



UNIVERSITY OF THE ARCTIC

## **Module 3**

### **New Internal Political Structures**

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#### **Key Terms and Concepts**

- decentralization
- devolution
- economic development
- federalism
- home rule
- liberal democracy
- new politics
- political capability
- self-government
- unitary system

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#### **Learning Objectives**

Upon completion of this module, you should be able to:

1. Recognize that all governments below the nation-state have limited powers
2. Explain why northern communities have improved self-governing capabilities
3. Describe the similarities and differences between the Alaska North Slope Borough and the Canadian Yukon, Nunavut, and Northwest Territories
4. List some of the ways in which northern governments (territorial, home rule, local) appear to differ from southern governments
5. Point out the impact that homogeneity of population has on the development of self-governing institutions
6. List those northern jurisdictions having political party competition, and some differences among the parties



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7. Explain the relationship between economic development and political development of northern communities
8. Describe major issues of the “new politics” in northern communities, particularly gender relations

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### Module Readings

Read the Overview and Lecture for Module 3, then read the assigned readings from the *Reading File* given below.

Reading 7: Oran R. Young and John Dryzek, “Internal Colonialism or Self-Sufficiency? Problems and Prospects in the Circumpolar North”

Reading 8: Aileen Espiritu, “‘Aboriginal Nations’: Natives in Northwest Siberia and Northern Alberta”

Reading 9: Monica Tennberg, “Discourse on Sovereignty”

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### Overview

This module examines the growth of new political structures in the Circumpolar North with an emphasis on the last two decades of the twentieth century and entry into the twenty-first. It begins with definitions of central terms and concepts, such as “self-government” and “new politics.” Then, we take a tour of seven nation-states of the North, and describe some of the important political changes occurring at sub-national levels.

We begin in Alaska, focusing on the North Slope Borough which covers one-fifth of the Alaska region. Then we travel east to northern Canada, and visit the Yukon, Nunavut, and Northwest Territories, which comprise 40 percent of the Canadian land mass. Still heading east we discuss development of home rule in Greenland and the Faeroe Islands, and briefly treat the Sami populations found in Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Russia. Our last visit is to the northern regions of the Russian Federation, where developments are murky as compared to other parts of the Circumpolar North.

The module concludes with several tentative explanations of the process of establishing self-governing institutions. We invite you to compare the experiences of your home region with those of areas new to you.



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## Lecture

### The Concept of Self-Government

Throughout the North, communities encounter threats to their capability for self-government. Lying at the periphery of powerful post-industrial states, they cannot autonomously chart the course of their future, because governments to the South curb their authority. Multinational corporations and global market forces envelop them in complex webs of economic dependency. Increasingly drawn into modern market and state systems, northern communities face challenges to subsistence ways of life and threats to the preservation of their cultures and societies.

The approach of this module is optimistic, for northern peoples have significantly improved their political capabilities in the last three decades. We will see this as we review recent political changes in the American and Canadian North, northern Fennoscandia, and the Russian North. First, however, let us discuss some key terms and concepts and then illustrate the broad nature of political, social, and economic change.

### Self-Government

The concept self-government has a number of definitions, but its essential meaning is the ability of a people to make decisions on their own affairs without the interference or direction of external forces. The best example of self-government is found within powerful nations, such as the United States, which seem to possess fully all the attributes of sovereignty. The American government would appear to be independent and absolute, until we consider the events of September 11, 2001, which show that sovereignty today is nowhere absolute.

When we look within the eight Circumpolar nation-states, we find that all communities (including states or provinces, cities, towns, and villages) work within limits established by the nation-state. Thus, the self-government we will be discussing is relative and comparative. In treating northern communities and peoples, we ask: How able are they to make decisions on local affairs without external interference, as compared to communities in the South?

### Changes in Political Capability

In the last three decades, northern communities have improved their political capability, that is, their ability to govern themselves. Several factors explain this important trend. First, indigenous peoples of the Circumpolar North have organized themselves for collective action and mobilized to fight for their communities. Indigenous peoples are the aboriginal residents in seven



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of the eight Circumpolar northern states (only Iceland lacks an aboriginal population). In the American, Canadian, and Russian Norths, and in Greenland, Indigenous peoples occupy lands with significant resources. Threats to their lands, in most cases, prompted organization and political mobilization, beginning in the 1960s. An outgrowth of this political mobilization was local pressure on the states and their sub-national units to create responsive, local political structures. Second, constitutional changes and interpretations in northern nations have become more supportive of increased power for sub-national units. For example, the patriation of the Canadian Constitution in 1982, and its *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, gave legal and constitutional support to Native claims. Third, the global democratization movement has increased the currency of self-government movements, while popularizing their aims.

### Changes in Economic Opportunity

Prior to contact with western traders, missionaries, and government officials, Indigenous communities of the Circumpolar North relied on fish, game, and other local resources for their subsistence. Today, subsistence foods remain an important part of the diet in most regions, but many fish and game resources are threatened. Few northern communities are economically self-reliant. Those with marketable resources are subject to high degrees of volatility in prices for oil, gas, minerals, and other natural resources. As communities have become increasingly integrated into national and even the global economies, they have become reliant on cash exchanges, but without local means to raise cash. Transfers from external governments make up a large part of sub-national government budgets. It is with respect to their economic opportunities that these regions most resemble the model of colonialism.

### Rise of the New Politics

Survival issues—both economic and ethnic—dominated discussion of northern communities in the post-Second World War era up to the 1970s and 1980s. Since that time, a new set of issues has enlivened the debate: gender relations, environmental protection, and a focus on individual rights, among others. These issues do not directly impinge on community survival. Since the 1970s, they have manifested themselves throughout post-industrial nations, including their northern peripheral regions.

Gender issues in northern communities express themselves in terms of greater attention to spousal and child abuse as well as continued attempts to eradicate discrimination against women. Proposals of affirmative or preferential programs to benefit women are less common. Increased severity (as well as awareness) of environmental problems such as groundwater contamination, persistent organic pollutants (POPs), and threats to subsistence species from mining and oil and gas extraction have brought



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environmental issues to the agenda in all northern regions. Finally, individual and communitarian values increasingly come into conflict, worsened by intergenerational differences.

In this module, we will observe how these changes and conflicts play out in different parts of the Circumpolar North. We start with the northernmost communities and peoples of North America.

### **North American Patterns**

Overall, there are both similarities and differences in the development of the internal political structures of the northern United States and of northern Canada. In both nations, the development of political structures followed the political mobilization of Indigenous peoples and the resolution of Native land claims. However, in the United States, northern communities used the liberal local government provisions of the state constitution to secure a broad range of local government powers. Article X of the *Alaska State Constitution* provides that “A liberal construction shall be given to the powers of local government units.” In Canada, northern communities (which comprised 40 % of the total land area of Canada) took advantage of provisions for territorial government.

In the United States, northern communities formed new structures earlier than in Canada because of incentives provided by the discovery of oil and gas at Prudhoe Bay in 1968, the extinguishment of land claims in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA), and the 1980s discovery of valuable hard-rock minerals in the northwest Arctic. We examine briefly the development of the Alaska North Slope Borough, and then treat the more recent changes in Yukon Territory, the creation of Nunavut, and reformation of the Northwest Territories (NWT).

### **The North Slope Borough of Alaska**

The North Slope Borough (NSB), incorporated on 1 July 1972, was Alaska’s first borough (county-type) government serving a predominantly Native (Inupiat Eskimo) constituency. The movement to form a borough government was interconnected with the land claims movement on the North Slope. A clear motivation was to directly capture economic rents from oil and gas development at Prudhoe Bay, previously unavailable to North Slope residents except through indirect transfers from the state. Leaders sought to ease material conditions of life in the eight Native villages that would comprise the borough, particularly the high rate of unemployment. They were strongly motivated to establish high schools, not then available on the North Slope, and to protect subsistence pursuits and regulate the impact of oil and gas development through land-use planning and zoning powers.



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During the next quarter-century, the borough developed capabilities in four areas: government infrastructure, social welfare distribution, fiscal extraction, and environmental regulation. Initially, borough government was a highly centralized institution operating out of the borough's largest town, Barrow, which has about 60 percent of the borough's population. Protests from the other seven villages (Pt. Hope, Pt. Lay, Wainwright, Atkasook, Nuiqsut, Anaktuvuk Pass, and Kaktovik) led to representation of villages on the assembly, school board, and planning commission, and the designation of borough liaison officers in each community. Nevertheless, the borough remains a centralized administrative structure and has the largest local government staff of any region outside Anchorage. Furthermore, the mayor has greater authority within the borough than that of any other Alaska mayor. For a time, lack of bureaucratic and legislative checks (through the borough assembly) on mayoral power allowed corruption and scandal. Closer scrutiny of borough officials and increased political competition on the North Slope seem to have remedied these flaws.

The NSB's distributive capacity, funded by taxes on oil and gas property (primarily at Prudhoe Bay and Kuparuk) located within its jurisdiction, is greater on a per capita basis (borough population is less than 10,000) than that of any local government in Alaska and perhaps the world. It has had the state's most handsomely funded school district, and the most aggressive housing program for residents. The massive Capital Improvements Program (CIP) brought new schools, clinics, roads, housing, water and sewer facilities, airports, light, electric power, heating systems, and sanitary facilities to each of the eight North Slope villages, at a total cost, by 2001, of over US\$1 billion. Construction work on CIP facilities and jobs in the borough government employed well over half of North Slope adults seeking full-time employment.

After withstanding two oil company and state challenges to its taxation powers in the early and mid-1970s, the borough had 15 years of fiscal stability. However, the sunk costs of general government and social welfare programs, as well as growing interest payments on bonded indebtedness, grew to comprise the lion's share of the borough's budget. And that budget began to decline in pace with the reduction in oil production from Prudhoe Bay in the 1990s; property tax revenue fell for the first time in the fiscal year 1999. The borough's response was to develop status quo budgets in the late 1990s, to consolidate services, and to begin privatization of some central government services. These measures balanced borough budgets. The most notable indication of fiscal capability was the establishment, by borough voters, of the North Slope Borough Permanent Fund in 1984. By March 31, 2000, the fund's corpus was US\$482 million. Through charter changes in 1997, 5.5 per cent of the rolling average total value of the fund is transferred to the general fund annually. The principal amount of contributions and growth in excess of annual transfers remains in the fund in perpetuity.

As an environmental regulator, the borough stands between Native subsistence users and state and federal agencies that regulate species



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populations. In the particular area of whaling, so critical to continuation of Inupiat culture, the borough's development of a correlative agency, the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, has made it a major player in the protection of the species most vital to six of the eight North Slope villages. Through its planning and zoning authority, and through its Coastal Management Program (giving the borough a voice in all state and federal decisions affecting coastal development), the borough has regulatory power over oil and gas development that is as strong as that of any Alaska municipality.

The NSB is not the only predominantly Native region to have taken advantage of strong local government powers under the Alaska State Constitution. In 1986, leaders of the [NANA Regional Corporation](#), a for-profit corporation formed under terms of ANCSA, initiated incorporation of the Northwest Arctic Borough to the southwest of the NSB. Development of the Red Dog zinc mine, located on NANA corporation lands, provided the impetus behind the incorporation. The mine is this borough's richest tax resource and a major source of employment for the region's residents, most of whom also are members of the NANA corporation.

Both the North Slope and Northwest Arctic Boroughs are public governments, serving all residents, whether Native or non-Native. Since the 1980s in Alaska, some Native leaders have supported formation of tribal governments and a statewide inter-tribal council, believing this would provide a superior voice for Native people and better protection of their needs than instrumentalities of the state. Tribal governments play a relatively small role in Alaska's two northernmost boroughs today.

## Developments in the Canadian North

Concerns for self-government and empowerment in Canada's North have been front-page stories in the last two decades as peoples living within territories have gained federal government recognition and increased local authority. The Canadian North, including Yukon Territory, the Northwest Territories (NWT) and the newly formed Nunavut, is distinctive because it covers 40 percent of the Canadian land mass with little more than 100,000 people. In Canadian terms, it presents the issue of "public government"—equally accessible to all residents—vis-a-vis *Aboriginal* self-government, accessible only to those with Aboriginal ancestry. We will trace recent changes in internal political structures by briefly visiting Yukon Territory, the NWT, and Nunavut.

## Yukon Territory

This territory was created in 1898, in response to the need for a government to administer the huge population increase that came with the Klondike Gold Rush; it remains mining-dependent today. Government, however, is the largest employer, and it serves a relatively small population of 31,000.



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Over two-thirds (23,000) live in the territorial capital Whitehorse; only one-fifth of the territory's residents have Aboriginal ancestry. Although Yukon Territory has had a fully elected legislatures since 1909, for most of its history, the executive was appointed and the government dominated by the federal government. Pressures by Yukon's councillors in the 1950s and 1960s for constitutional change resulted in gradual devolution of responsibilities from federal officials, particularly Canada's Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) to elected representatives in the territory.

Today, in the views of many observers, Yukon Territory is a "proto-province," with a great deal of political autonomy. Its government is a scaled down version of the provincial governments of southern Canada. The 17-member elected legislature provides members for the executive council (cabinet). Competition between political parties enlivens debate, and the cabinet is collectively responsible to the majority party (following the British parliamentary tradition). Most federal programs, including resource management, have been transferred to the territory. The territory, however, is highly dependent on federal revenues, which amount to about 75 per cent of its budget. Unlike a province, the territory lacks unequivocal constitutional status, power over public lands, and the ability to make policy without federal interference.

The most significant political change recently was passage of the Yukon First Nation Land Claims Agreements and self-government agreements of 1993. The land claims were negotiated for Yukon's 14 Aboriginal communities by the Council of Yukon Indians. The claims settlement package is analogous to those of the Northwest Territories. It is a comprehensive land claim in the nature of a modern treaty. In exchange for compensation for lands lost, Natives received fee simple title (proprietary rights) to certain tracts of land, including ownership of a small part of the subsurface (mineral) rights to the land, and participation in wildlife and environmental management boards. Funds from the settlement are awarded to Native organizations for economic development projects and social programs; lands are retained in common by Native organizations.

Self-government provisions have yet to be implemented for Natives in the Yukon. Each First Nation (Aboriginal community) can assume areas of legislative jurisdiction from the territorial government and receive federal funds for operation of programs in that area. Economies of scale, however, suggest that few small First Nation communities will be able to manage government programs, especially those with expensive overhead requirements.

The Yukon has had a politically significant nationalist movement, seeking full provincial status, for four decades. Until recently, the movement has been constrained by the lack of resolution of First Nations land claims, which prompted objections from the DIAND. Then, the 1982 Constitution Act created new conditions for a territory to become a province; that is, both the federal government and two thirds of the provinces (with at least 50



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percent of Canada's population) must consent. This condition seems likely to delay provincial status as much as Yukon's small population, underdeveloped economy, and fiscal dependence on the federal government.

### **The Northwest Territories**

Created by the Canadian government in 1875, the NWT originally covered all of the Canadian Arctic, most of the western provinces and much of northern Ontario and Quebec. Over the years, the southern part of the region was absorbed by the provinces of the south. Yukon Territory was carved out of it in 1889 and Nunavut was established in 1999. The western sphere, which is the NWT today, has an heterogeneous population, and this factor has been the impediment to the growth of autonomous institutions of public self-government. Non-Natives make up roughly over half of the population of 36,000, and live in the most populous towns, including the territorial capital of Yellowknife (15,000). The Aboriginal population is substantially divided, and includes some Inuit and a large Dene and Metis population. Here too, government is the largest employer, but the territory has a varied menu of non-renewable resources, including oil and gas, gold, and diamonds. The site of best economic development prospects and also the most populated region is the Mackenzie Valley.

NWT political developments resembles those of the Yukon. Until the 1960s, the federal government was in complete charge, and the NWT commissioner and the territorial council worked from Ottawa. Following the *Carrothers Report*, which called for enhanced autonomy, the territorial administration moved north to Yellowknife in 1967. Native residents, however, were little involved in this process. Only in 1975 did the territory gain the right to have a wholly elected territorial council, and in that year the council had a majority of First Nations members. In the 1980s, much of effective government authority was transferred to elected officials, including the devolution of provincial-type programs. The territory relied on the federal government for most of the revenue (about 80 per cent) to support service delivery.

The NWT government early established a distinctive pattern of operation. Legislators did not organize into political parties, and functioned more as a committee of the whole than as a debating society. Aboriginal customs and traditions were recognized, and the government translated important proceedings into all eight of the region's major languages. Northern influences have been prominent as well, particularly in the attempts of the territorial leaders to decentralize programs to local governments.

The First Nations of the western Arctic did not agree to a comprehensive approach to settlement of land claims. The "Treaty 8" and Deh Cho Natives opposed this in concept. They questioned the legitimacy of the territorial government, and sought nation-to-nation negotiations with Ottawa. On the other hand, the Inuvialuit formed one of the earliest land claims



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associations—the Committee for the Original Peoples' Entitlement (COPE)—and reached agreement in 1984, followed by the Gwich'in in 1992 and the Sahtu claims in 1994.

The establishment of Nunavut reduced the size of the NWT without narrowing the differences among residents on the scope and nature of territorial government, definition of the political community (and in particular whether it included all residents or was defined by Aboriginal status), and the basis of government legitimacy.

## Nunavut

On April 1, 1999, the Canadian government formally acknowledged the formation of Nunavut from the central and eastern regions of the NWT at a celebration attended by Native leaders from many nations. The small population of Nunavut, about 27,000, is mostly Inuit (about 85 per cent), and this relative homogeneity is a factor explaining its political unity and success.

Discussions concerning the formation of Nunavut began in the early 1960s, but were delayed by federal constitutional issues as well as land claims. The formation of the new territory required two plebiscites among NWT voters. The first, in 1982, asked whether a new territory should be formed, and 56 per cent of those voting agreed; the second, in 1992, asked whether the proposed boundary (giving relatively more contested land to Nunavut than to the NWT) should be accepted, which gained a similar vote. At this time, the provisional government committee made an interesting proposal to ensure gender balance in the legislative assembly. They proposed the establishment of two-member districts in which voters would choose one man and one woman. The proposal was not accepted by voters.

The new government of Nunavut has the same legislative and executive authority as do the other territories. The government is responsible for a full range of jurisdictions from the old NWT government. But, unlike some of the First Nations representatives at the Western Constitutional Conference in 1995, who sought clear constitutional statements of Native self-government, the Nunavut Act makes no reference to “citizens” of Nunavut, and regards itself as a public government.

Notwithstanding the issues remaining in each of Canada's three northern territories, they have taken great strides toward self-government in the last few decades. In each, aboriginal populations now have a stronger voice than at any previous time; all residents through representative assemblies can share in making decisions on policy matters.



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## European Northern Patterns

A different set of patterns appears when one leaves the North American continent and visits communities of the North Atlantic and northern Fennoscandia. Some of these communities (Greenland, Faeroe Islands) are colonies of European nation-states, which have achieved a considerable measure of self-government within that context. Other communities, such as the Saami, are not recognized as having aboriginal rights, but have been successful in winning some degree of autonomy that protects their culture and, to a lesser extent, their livelihood. We discuss the different cases below.

### Greenlandic Home Rule

Greenland has only 55,000 residents, nearly 80 per cent of whom are Inuit (most of the remainder are Danes). After more than 200 years of colonial rule, and an interlude of some 25 years as an ordinary Danish province, Greenland became a home rule territory of the Danish Realm in 1979. The path toward home rule was gradual, beginning in the 1860s as local councils were established with representatives from the Greenlandic population. In connection with the decolonization process occurring after the Second World War, Greenlanders were represented in a provincial council and won two seats in the Danish Parliament. The pace quickened in the 1970s, by which time political parties advocating different positions (home rule vs. independence) had mobilized voters.

The Greenland Home Rule Act of 1979 transferred legislative and administrative powers in particular fields to the home rule authority. The act provided for a legislative branch, the *Landsting*, and for the establishment of local government in the *Landsstyre*. Foreign relations, international treaties, defense policy, monetary policy, and areas such as the police and judiciary are not subject to home rule. In these two latter cases, the powers of the home rule government are less than those of Canadian provinces or U.S. states. Decisions concerning the use of natural resources are shared jointly between Greenlandic and Danish authorities.

Greenland's home rule system has not created a nation-state. A large degree of control is still vested in Denmark. Greenland relies on Denmark for economic aid, ranging from half to three-quarters of its annual budget for public expenditures.

Nevertheless, the home rule administration has assumed a long list of important government functions: direct and indirect taxes, control of fishing in the territory, labour relations, education and cultural affairs, social welfare, wildlife preservation, trade and competition regulation, internal transportation, housing administration, environmental protection, and health services. Moreover, although Greenland lacks independent foreign relations powers (sovereignty), it may comment on proposed treaties affecting its interests and may negotiate directly with foreign governments and



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participate in international negotiations on commercial issues (with Danish approval). Significantly, by a narrow margin, Greenland voters opted out of the European Union in 1982, a decision supported by Denmark (Greenland remains as an observer, protective of its fishing interests).

Home rule leaders quickly moved to implement policies of “Greenlandization” to enhance control over economic and social development. An early focus was the fishing industry, Greenland’s largest employer (after government), and industry. The home rule government took over the Royal Greenlandic Trade Department, which gave it influence over the industry as a whole, including the state-owned trawlers. Too, home rule enabled a focus on economic diversification and development of the Greenlandic home market. Educational policies have attempted to increase significantly the number of Inuit serving as teachers and public administrators, which is a central objective of the new, small, University of Greenland in Nuuk, the capital. Collectively, Greenland’s majority Inuit population is less advantaged than the Danish residents, and the intent of Greenlandization policies is to address this disparity. However, home rule is defined in relation to the geographical territory of Greenland and not to any racial definition. The home rule government thus is a “public” and not an Aboriginal government.

Differences among Greenland’s parties are more pronounced than those of the other Circumpolar northern states. Since the 1970s, a left-leaning, socialist or social democratic party (called *Siumut*, meaning progressive) has emphasized Greenland’s “blocked development,” which the party blames on colonial dependency. It was the spearhead of the home rule movement and guided the home rule government during its early years. The success of *Siumut* stimulated the formation of other political parties, such as the *Atassut* (formed in reaction to the non-transferability of land rights), which sought to slow the pace of socio-political change, and newer center-conservative parties, seeking to promote the private sector and limit the scope of the public sector. One party only, the Inuit *Ataqatigiit*, has sought to cut all ties to Denmark and enter close co-operation with other Inuit nations. To date, this party has not won more than 20 per cent of the votes in Landsting elections.

Home rule has led to a resurgence of consciousness and pride among the Greenlandic population, with ramifications on language and culture as well as society and politics. The home rule status in the view of some observers is a state of de facto nationhood in what they term the Danish federal state. Whether or not this observation is correct, Greenlanders today demonstrate less support for independence than the Faeroe Islands residents, discussed below.



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### **Faeroe Islands**

These 18 islands lie between the Norwegian Sea and the North Atlantic, nearly equidistant from Iceland and Norway. Populated by Viking settlers in the ninth century, they have been linked to Denmark since the fourteenth, and achieved a high measure of self-government after the Second World War. Today's population is approximately 46,000. Although part of the Danish Realm, the Faeroe Islands are a self-governing overseas administrative division of Denmark and enjoy de facto home rule.

An elected parliament with 32 members, the Logting, represents the Faeroese, and there is strong competition between political parties. The election in 1998, for example, produced a coalition government comprised of the People's Party, the Republican Party, and the Home Rule Party. The prime minister is selected by the parliamentary majority, and he or she selects a cabinet that is responsible to the Logting. A high commissioner represents the Danish head of state (as in Greenland), and there are two Faeroe Islands seats in the Danish Parliament.

The Faeroese economy is heavily dependent on fisheries, which makes it vulnerable, particularly given the non-sustainable fishing practices of recent years. Nevertheless, success in fish landings as well as high and stable export prices have reduced unemployment as well as the subsidy required from Denmark (approximately 15 per cent of annual public expenditures). One economic factor stimulating the independence movement is recent oil finds close to the islands.

In 2001, the Logting adopted a proposal for a structured process toward independence, acknowledging that the Faeroese people are a nation with sovereign rights to self-determination. The plan would phase out financial subsidies from Denmark and begin the transfer of control over education, church, police, and other areas in 2002. Initially, Denmark was reluctant to discuss the issue, but in a 2002 visit to the Faeroe Islands, the new Danish prime minister proposed that the Faeroese take over responsibility of areas such as police, courts, and the airport. Clearly, the Faeroese are the closest to independence of the northern peoples.

### **The Saami**

Four North European states—Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia—have Saami populations, which collectively number less than 60,000. None of the states, however, gives constitutional recognition to the Aboriginal status of the Saami, and none has recognized their rights to lands as indigenous peoples. The treatment of the Saami in Russia is similar to that of other Aboriginal peoples. Here we consider some of the patterns of Saami-Nordic state interrelationships. One factor is similar, however: each of the Nordic states has a unitary system of government, with no provision for a constitutional devolution of authority to sub-national units. Unlike the



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situation of the Greenlanders and Faeroese, moreover, the Saami populations are contiguous to other Nordic state residents.

Norway has the largest population of Saami, and most of them live in the northernmost region of the nation, Finnmark. The Norwegian government recognizes the Saami as an ethnic minority and a separate people (but not one with indigenous constitutional rights). Reindeer herding is a major pursuit of Norway's Saami (as it is of Finnish and Russian Saami too), and the state recognizes reindeer herders as an interest group. But areas traditionally used for herding are not protected by the state. In fact, conflicts between reindeer herding and other land uses are not uncommon. The Norwegian state has followed a progressive policy regarding recognition of the Saami language (including teaching it in schools) and protection of the culture through creation of several museums.

Sweden does not recognize its small Saami population as a separate people but does recognize them as an ethnic minority. A larger part of the indigenous population is economically integrated and resides in southern Sweden. The northern population lacks protection for its herding areas, which are increasingly threatened by mining and nuclear and hydro power plants.

Under Finnish law, Saami have no rights to land, waters, or traditional sources of livelihood. Unlike Norway, which restricts reindeer ownership and herding to Saami, Finland allows those without native ancestry to use reindeer. Yet the Finnish government has played an important educational role in publishing Saami textbooks and dictionaries, and seeking to preserve their culture.

Each of the three Nordic states has Saami "Parliaments," which function as representatives of Indigenous peoples. They have made little headway, though, in developing protections for Saami livelihoods. The Saami Council is a body representing Saami from all four northern nations, and is a non-governmental organization with the United Nations (as is the Inuit Circumpolar Council, representing Inuit of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Russia).

## Patterns in the Russian North

Unlike changes in the other northern regions we have visited, developments in the Russian North are ambiguous and unclear, for three important reasons. First, Russia has undergone a massive political transformation since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. It is evolving toward a new system of which only the outlines are apparent. Second and related, Russia is now democratizing, but has not yet consolidated its democracy—unlike the established liberal democracies one finds elsewhere in the Circumpolar North. Critical processes, such as legal and judicial protections for rights of individuals and groups, have not become established. Finally, Russia's



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market reforms and economic declines make unclear the exact and potential fiscal relationships between center and periphery.

For these reasons, we cannot point to new internal political structures, but in this section we will outline the development of existing structures of regional and local governments, focusing on the indigenous peoples of the Russian North. There are more than two dozen indigenous groups which collectively comprise nearly 200,000 people, but they are a small proportion of the northern population of about 10 million. Their traditional homelands extend over the Arctic and sub-Arctic territory, from the Kola Peninsula in the west to the Bering Strait in the east (including western Siberia, eastern Siberia, and sections of the Russian Far East). Practicing a subsistence lifestyle of fishing, hunting, trapping, and reindeer husbandry over the centuries, their lands and pursuits have been threatened by industrial enclaves and development projects since the end of the Second World War. Resulting degradation and pollution of their lands have been more serious than in any other region of the North.

### **Pre-Communist Era**

Siberia was annexed by Russia beginning in the sixteenth century, and initially its indigenous peoples were sought out as allies in the settlement of the region. The Russian colonizers established districts, primarily for tax collection purposes, based on clan or territorial units; they also co-opted elders and clan leaders into the tsarist service. Throughout the period of colonization, however, Russian officials took advantage at will of indigenous peoples. Perhaps the most far-reaching administrative reform during this era was the division of the aboriginal population into settled, nomadic, and other (mostly hunting) groups. Tax collection systems as well as administrative practice differed across the groups, with the latter two enjoying the greatest amount of autonomy. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, this system was revised in an attempt to equalize settled indigenous peoples with Russia's peasant population, while attempts were made to bring all indigenous people into a settled way of life.

### **The Soviet Period**

The early days of communist rule brought some improvements to the conditions of indigenous people. A "Committee of Assistance for the Peoples of the Northern Peripheral Regions" conducted a census, extended schooling and health care facilities, and sought to prevent encroachment on their territories. Work began on creating written languages for each of the peoples of the North in the late 1920s. An important political event was the establishment of national areas (*okrugs*) for many aboriginal peoples, such as the Nenets and Evens. Simultaneously, however, the regime organized joint reindeer breeding associations and used lands and co-operatives for



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joint production. Clearly, location on the periphery of the Soviet state protected indigenous peoples somewhat from the ravages of Stalinism.

Post-war developments were more threatening to subsistence pursuits and to cultural survival. Peripheral districts in the 1950s were required to develop new economic activities, such as dairy farming, cattle husbandry, and domestic fur breeding, which overused lands and stole attention from primary economic activities. Then, in the late 1950s, a policy directive aimed to assimilate the nomadic population into settlements, mainly by construction of new housing. This violated the integrity of family units. The assimilation campaign intensified with the relocation of smaller villages into large communities. As a result, traditional hunting and fishing locations were abandoned, and indigenous groups were mixed. The Russification policy of the 1960s and 1970s led to loss of indigenous languages and disappearance of some national cultures.

### Post-Communist Reforms

The *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness) reforms of the Gorbachev era, which brought on the dissolution of the Soviet Union, also focused on problems facing aboriginal peoples in the Russian North. One important outcome of this public debate was the formation, in 1990, of the Association of the Indigenous Minorities of the Far North, Siberia and the Far East. The association participated in election campaigns for the Duma and Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, and also campaigned in regional and local assembly and executive elections. This political mobilization emphasized themes of self-government.

A number of laws were amended and established pertaining to indigenous peoples and their opportunities for self-government. The intent of these laws was to assist peoples of the North to overcome excessive paternalism and local ethno-social dependence, by supporting them in developing their national cultures, traditional economy, and commerce. They included: “The Basics of the Legal Status of the Minority Nations of the Russian Federation,” “The Status of Family Land Plots of the Minority Peoples of the North,” and “On the Protection and the Traditional Use of Land and Other Natural Resources in the Areas Inhabited by the Minority Peoples of the North.” However, severe economic dislocations associated with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the marketizing reforms in Russia, and general deterioration in the level of administrative services, undercut the intent of these legal reforms.

Constitutional reforms too seemed to head in the direction of increased self-government opportunities for northern peoples. The 1993 Yel'tsin Constitution gave increased powers to 89 “subjects,” the primary political entities in the territory of the Russian Federation. Yet their character is quite complex. The subjects (such as republics) are further divided into smaller units—districts, cities and towns, groups of villages, and villages—in which



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local self-governments operate. Although the Yel'tsin Constitution established a chapter entitled "Local Self-Government" (chapter 8), it formed only a broad framework for the creation of institutions of local self-government without specifying details. Local self-government is to be exercised in forms determined by the local population, with consideration being given to historical forms and other traditions of local administration. However, local self-government institutions are almost completely dependent economically on the subjects of the federation. Instead, representative bodies of the subjects of the federation determine what revenues collected in their jurisdiction will be given to the districts, cities, towns, and villages. Local governments across Russia complain that subjects keep the largest share of collected revenue, much like the complaints that subjects of the federation make about the federal government.

The identified problems of developing self-governing institutions for communities of the North are indeed generic to all local polities in post-communist Russia. Observers of local politics generally agree that local government has been unable to attain the degree of independence ostensibly granted to it by the Constitution and laws of Russia. This is, in large measure, because of the inadequacy of the financial resources of institutions at that level. Also, local government executive authority has been dominant and legislative institutions have played only a marginal role. The ties between political actors on different levels are highly personalized, with wide opportunities for the cultivation of patron-client relationships (and associated corruption). In other words, new internal political structures have not been solidly established. The situation is little better at the republic level, where indigenous peoples of the North are typically minorities.

A serious difficulty not within sight of resolution is the lack of concrete and definitive legal frameworks supported by a powerful judiciary. This is essential in order to confer group rights to land and to subsistence pursuits. No property rights regime exists in Russia that would facilitate the protection of indigenous community structures.

## Conclusions

We have taken a quick tour of seven Circumpolar northern nation-states and briefly visited some of their northern communities. In most, we have seen the growth of new internal political structures that have had the effect of increasing self-governing capabilities of northern peoples.

Most of the Circumpolar North is very sparsely populated, and the majority of residents are Native people who have lived in the region since time immemorial. Non-aboriginal settlers and transients increasingly moved to northern regions in pursuit of furs, gold, oil, and souls. Government actions, such as military deployments in the Arctic during the Second World War, were a major vector of change. Multinational corporations seeking to exploit



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northern resources began the industrialization of sections of the North. These pressures collectively were the most serious challenge to aboriginal lands, culture, livelihood, and environment in their history. The response of indigenous people—their political mobilization—was the chief explanation of the creation of new political structures. Native land claims movements in the United States and Canada were directly linked to the formation of new agencies of self-government for them. Clearly, however, other conditions facilitated the development of new institutions: favourable national conditions for recognition of minority rights, the growth of human rights on the international agenda, and the power of a “demonstration effect,” as news of the successes of one group migrated to others.

Development of new political structures has been dependent on two factors that are present in the North American and European regions and absent to the present in Russia. First, changes occurred in modern liberal democracies that allowed groups to freely organize and protest and that require that important changes receive support from a majority of the electorate. Liberal democracies also insist that institutions be representative of those served and responsible to them. Second, changes occurred in states with autonomous legal systems that recognized property rights and which could assign property rights to groups as well as to individuals.

Obviously, the internal political structures we have examined are not identical. They vary in response to the groups they represent, and particularly to the ethnic homogeneity or heterogeneity of those populations. Of equal or greater importance, the internal political structures vary by nature of system—federal or unitary. Federal systems seem to provide greater opportunities for the development of self-governing structures, as indicated in the difference between the United States and Canada on the one hand and Denmark on the other (although some would contest this point). Within the class of federal systems, there are significant differences in the amount of local government opportunities provided. Alaska gives its local governments great powers, unmatched by the Canadian and Russian federal systems. Finally, internal political structures vary by the arrangement of powers found in the nation-state, with a difference between parliamentary systems, such as Canada’s and Denmark’s, and the separation-of-powers system found in the United States and, to a lesser extent, Russia.

Lastly, internal political structure vary by condition of economic development. There is an obvious linkage between the power of a sub-national structure and its wealth, as we note in the case of the Alaska North Slope Borough. Northern communities lack the diversified economic bases of their southern cousins. Subsistence provides a floor, but community wealth depends on resource extraction opportunities and transfers from superior governments. There is considerable variety in both conditions across the North today.



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## Study Questions

1. Explain the limitations on sub-national governments, and show how this applies to regions of the Circumpolar North.
2. List those factors most important to the improvement of self-governing capabilities of northern peoples in the last decades of the twentieth century.
3. Compare and contrast northern Alaska with the three territories of the Canadian North with respect to the form of government, homogeneity or heterogeneity of the population, and kind of economic development.
4. Compare and contrast two northern governments (select one territorial and either a home rule or local government) with two southern governments (for example, Province of Alberta in Canada, the US state of Idaho). What are some of the major differences? Similarities?
5. Why does it appear to be more difficult for heterogeneous populations (such as those of the Northwest Territories in Canada) to develop self-governing institutions, as compared to relatively homogeneous populations (such as the Inuit of Nunavut)?
6. List two or three areas of the Circumpolar North that have political party competition and identify some of the differences among the political parties.
7. Describe some of the ways in which economic dependency (on multinational corporations, for example, or on transfer payments from superior governments) limits self-government opportunities of northern peoples.
8. Find an issue of “new politics” (for example, gender relations, environmental protection, individual rights) within your community and describe how people in the community have organized politically with respect to the issue.

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## Glossary of Terms

**Borough government:** The strong county-type, area-wide local government unit found in Alaska.

**Decentralization:** The delegation of powers, usually administrative, and their operation from a superior government to lower-level governments.

**Devolution:** The transfer of powers in a unitary system of government (such as Denmark or Norway) to a regional or local administration.

**Federalism:** A system of government in which two levels of authority (national and state or provincial) operate simultaneously on the people. A national, overarching government shares power with subnational governments. The authority of states or provinces is embedded in the national constitution. Opposite from a unitary system. Examples of federal states include Canada, Russia, and the United States.

**Home rule:** An advanced state of devolution in which the colony has autonomous law-making powers (with specific reference to Greenland and the Faeroe Islands). In the United States, home rule means the ability of a municipal corporation to develop and implement its own charter.

**Liberal democracy:** A form of government in which the people, typically through their elected representatives, make decisions, and in which rights of life, liberty, and property are constitutionally protected.

**New politics:** Issues concerning conflict in the relationships of people (for example, their individual rights, gender relations) and people's relationships to their environment; such issues are different from "survival" issues, for example labour-management conflict and social welfare.

**Political capability:** The ability of a community to make its own decisions; usually dependent on the organization and mobilization of individuals in the community.

**Province:** A territorial division of a nation-state, with at least quasi-sovereign powers. Synonymous with "state" in the United States.



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**Self-government:** The ability of a people to make decisions on their own affairs without the interference or direction of external forces. Sometimes used synonymously with political capability.

**Territory:** A district or region of a nation-state in an intermediate status between that of a colony and that of a province or state, such as Yukon Territory in Canada; lacking in sovereignty.

**Unitary state:** A system of government having one sovereign authority operating legitimately throughout the state. Examples include Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland.



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