducting negotiations, particularly related to fishery policy. The fact that Denmark is a member of the EU, while the Faroe Islands is not, means that the Faroe Islands conduct their own negotiations when dealing with the EU. Moreover, the Faroe Islands is represented in different international councils (West 2018: 78-79). In other words, the Danish state has despite the limitations had a pragmatic approach, allowing for a gradual involvement of the Faroe Islands in their own foreign affairs policy (Ólavsdóttir et al 2011: 100).

Even though, the Faroe Islands in general face limitations in authority when it comes to foreign policy issues, most topics treated by the Arctic Council in fact are Faroese jurisdictions (Parliamentary matter, no. F-3/2013, 2). This mean that when it comes to Arctic Council activity, Faroese government institutions have the authority to treat these issues. This

⁵ For more information on the Faroese political party system see Jákupsstova 2013, Mørkøre 1991, West 2018).

⁶ Also, a Folketing legal act: no. 579 from 2005.

strengthens the importance of addressing Faroese foreign policy and parliamentary control in Arctic politics. Still, this does not change the fact that the Faroese political system has far less previous experience dealing with foreign policy issues compared to internal political processes. Ólavsdóttir et al: stress that the Faroe Islands still have lessons to learn when it comes to foreign policy: “..the Faroes can be seen as ‘the new kid on the block’ having to learn to look out for itself, finding friends, establish contacts etc. In short: The Faroes must find their place in the hierarchy, figure out what the manoeuvring room is....” (2011: 102).

The Faroese Arctic foreign policy

The question following the statement of Faroese authority in Arctic matters is whether the Faroe Islands have an Arctic foreign policy. For this question, government reports related to the Arctic are considered.

In 2011, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government of Greenland and the Government of the Faroe Islands published a joint Arctic strategy paper for the Kingdom of Denmark: “Kongeriget Danmarks Strategi for Arktis 2011-2020”. The report states that the parties will work together within the Kingdom of Denmark with international partners to ensure a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable future for the Arctic. The Faroese Unionist led government coalition (2011-2015) is behind this joint strategy approach.

However, in 2013 the same Unionist led coalition government presents a Faroese Arctic strategy named: “The Faroe Islands – a Nation in the Arctic. Opportunities and Challenges”, stressing the importance of a Faroese Arctic strategy. The report was presented to parliament for debate in November 2013 stating that Arctic matters to a high extent relate to Faroese Home Rule jurisdictions (Løgtingið, parliamentary issue no. F-3/2013). In other words, the government stresses the importance of a Faroese Arctic foreign policy and not only to rest on a joint Kingdom of Denmark strategy. In addition to this, the same coalition also addresses a Faroese Arctic foreign policy strategy in their 2014 foreign affairs report⁷. Political statements were also followed up by political participation at Arctic Council meetings, e.g. the foreign minister from the Unionist Party (Prime Minister) participated in the 2015 Arctic Council minister meeting⁸).

⁷ Since the 2013 Arctic strategy report, Parliament has received two reports from government about Faroese foreign policy, which both address Arctic politics and the Arctic Council. These reports were presented in 2014 and in 2018 (Report 4/2014 and 8/2018, source: www.logting.fo, reports).

⁸ The Prime Minister from the Unionist Party, Kaj Leo Holm Johannesen, participated in the 9th Arctic Council minister meeting in April 2015 in Canada. Newsletter, April 25 2015, Prime Minister’s Office, <https://www.lms.fo/fo/kunning/tidindi/logmadur-a-radharrafundi-i-kanada/>, visited June 20 2019.

The subsequent 2015-2019 left wing coalition led by the Social democratic party, but also consisting of two independence-oriented parties, the Republican Party and the Progressive Party, continued the focus on Arctic foreign affairs. Their 2018 foreign affairs report addresses Faroese Arctic policy, and the minister of foreign affairs from the Progressive Party participated in the 2017 and 2019⁹ Arctic Council minister meetings. In other words, when it comes to foreign Arctic policy, unionist as well as independence-oriented government parties stress the importance of an independent Faroese Arctic foreign policy strategy

In addition to the political participation (The Kingdom of Denmark seat in the Arctic Council), the Faroe Islands take active part in other Arctic Council institutions. Faroese representatives have participated in ministerial meetings since 2011, participate in Senior Arctic Officials forum (SAO meetings) and in different working groups. In addition, the Faroe Islands have a permanent seat in the Arctic Economic Council and have in their own name signed the three treaties SAR (2011), Oil and Spill (2013) and Arctic Scientific Cooperation (2017)¹⁰.

Having presented the formal states of the Faroese case and the presence of a Faroese Arctic foreign policy and Arctic foreign policy activity, the paper in the following section addresses the question about a parliamentary response.

Faroese MPs and parliamentary control strategies

As mentioned, the Faroese case has a complete political institutional infrastructure. The Faroese system handling home rule jurisdiction meets the criteria for a typical parliamentary system. Overall this means, that parliament delegates power to government and government's power rests on a confidence relation with parliament. It also means that government answers to parliament (Strøm, 2003; Strøm, 2000).

Overall, parliament – the Løgting - is institutionally equipped to control and oversee government actions. MPs have access to typical types of parliamentary questions, standing committees, ad-hoc investigative committees, and the ordinary No Confidence Vote. Overall, the committees are rather strong, considering the power to require information, to ask ministers

⁹ The minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade from the Progress Party, Poul Michelsen, participated in the 10th minister meeting in May 2017 in Alaska⁹ and in the 11th meeting in May 2019 in Finland. Newsletter, May 7 2019, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.uvmr.fo/fo/kunning/tidindi/arktiskur-radharrafundur-i-finnlandi/>, visited June 20 2019.

¹⁰ Information from Hanna í Horni, adviser, foreign service, Government of the Faroe Islands, November 28, 2018.

to meet and to make amendments (Bergman et al. 2003; Wiberg, 1995; Garritzmann, 2017; Sieberer, 2011; West, 2018).

According to parliament's Standing orders, committees treat cases signed to them by the Speaker. In addition, 5 committee members have the authority to raise a question directed at the minister, while a single MP can present a legal act or a resolution in the assembly (West 2018).

For the foreign affairs committee, the governing rule (§ 54, Legal act no. 103 from 1994) states that the government, Landsstýrið, must consult the foreign affairs committee before taking decisions of great foreign affairs importance. This also applies for negotiations about the relations between Faroe Islands and Denmark. In other words, government must make sure that the mandate in parliament is in place when it comes to foreign policy. The foreign affairs committee has seven members among the total of 33 MPs in the Løgting. Legal acts as well as resolutions related to foreign policy are treated by the foreign affairs committee between parliament's first and second reading.

The investigation focuses on whether Faroese MPs engage in oversight of government's Arctic foreign policy, and which strategies Faroese MPs make use of.

The trans parliamentary strategy

The Faroe Islands have no independent representation in the previous mentioned SCPAR trans parliamentary assembly, and which means that this hardly qualifies as a Faroese MP strategy. However, the Faroe Islands have representation in another transnational parliamentary assembly, which is the West Nordic Council (WNC) that the Faroe Islands together with Iceland and Greenland established in 1985.

The WNC is a parliamentary co-operation and consists of 18 MPs, six from each member country. The council convenes twice a year, for an Annual General Meeting and a Theme Conference. The council adopts resolutions that are submitted to the three national parliaments for approval and for implementation by the appropriate government ministers¹¹.

The WNC has in the same way as SCPAR achieved observer status in the Arctic Council. The WNC achieved the observer status on the Arctic Council minister meeting in Fairbanks, Alaska, on May 11, 2017¹². This means that Faroese MPs can and are in fact using

¹¹ www.vestnordisk.is, visited October 17, 2019.

¹² www.vestnordisk.is, news may 12, 2017, visited October 17, 2019.

a transnational parliamentary strategy for political oversight of Arctic politics. In addition, the WNC recently also has established a specific Arctic Committee¹³.

The national parliamentary control strategy

The question related to the existence of a national parliamentary control strategy is whether MPs use parliamentary institutions to oversee Arctic Council activity, but also if parliament has created any institutional changes or innovations in order to improve MPs opportunities to control Arctic politics, like for instance the establishment of an Arctic committee.

Regarding MPs use of existent parliamentary control institutions related to Arctic foreign policy, the investigation focuses on traces of Arctic control activity in the foreign affairs committee. For the investigation, focus is directed to minister foreign affairs consultations as well as cases (resolutions, international agreements and legal acts) treated by the foreign affairs committee. According to the previous mentioned mandate system, government must consult the foreign affairs committee in parliament when it comes to important foreign policy issues, and the question investigated is whether Arctic Council activity figure on the list of consultations. The investigation focuses on the overall theme for each minister consultation and for each committee case, and the data for the investigation is the minutes for the foreign affairs committee.

The time-period for the investigation is the parliamentary years of 2014-2018¹⁴ and covers parts of both previous mentioned government coalition periods (The Unionist led coalition from 2011-2015 and the Social democratic led coalition from 2015-2019). For this time-period, there are 5 to 10 consultations annually, and the total number of consultations in this time-period is 40. Table 1 displays the results from the investigation and reveals the themes for the 40 consultations from 2014 to 2018.

Table 1. Overview of minister consultations in the foreign affairs committee 2014-2018 divided by themes.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total/ theme

¹³ The public service media institution, KVF, www.kvf.fo, 22.09.2019 (13.28 PM), “Býta oddasessin millum sín”.

¹⁴ The Løgting’s parliamentary year starts and ends on July 29.

Fishery negotiations	4	4	3	5	5	21
Continental shelf	1		1			2
Relations – East		1		2		3
Relations – West		2	1	1	1	5
Relations - Denmark		2				2
Relations – Nordic			1			1
Climate			1			1
Relations – West Nordic				1	1	2
No information			1	1	1	3
Total/year	5	9	8	10	8	40

Source: Minutes (Gerðabók), Foreign Affairs committee, parliamentary years 2014-2014.

The table shows that more than every second consultation is about international fishery negotiations, while the other half to a high extent is about different international relations within the Nordic region (Denmark, the West Nordic countries, and the Nordic Council), the West (like EU, OECD), and the East (Russia, Asia). There are, however, no records of any discussions about the Arctic Council or Arctic politics in general. In addition to this, an investigation of the Foreign affairs committee cases (decision proposals, legal acts, international agreements) for two of the years in the previous mentioned time-period, 2014 and 2018, showed the same lacking focus on Arctic politics. In other words, there are no traces of Arctic control activity in the foreign affairs committee. Moreover, a general search for parliamentary questions about the Arctic resulted in one single parliamentary question.

Regarding the question about institutional changes in order to improve MPs control options, like offering MPs the opportunity to specialise in Arctic politics by establishing an

Arctic committee, gives the same result. Even though, parliament has the option to settle ad-hoc committees, there are no traces of any ad-hoc committee or delegations dealing with Arctic politics. For comparison, the Løgting has established delegations related to the Nordic Council (NC) and the West Nordic Council (WNC), but no delegation or committee related to the Arctic Council or Arctic politics in general. In other words, there are no signs of MPs making use of a national control strategy related to Arctic foreign policy and Arctic Council activity.

The Danish Folketing as an arena for Faroese political oversight

Faroese voters in addition to the Løgting elect 2 MPs for the Danish parliament, the Folketing. This means that there is yet another political arena to consider for Faroese political oversight related to Arctic politics.

In 2014, the Danish Folketing established an Arctic delegation in order to increase the political attention for Arctic matters (on the Speaker Office's initiative). This Arctic working group was established within the Nordic Council delegation in the Folketing. In December 2018, the Folketing presented and passed a proposal to strengthen the focus on Arctic politics by establish a new Arctic delegation in order to strengthen the parliamentary work in Arctic affairs. The proposal stressed that Arctic matters are highly prioritized in the Folketing. In addition, the proposal refers to corresponding delegations in the Norwegian and Finnish parliaments, meaning that also these parliaments have established parliamentary institutions dealing specifically with Arctic matters (Folketinget 2018-19, Decision proposal no. B 67).

In addition to the references of the importance of Arctic politics, the proposal stresses the importance of the North Atlantic mandates in the Folketing¹⁵. The proposal states that the Faroese and Greenlandic representatives in the Folketing are natural members of the delegation (Folketinget 2018-19, Decision proposal no. B 67). Interestingly, in the newly elected Folketing, the two Faroese MPs, one from the Unionist Party and one from the Social democratic Party, have achieved the positions as accordingly chair and vice chair in this new Arctic delegation in the Folketing¹⁶.

Summing up, the investigation shows neither traces of control activity related to Arctic foreign policy in the Faroese foreign affairs committee nor of any institutional changes or innovations in the Løgting in order to strengthen MPs control options related to activity in the

¹⁵The Danish strategy according to the 2016 so-called Taksø report "Danish Diplomacy and Defence in Times of Change – A Review of Denmark's Foreign and Security Policy" is that Arctic politics and the Danish Realm should be given high priority. The reference Danish Realm refers to Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

¹⁶ Danish parliament, Folketing, <https://www.ft.dk/da/internationalt/delegationerne/den-arktiske-delegation/medlemsoversigt>, visited August 15 2019.

Arctic Council. In other words, even though Faroese MPs are institutionally empowered to oversee Arctic Council activity in the Løgting, they refrain to do so. Instead, Faroese MPs make use of the transnational parliamentary strategy and use their seats in the West Nordic Council to oversee Arctic Council activity and development. In addition, Faroese political representatives use institutions in the Danish Folketing for political oversight related to the Arctic political development. In other words, Faroese MPs seem to consider trans parliamentary assemblies and the Danish Folketing as more effective arenas for Arctic control than the national Løgting.

Salience and electoral connection related to Arctic politics

The previous section stated that Faroese MPs and political representatives in fact engage in political oversight related to Arctic politics. It is, however, also clear that Faroese MPs prefer the transnational parliamentary strategy and the arena of the Danish Folketing over a national control strategy. This paper builds on the expectation that the extent of MP control related to Arctic foreign policy depends on the salience and electoral connection of Arctic politics. The lack of a national control strategy indicates limited salience of Arctic politics in the Faroese case. This section investigates the salience and electoral connection related to Arctic politics in the Faroese case.

Aldrich et al 2006, as previously mentioned, refer to low awareness among the mass public on international issues, according to Gallup's "most important problem" measure. There are no data on issue salience for the Faroese case, but the general impression is that the focus on foreign policy issues is very low, except for the relation to Denmark. A survey conducted in 2009 indirectly supports this judgement. This investigation shows that politicians from unionist-oriented parties in favour of unaltered dependency to Denmark to some extent even question the importance to have an independent foreign policy for the Faroe Islands at all. However, the opposite correlation applies for politicians from independence-oriented parties (in favour of sovereignty or more autonomy to the Faroe Islands), who to a higher degree stress the importance of an independent Faroese foreign policy (Ólavsdóttir, J. et al 2011: 114).

This paper's investigation of the salience and electoral connection related to Arctic politics and the Arctic Council focuses on whether political parties make references to foreign policy and Arctic politics in their election programmes and the content of these references. An election program offers information about the policy issues that political parties prioritize and what parties expect that their voters take interest in. The investigation focuses on election

programmes from the four main parties: the People’s Party (A), the Unionist Party (B), the Social Democratic Party (C), and the Republican Party (E), but also includes the smaller Progressive Party (F), since the party had the minister in foreign affairs in the latest coalition government (2015-2019). The investigation is based on the programmes for elections to the Faroese parliament, the Løgting, for the two latest elections in 2015 and 2019 and the latest election for the Danish parliament, the Folketing, in 2019.

The focus of the investigation is first to clarify whether the programme makes statements about a Faroese foreign policy, and second whether the program refers to Arctic politics and/or the Arctic Council. Following this, a content analysis is conducted in order to inform on the content of Arctic references and hereby the salience of Arctic politics. Table 2 presents the results for the investigation of whether there are any references (0, 1).

Table 2. References to foreign policy and to Arctic politics

		2015		2019	
Political parties		Foreign policy references	Arctic references	Foreign policy references	Arctic references
Unionist	B	0	0	1	1
	C ¹⁷			1	1
Independence	A	1	0	1	0
	E	0	0	1	1
	F	1	0	1	1
Total	5	2	0	5	4

The results show a change in the degree of references to foreign policy and to Arctic politics from 2015 to 2019. In the 2015 election programs, only 2 out of 5 parties refer to an independent foreign policy and the election programs show no references to Arctic related political views. In the 2019 election programmes, all parties make references to foreign policy and 4 out of 5 parties make direct references to the Arctic. This result indicates an increase in the political salience and the electoral connection related to the development in the Arctic region and of Arctic politics.

In order to offer more information on these references in the election programmes, a content analysis was conducted of the foreign affairs and Arctic references. The content analysis reveals differences in the parties’ references. The People’s Party (A) makes clear references to a Faroese foreign affairs strategy, but this strategy is directed towards other

¹⁷ No data for 2015

regions in the world, not towards the Arctic region. The other two independence-oriented parties, the Republican Party (E) and the Progressive Party (F), both stress the importance of the Arctic and state the importance of the goal to achieve independent Faroese political membership in the Arctic Council. Also, the unionist-oriented parties state the importance of the Arctic. The Unionist Party (B) states that the party will work for greater influence in Arctic matters, though without specifying in what way. The Socialdemocratic Party (C) makes clear references to Arctic politics and explicitly states the importance of controlling and overseeing the development. The party, however, makes direct references to the Danish Folketing as the relevant control arena and stresses the Socialdemocratic Party's engagement in the Arctic working group in the Folketing.

This analysis shows that even though the salience of Faroese foreign policy and Arctic politics has increased from 2015 to 2019, the references are rather vague in content and the political controversies seem less outspoken. As previously described, Aldrich et al 1989 stress that in order for foreign policy to have an electoral connection (and hereby activate vote seeking activity), parties and candidates have to present citizens with different policy choices rather than converging to the same options (in Aldrich et al 2006:489). In other words, the investigation shows some salience of Arctic politics in the Faroese case, but still it seems rather limited.

Conclusion

In the light of the rapid development in the Arctic region and the increasing political activity, it is important to address the issue of how democratically elected political representatives can keep tap on this development and engage in parliamentary oversight. The most important political institution in the Arctic region is the Arctic Council, which has turned into a complex multilevel system attracting attention from a multitude of different political actors aiming for "a seat at the table". This paper has focused on options for national parliaments and MPs to respond to this development and engage in political oversight. The paper has addressed different MP control strategies. MPs might join forces with other MPs in transnational assemblies or MPs might use national parliaments as arena for political oversight. In addition, the paper has focused on the salience and electoral connection of Arctic politics in order to explain MPs control strategies.

This paper has investigated the Faroese case and Faroese MPs' parliamentary control strategies. The paper shows that even though the Faroe Islands in general face authority

limitations when it comes to foreign policy, most Arctic Council issues figure within Faroese jurisdictions. Following the investigation of the presence of a Faroese foreign Arctic policy, the investigation continued and showed that Faroese MPs in fact do engage in political oversight, but that they refrain from using a national control strategy. Instead, MPs favour the trans parliamentary control strategy by their participation in the transnational parliamentary assembly, the West Nordic Council (WNC), and to participate in Arctic control activity in the Danish Folketing. The investigation of the salience and electoral connection related to Arctic politics shows an increase from the parliamentary election in 2015 to the parliamentary elections in 2019, but still the content of the references to the Arctic are politically rather weak.

The results of the investigation indicate that MPs as rational goal-seeking actors consider trans parliamentary assemblies and the Danish Folketing as more effective arenas for control of Arctic foreign policy compared to the national parliament, the Løgting. It is, however, important to stress that the limited general Faroese experience when it comes to foreign policy might also be a reason for the missing national control strategy.

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