Peer-Reviewed Article

Mitigating black carbon emissions from gas flaring and Arctic maritime shipping: Russia's anti-Western ambitions in the Arctic

Minna Hanhijärvi, Doctoral Researcher in the Politics Unit of the Faculty of Management and Business in Tampere University, Finland

Abstract

The Arctic region and Russia, the major emitter of greenhouse gases, are facing effects of climate change faster than the rest of the world. Evidently, climate change and adoption to it will shape Russia's future, and vice versa, regardless of who or what kind of a government is in power. This includes addressing the problem of black carbon and other short-lived climate pollutants from hydrocarbon industry and maritime shipping in the Northern Sea Route accelerating climate warming, with harmful effects on air quality, ecosystems and human health. Drawing on insights of international relations literature, this article examines conceptualisations of illiberalism, illiberal environmentalism and their contemporary versions in Russia, and discusses how these frameworks can be applied to understand Russia's policy choices regarding climate change and the Arctic since the invasion in Ukraine in February 2022 and considers prospects for post-war Arctic collaboration. It finds that these conceptualisations when carefully contextualised help to identify ideational underpinnings intertwined with national interests in policy texts and illuminate connections to societal beliefs held by Russian conservatives and indicate authoritarian and illiberal practices guiding policymaking and implementation. Post-war international collaboration among climate scientists is viewed as worth pursuing, and perhaps essential, to mitigate Arctic warming.

Keywords

Arctic, Arctic Council, black carbon, climate change, emissions, illiberalism, Russia, Ukraine war

Introduction

The Arctic climate is warming irrevocably, four times as fast as the rest of world (Rantanen et al., 2022, p. 168). Since 2013 the Arctic Council (AC) member states – Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and USA – have acknowledged the harmful effects of black carbon (BC) and other short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs) on the warming of Arctic climate, air quality, and human health. This promising collaboration was strengthened by the adoption of the non-legally binding Framework for Action on Enhanced Black Carbon and Methane Emissions Reductions in 2015 and a collective BC reduction goal in 2017 (AC, 2015; 2019), and the Arctic Marine Strategic Plan 2015–2025 (AMSP, 2015). These agreements established a vision for mitigating climate change and BC emissions through national and collective actions, coordinated by the BC and Methane Expert Group (EGBCM). Although Russia has failed to provide BC monitoring data since 2015 (Böttcher et al., 2021, p. 2), expectations were high at the time that the AC as "a small climate club" (Aakre et al., 2018, pp. 85-90) and as a "node" of global governance of SLCPs (Koivurova et al., 2023, p. 208) would enhance true multilateral cooperation, supported by scientific cooperation and expert networks in monitoring and measurements, emission reduction technologies, and knowledge about BC effects. This collaboration was anticipated to provide an experimental platform to catalyse BC and SLCPs regulation in the Arctic and observer states, such as China and India (Khan and Kulovesi, 2018, pp. 10-12), and contribute to interstate confidence-building and conflict prevention (Kopra, 2022, p. 265).

The AC cooperation was minimally affected by Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 (see e.g., Byers, 2017), but the full-scale war by Russia in Ukraine since February 2022 has fundamentally altered the situation. It contests the foundations of the AC intergovernmental cooperation and the joint efforts to mitigate effects of climate change and BC emissions in the Arctic. The AC responded by suspending operations in March 2022. The working-group work was resumed in May 2023 by Norway's chairmanship, although only in a virtual format. As the biggest Arctic state and major emitter of greenhouse gases (GHG) (Climate Action Tracker, 2022), Russia's involvement is considered necessary to mitigate Arctic climate warming and its effects (Humpert, 2024). The major BC and methane emissions are linked to the flaring of associated petroleum gas (APG), a side-product of oil extraction, which is traditionally burned in flares as waste in the oilfields in the Russian territory, contributing 42 percent to the annual mean BC surface concentrations in the Arctic (Böttcher et al., 2021, pp. 1-11). BC emissions from shipping are estimated to increase due to growing maritime traffic in the Northern Sea Route (NSR) (Aalto, 2025, pp. 1-2).

Despite commitments to all the key international agreements relevant to SLCPs until its offensive in Ukraine from 2022 onwards (see Aalto et al., 2023, pp. 243-245), the AC Framework for actions to mitigate BC emissions, the World Bank's Zero Routine Flaring by 2030 initiative (WB, 2015), and domestic regulation of harmful pollution from flaring based on a pollution fee system (Korppoo, 2018, pp. 236-238; Tsukerman and Ivanov, 2022, pp. 3-4), Russia has for long been the world's largest emitter of APG from flaring (WB, 2024). In 2023, the volume and intensity of APG flaring increased to a record high across Russia's oil-producing regions, accelerating climate warming (World Bank, 2024, p. 12). Regarding BC emissions from shipping in the NSR, Russia's contribution is limited as it has not ratified the Gothenburg Protocol that includes voluntary BC actions (Zhang and Yang, 2024, p. 40441), nor is it complying with the IMO regulations and guidelines on shipping emissions (Aalto et al., 2025, p. 7). Hence, salient questions concern the future of the scientific collaboration within the AC, contingent upon Russia's policy decisions and the assessments by other AC member states regarding continuation of climate collaboration with Russia in the aftermath of the war (see Dyck, 2024, pp. 6-7; Koivurova and Shibata, 2023, pp. 1-9).

The topic of BC emissions mitigation is widely studied in terms of scientific assessments of SCLPs' impact on climate change and consequences in the Arctic by, for example, the AMAP (2021a, 2021b) and the EGBCM (AC, 2019) and several research teams such as Brewer (2023, pp. 309-331), Kühn et al. (2023, pp. 14-39) as well as regarding mitigation solutions available (Aalto et al., 2025, pp. 1-12; Qi et al., 2023; Åström et al., 2021, pp. 17-66). Additionally, the actions and contribution of the AC members states are carefully analysed (e.g., Yamineva, Kulovesi and Recio, 2023, pp. 1-13; Aalto et al., 2023, pp. 214-256; Steinveg, Rottem and Andreeva, 2023, pp. 1-7).

This article aims to contribute to these openings by focusing on Russia's policies regarding climate change and the Arctic adopted since Russia began a full-scale war against Ukraine in February 2022 by employing conceptualisations of illiberalism, illiberal environmentalism, and their contemporary versions in Russia. Here, key questions arise about the extent to which official policies adopted since 2022 inform illiberal thinking and whether these conceptualisations enhance our understanding of Russia's stance on climate change mitigation and international climate cooperation. Against this background, the potential for post-war Arctic cooperation on reducing BC emissions is discussed, drawing on ongoing debates and insights from IR literature.

Illiberalism and Russia

In contemporary IR literature, Russia is commonly viewed as an authoritarian regime espousing an explicitly illiberal ideological worldview domestically and abroad, antagonising the modern liberal global order (e.g., Morozov, 2023, pp. 2302-2310; Adler-Nissen and Zarakol, 2021, pp. 611-612). This perception has become mainstream along with a re-emergence of geopolitical thinking since the Russia–Ukraine conflict in 2014. The horrific war in Ukraine since 2022 has revived debates over the conflict between liberal democracy and illiberalism globally (Foa et al., 2022, pp. 3-5). While Russia is referred to as an authoritarian state advancing illiberal practices (Glasius, 2018, p. 515), and wartime Russia's regime is labelled imperialistic authoritarian and even fascist (Laruelle, 2024), there is a need for conceptual clarification: is authoritarian the same as illiberal? How are illiberal practices manifested? And does this conceptual distinction matter in explaining state policies on climate change mitigation?

Definitions and usage of illiberalism are not straightforward. As a term illiberalism is used only recently, and it is not treated as a "classical concept" that would have "a minimal definition which includes the necessary and jointly sufficient defining properties" (van Kessel, 2014, p. 104). Following a classic approach of IR literature focusing on distinctions and categorisations of regime types, Dimitrijevic (2021, pp. 121-140) identifies dictatorship, despotism, tyranny, autocracy, totalitarianism, and authoritarianism as distinct types of illiberal regimes. In institutional terms, these regimes are illiberal as they do not recognise the supremacy of rights, limited government, and the rule of law. In a simplified way, the definition of authoritarianism could be applied to all political regimes that are not electoral democracies (Waller, 2023, pp. 366-368). While addressing Russia's political system as authoritarian, the contemporary literature is primarily focused on describing authoritarian features of the political system and state governance (e.g., Golosov, 2023, pp. 390-408) and their influence in Russia's foreign policy choices (McFaul 2020, pp. 95-139). For example, Russian foreign policy choices are explained through the features of Putin's presidential governance named as "Putinism", which reflects authoritarianism with anti-liberal worldviews and sentiments particularly regarding US foreign policy and embracing ideological leaders and movements committed to illiberal values at home and abroad (McFaul, 2020, pp. 114-116).

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Literature appears to struggle when portraying Russia's regime as a political system that is neither fully liberal nor democratic nor fully authoritarian. Russia is frequently described as a hybrid regime (e.g., Morlino, 2022, pp. 144-146), which may depict a diminished or limited subtype of democracy or authoritarianism, or a distinct type of regime, but which may also host national competitive elections. Sakwa's (2010, pp. 185-206) dual state theory highlights the tension between the normative constitutional order and the administrative state. Under Putin, Russia has evolved into an authoritarian regime while maintaining a formal democratic façade (Ibid., p. 185) and preserving Soviet institutional legacies, including a strong security apparatus and politicised judiciary (Rutland, 2018, p. 278). Authoritarian strategies have fortified the presidency, restricted civil liberties, and curbed opposition (Klimovic, 2023, pp. 105-106). Since 2012, and especially after the 2020 constitutional amendments, Russian governance has become more centralised and personalised, with increased loyalty demands and weakened institutional authority (Ibid., pp. 110-112).

Recent conceptualisations of illiberalism by Laruelle (2022, pp. 303-327), Waller (2024, pp. 365-386), and Glasius (2021, pp. 339-350) explain Russia's policies through ideology and practice. In line with a generic definition, to qualify as a distinct ideology, illiberalism should provide "ideas, beliefs, values, and opinions that exhibit a recurring pattern, are held by significant groups, compete over providing plans for public policy and do so with the aim of justifying, contesting or changing the social and political arrangements and processes of a political community" (Freeden, 2003, pp. 32-34). Laruelle (2022, pp. 304, 309-315) describes elements of illiberalism as the following:

- Illiberalism is a modern cluster of ideologies opposing various forms of contemporary liberalism – political, economic, cultural, geopolitical, and civilisational – especially where liberalism is seen as failed or excessive. It merges diverse intellectual traditions and policy norms that promote majoritarianism, sovereignism, traditional hierarchies, and the right to particularism and exclusivity.
- Illiberalism and liberalism are deeply entangled. Illiberal practices are found in authoritarian regimes as well as within liberal democracies. They entail, for example, patterns of interference with legal equality, legal recourse, or recognition before the law; infringement of freedom of expression, fair trial rights, freedom of religion, the right to privacy; and violations of physical integrity rights (see Glasius, 2021, pp. 340-344).
- Illiberalism can be identified in various degrees and intensity across countries, regime types, and constituencies. It may be found within doctrines, strategies, as a project or a vision for a country and/or the world, public policies at regime and institutional level, or as a grassroots culture at societal level, shaped by collective beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours.

Glasius (2021, pp. 340-344) utilises the definitions of practices by Adler and Pouliot (2011, p. 5) as "patterned actions that are embedded in particular organised contexts" and uses practices as the core units of analysis to explain authoritarianism and illiberalism. They are conceptualised as distinct phenomena, although often overlapping and engaged in by the same political actors at the same time. While illiberal practices violate the autonomy and dignity of the person, authoritarian practices sabotage accountability to people over whom political actors exert control by means of secrecy, disinformation, inefficient or corrupted judicial oversight, and disabling voices, thus jeopardising democratic processes.

Illiberalism, distinct from authoritarianism, is defined by its situational and temporal relation to liberalism, and thus it is found in contexts that have experienced liberalism, either internally or through foreign influence (Waller, 2024, pp. 371-377). Hence, Russian illiberalism is viewed by Laruelle (2020, p. 115) as a form of post-liberalism, manifesting in a Russian version of conservative ideology that reacts against liberalism after having experienced it. It operates not only at the regime level, involving the presidency and a set of individuals and central institutions that determine practices of power and bound in patronal network of informal direct personal connections (Hale, 2017, pp. 30-33), but also among political, economic, and cultural elites, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the armed forces (Waller, 2023, pp. 8-11).

Illiberal environmentalism

While addressing society–environment relations, literature focuses primarily on the importance of the political regime. Several studies have indicated that democracies and authoritarian regimes behave differently regarding domestic environmental policy choices as well as global environmental governance (Povitkina and Jagers, 2022, pp. 1-11). Although liberal democracies are frequently criticised for their shortcomings in addressing climate change, they are considered more effective in ratifying international environmental agreements and implementing decentralisation policies that facilitate better governance of commons (e.g., Kang et al., 2023, pp. 1-10; Shaw, 2023; pp. 1-3). Additionally, driven by electoral pressures, they are recognised as more accountable and responsive to public demands for eco-friendly policies and the promotion of environmental awareness (von Stein, 2022, pp. 340-341).

Authoritarian regimes, in general, are considered less concerned with the environmental agenda than democracies, both at a national and a global level (Brain and Pál, 2019, pp. 1-2). The rise of contemporary authoritarianism and populism, on one hand, and the destructive trends in environmental politics and governance are often equated (McCarthy, 2019, pp. 305-307). The motivations for authoritarian regimes to advance environmental protection are considered multifaceted, primarily focusing on socio-economic performance. This emphasis is grounded in the pursuit of legitimacy, which is crucial for the survival and longevity of authoritarian rule (see e.g., Dukalskis and Gerschewski, 2017, pp. 251-268). At the same time, contemporary environmentalism challenges social theory of the environment by highlighting, for example, that environmentalism does not require democracy nor liberalism, and illiberal environmental practices may prevail within liberal democracies (Sonnenfeld and Taylor, 2018, pp. 516-518).

Authoritarian environmentalism is used as a theoretical framework to describe a highly centralised environmental governance system often led by a handful of elite bureaucratic agencies at a central level to design and promote environmental policies (Shen and Jiang, 2021, pp. 43-46). While the idea of authoritarian environmentalism is promoted as an effective model for addressing environmental challenges, China is often cited as an example, demonstrating how the inherent characteristics of authoritarianism and authoritarian governments can arguably overcome the institutional and procedural obstacles that democracies encounter in tackling environmental issues (Gilley, 2012, pp. 287-307). On the other hand, several studies contest these claims by demonstrating opposite findings and authoritarian practices enhancing path dependence and lock-ins (e.g., Luo et al., 2023, pp. 6-8).

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When applied to the Russian environmental system, Masyutina et al. (2023, pp. 305-330) identify several features of the authoritarian environmentalism model:

- a top-down and non-participatory environmental decision-making process centralised within the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNR) and a few government agencies.
- limited contribution or exclusion of scientists (see Korppoo and Alisson, 2023, p. 6).
- no cooperation with and among non-state actors (see Crotty and Ljubownikow, 2023, pp. 48-49).
- limited public deliberation in media (see Bodrunova, 2024, pp. 246-251).
- restricted operations of environmental movements and NGOs by legislation and through their dependence on state financing (see Tysiachniouk et al., 2023, pp. 13-14; Bederson and Semenov, 2021, p. 546).

The Chinese and Russian environmental systems exhibit some structural similarities and authoritarian and illiberal practices resulting in noticeable inefficiency in translating strategies and policies into effective actions to reduce harmful emissions. Scholars also highlight that this model fails to take into account some of the specifics of Russian environmentalism. Concentration of policymaking to the MNR can be interpreted as prioritising natural resource exploitation over environmental protection. Some scholars view that this structure may also elevate the importance of environmental issues within the government's hierarchy (Martus, 2021, p. 874). The Russian presidency is seen as guiding the government by shaping high-level environmental policy through broader environmental concepts and discourse, rather than direct legislative intervention (Ibid., pp. 885-886). Gustafson (2021, pp. 17-19) adds that despite the authoritarian features of centralised top-down structures, Russian climate policymaking is also influenced by individuals and groupings and scientific agencies within the NMR such as the Roshydromet, the Russian Federal Service for Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring. It has reported on climate change for the Russian government since 2008 and contributed to IPCC's reports (Aalto et al., 2023, p. 234). The most influential lobbying groups include the coal and metals industries and the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, particularly the oil and gas companies, which have succeeded in blocking significant action on climate change, such as proposals for a carbon tax or a cap-and-trade market in carbon emissions (Gustafson, 2021, pp. 19-20). During Putin's third term, Russia's environmental system is shifting towards a stronger presidency, with laws and regulations increasingly serving elite interests (Korppoo and Alisson, 2023, pp. 1-6).

Environmental policies in illiberal regimes are explained through varying interpretations of the meaning of environmentalism, distinct from Western liberal thinking. The definition of environmental problems is critical, as it directs the adoption and implementation of appropriate measures. This is exemplified by the way China and Russia define the nature, scale, and causes of climate change, and the role of BC emissions, resulting in inaction and discrepancy between their official climate commitments, political rhetoric, and the enforcement of regulations (Aalto et al., 2023, pp. 225-226, 235). Although Russia has recognised the anthropogenic origins of climate change, climate scepticism and climate denialism among scientific actors and the state leaders and in media are prevalent (Asche and Poberezhkaya, 2022, pp. 1-20; Tynkkynen and Tynkkynen, 2018, pp. 1115-1116).

The Russian version of ideational illiberalism

Recent studies on Russia's illiberalism approach it as an ideology and practice in the framework of conservatism or new conservatism specific to Russian context (e.g., Laruelle, 2020, pp. 115-129; 2024, pp. 5-37; Kangaspuro, 2021, pp. 15-24; Bluhm and Varga 2020, pp. 642-659; Robinson, 2020, pp. 10-37). Russian political conservatism is interpreted in this article as both a distinct form of ideational illiberalism and a self-defined conservatism by Russian actors.

Scholars agree that there is no single Russian conservatism. The diverse versions of conservatism are inherently different and reflect various philosophical and ideological sentiments and traditions. Russian conservatism is approached in the literature both as a continuous process originating from the early Slavophiles throughout the nineteenth century and their belief in Russia's universal mission and ideas of Russia's distinctiveness (Robinson, 2020, pp. 13-23). The contemporary version of conservatism is linked to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the developments during the 1990s, reflecting the disappointment of many Russians, including both elites and ordinary citizens, with the West and the liberalism they associate with it (e.g., Laruelle, 2020, pp. 115-117). Russia's present-day conservativism is linked with a conservative turn and shift of values during 2011–2013, amid mass demonstrations protesting Putin's third presidency and election fraud (Kangaspuro, 2021, p. 16) and stemming from two main sources: state-backed conservatism from presidential power centres and conservative movements led by intellectuals and activists outside the political establishment, representing various forms of Russian conservatism (e.g., Busygina and Filippov, 2018, pp. 158-159).

Scholars have differing views on conservative ideology and its influence in Russian state politics, also concerning the wartime policy choices (Snegovaya and McGlynn, 2025, pp. 43-48). During Putin's two decades in power, the presidential administration is interpreted as balancing between elite interests and ideologies and state norms and international pressures, and after February 2022, with intensifying conservative rhetoric and ideological narratives about a struggle between Russia and the West (e.g., Fomin, 2024, pp. 3-4; Laruelle, 2024, pp. 7-9). Some argue that Putin's regime lacks a coherent worldview. Instead, it has adopted a mission to create a centralised, strong state and restore regional control (Fomin, 2024, pp. 3-4). Zhavoronkov (2024, pp. 1-6) interprets the regime's value changes not as a conservative turn but as tactical and opportunistic pseudo-conservatism, characterised by pseudo-historical and anti-intellectual tendencies, and guided by the "divide et impera" principle and situational interests (Ibid.). Similarly, Fomin (2024, pp. 1-19) notes that the regime employs different ideological expressions depending on the audience and purpose, using selected ideas to legitimise actions and gain popular support to maintain its position and serve elite interests.

Other scholars claim that since the 2010s, Putin's regime is based on an ideology emphasising a strong, stable state, anti-Westernism, and cultural conservatism in envisioning Russia's future (Laruelle, 2024, pp. 7-11). The official state policy is viewed as more pragmatic and moderate compared to Orthodox/Slavophile and civilisational conservatism capable of adapting to quickly evolving realities (Robinson, 2020, pp. 28-29). In economy, "conservative modernization" enhances stable development of the country's economy, consolidating its international status, and achieving this through the reliance on the experience of previous generations (Chebankova, 2020, pp. 82-83). This is based on an idea of a strong state investing in strategic industries and large industrial and infrastructure projects, thus stimulating technological development to assist the ambitious projects of Arctic exploration, restructuring of the army, and subsequently to serve as engines of progress for smaller and medium-sized business (Shcherbak, 2023, p. 198; Bluhm and Varga, 2020, pp. 651-653).

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Russia's foreign policy is linked to the idea of a strong state that could sustain the country's geostrategic interests in the international arena to achieve stable domestic development. Russia is viewed as a sovereign world power equal to USA, China, and India in a multipolar world order. The foreign policy discourse reflects conservative thinking regarding Russia's national distinctiveness rooted in the country's values, distinct from Western values in terms of culture and religion, the strong state-centred political system, national interests, and national sovereignty and great power status in world politics (Tsygankov and Tsygankov, 2021, pp. 4-9). Russia's wartime conservatism reflects growing influence of the siloviki, the elite members with a force-structure background embracing anti-Western conspiracy theories and restoration of Soviet great powers (Snegovaya and McGlynn, 2025, pp. 49-50). For example, Nikolai Patrushev, presidential aide, previous Secretary of the Security Council, and newly nominated head of the Maritime Board (President of Russia, 2024) and Sergei Naryshkin, head of the Foreign Intelligence Service, are frequently mentioned as belonging to the most influential conservative elite members of the network close to Putin (e.g., Krag and Umland, 2023, pp. 374-378).

State-supported conservatism is reflected in political narratives and identity concepts promoting anti-Americanism, anti-Westernism, nationalism, and conservative values (Shcherbak, 2023, p. 196; Tsygankov and Tsygankov, 2021, pp. 2-3; Laruelle, 2024, pp. 14-20). For example, the concept of a "Russian world" which asserts a distinct Russian civilisation extending far beyond Russia's borders with Russia at its core, was used by Putin to justify Russia's interference in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Kangaspuro, 2021, p. 16). Conservative narratives are promoted, for example, in the official doctrine of the largest political party, the United Russia, and by several conservative internet platforms and influential political discussion clubs such as the Izborskij Club, the widest alliance of conservative ideologists and political activists (Chebankova, 2020, pp. 84-85); the Young Conservatives which advances a more moderate, European inspired conservatism favouring a civilisationist isolationism for Russia (e.g., Laruelle, 2020, pp. 119-123; 2024, p. 24); the Neo-Eurasianist movement headed by the notorious political theorist Aleksander Dugin (Backman, 2022, pp. 9-11); and the so-called Z-patriotism developed by military bloggers after February 2022 (Laruelle, 2024, pp. 24-25).

Research on contemporary conservative environmentalism in Russia is limited. A recent study by Russian scholars (Scherbak et al., 2024, pp. 22-48) reveals that Russian conservatives view environmental issues through the lenses of state control and anti-Westernism. They advocate for the state leadership in addressing ecological issues through smart legislation, environmental oversight, and investment in modern technologies, prioritising the interests of ordinary people and local ecological problems. Conservative views reflect scepticism about global climate change, distrust of Western climate science and environmental activism, and criticism of international agreements as conspiracies by global elites to limit Russia's ecological sovereignty, the control over natural resources, aiming at undermining Russia's energy sector (Ibid., pp. 27-28).

Arctic climate and anti-Western Russia

Russia has increasingly focused on the Arctic to enhance its interlinked economic, societal, environmental, and military-strategic interests in the region. Russia's ambitious plans are manifested in centralised Arctic governance structures coordinated by the State Commission on the Development of the Arctic under presidential guidance (Blakkisrud, 2019, pp. 197-203) and the development of several official strategies and policies envisioning the Arctic future. Since 2022, Russia has adopted, for example, the climate doctrine (President of Russia, 2023a), the foreign policy concept (President of Russia, 2023b), the maritime doctrine (President of Russia, 2022), and the amendments to the Arctic strategy (President of Russia, 2023c), all of which also address environmental or climate issues along with the development of the Arctic region.

As the scholars' debate on Russia's ideological drivers in policymaking highlights, indicating whether ideological underpinnings in state policy inform official conservative ideology or whether conservative rhetoric, narratives, and patriotic expressions are used for tactical purposes is extremely difficult. The centralised top-down policymaking of climate and Arctic policies and limited participation of regions and other than state actors correspond to the authoritarian environmentalism model. The major strategies and policies originate at the federal level and are then brought down to the regional and local levels to be implemented (Blakkisrud, 2019, pp. 197-203). Despite scientists and the Roshydromet (2023) presenting data on the warming Arctic climate and the harmful effects of BC emissions, along with plans for modernising BC emission monitoring systems from shipping and installing meteorological stations in the Arctic Ocean just before the Russia–Ukraine war (Aalto et al., 2023, pp. 234-235), these initiatives have not been translated into significant concrete emission reduction measures.

Snegovaya and McGlynn (2024, pp. 46-57) suggest examining ideological elements in policy documents through testing coherence of the key ideational narratives, their temporal consistency, elite commitment, codification into the texts, indoctrination by key institutions, internalisation in practice through new practices and rituals for the population, and provision of future vision. Evidently, the wartime policies fulfil most of these criteria, although verifying indoctrination by key institutions or internalisation of ideological narratives in a society is currently difficult. Some narratives and concepts are consistently used in these policy documents reflecting ideational conservative rhetoric and attitudes regarding the present-day world. For example, the foreign policy concept in the general provisions portrays Russia as "a unique country-civilization" and "a vast Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power" with "deep historical ties with the traditional European culture and other Eurasian cultures" and missioned to maintaining global balance of power and building a multipolar international system. The world today is viewed in terms of a global competition for power and influence among the USA-led Western states and the non-Western world.

For the first time, the Arctic is ranked second among Russia's geographic foreign-policy priorities, following the "near abroad". The focus is on regional and local socio-economic development, including the NSR, and addressing the protection of the original habitat and traditional livelihoods of indigenous people. While accentuating Russia's right to defend its sovereign rights in the Arctic zone, the focus is shifted to unfriendly states and their policies aiming at militarisation of the Arctic region and limiting Russia's rights there. Amendments to the Arctic strategy focus on economic and infrastructure development in Arctic shipping and consistently emphasise Russia's national interests legitimating and justifying the goals and tasks for socioeconomic development and self-reliance instead of international cooperation.

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Environmental issues and climate change are identified as national interests and security concerns by both the foreign policy concept and the new climate doctrine, which acknowledges the recognition of human-induced climate change. Effects of the climate change in the Arctic are framed both as a threat to human health and ecology and an economic opportunity particularly in terms of effective development of natural resources and maritime shipping in the NRS. By contrasting explicitly and implicitly Western and Russian interpretations of efficient international cooperation and methods for adapting to climate change and mitigation of harmful effects and GHG emissions, the document reveals a suspicious attitude towards the reliability of Western science, global regulation versus national interest, and Russia's self-reliance and economic interests. Goals and implementation of the climate policy focus on modernisation of the climate monitoring system. Thus, actual measures to reduce BC and other SLCPs and their enforcement are disregarded. A dual approach appears again, whereby the necessity of civil society participation and open discussion about the principles, content, and implementation mechanisms of climate policymaking is highlighted, provided that Russia's long-term interests are prioritised. In terms of international engagement, the policy documents indicate a shift in official thinking from multilateral cooperation to bilateral relations with clearly defined terms. The climate doctrine provides, however, options for international scientific collaboration and contribution of Russian scientists to the preparation of international evaluation reports on the climate change and related issues.

Discussion

Conceptualisations of illiberalism are linked to the ongoing IR debates regarding revival of authoritarianism and the rise of political leaders with populist and conservative post-truth rhetoric, contesting the Western understandings of global order, international law, and governance of global problems, such as globalisation, migration, climate change, or pollution. In terms of its use and definitions, illiberalism is still an evolving and fluid concept. Scholars like Laurell, Waller, and Glasius portray illiberalism as an analytical framework that enables us to elucidate contemporary societal changes through combined ideational and practice lenses across various regime types, countries, and constituencies, complementing the dominant research approaches centred on structural factors and agency-driven causalities. In the context of Russia's contemporary climate and Arctic policies, ideational analysis helps to uncover conservative political ideas and anti-Western narratives present in official rhetoric and documents. These narratives serve to legitimise climate policy aims and the enhanced exploitation of Arctic hydrocarbon reserves and Arctic shipping, framed as national interests and security concerns for Russia. The practice approach enables us to interpret inefficiency of Russia's top-down environmental system stemming from authoritarian practices restricting participation of regions, non-state actors, scientists, and NGOs in the policymaking, and curbing public discussion in media.

From an IR perspective, wartime rhetoric is just one aspect of analysing Russia's national interests and stance on world politics, climate change, and the Arctic developments. The analysis needs to be contextualised with historic, economic, and political developments as well as domestic power struggles. For example, before the Russia–Ukraine war, the state-linked oil and gas companies demonstrated awareness of the climate and air quality problems of APG flaring to their customers in Western markets (Aalto et al., 2023, p. 236). Ideational analysis of Russia's wartime policy documents envisioning the Arctic future reveals how at the level of political texts the conservative expressions are normalised in justifying Russia's policy choices. Both explicitly and implicitly Europe and the USA are portrayed as threatening Russia's national interests in all policy domains, thus legitimating the war in Ukraine and altering Russia's approach to international cooperation. These may reflect

the president's personal worldviews supported by elite members dependent upon him, rather than genuine societal demand (see Lassila, 2024, pp. 1-6).

Confronted with the global calls for green energy transition and reduction of fossil fuel induced GHG emissions, Russia faces some particularly difficult issues. Since the Russian state owns or controls most of its hydrocarbon companies, the country's economy and domestic structures are heavily dependent on the hydrocarbon sector. As the large western Siberian oil and gas fields are depleting, the companies are shifting production to the Arctic, thus enhancing the strategic importance of the region (Bradshaw, 2019, pp. 7-10). In 2021, the oil and gas sector provided about 45 percent of Russian federal budget revenues and accounted for 70 percent of exports (IEA, 2022). This creates significant institutional lock-ins that hinder enforcement and inspection, along with technological and infrastructural lock-ins on the part of Russian fossil fuel companies (Aalto et al., 2023, pp. 229-231). In line with the energy strategy (Government of Russia 2020), Russia aims to continue producing and selling fossil fuels, and thus state economic interests are prioritised over environmental and climate concerns (Gunnarsson, 2024, pp. 113-116).

Russia's climate policy can be described as dual or "imitational", reflecting co-existence of official position and legal framework emphasising achieving global climate targets, but at the same time, domestic framings of climate diplomacy emphasise economic or political benefits (Korppoo and Alisson, 2023, p. 3). To ensure global efforts to monitor and assess climate change effects, scholars view it as essential to continue the Arctic collaboration of climate scientists, including those from Russia (see e.g., Dyck, 2024, pp. 6-9; Ivanova and Thiers, 2024, pp. 558-560). Despite the expressed explicit suspicion and distrust towards Western science and liberal environmentalism in the policy texts, Russian climate scientists are still provided an opportunity to engage internationally, thus opening a window for some form of post-war science diplomacy.

Conclusion

As highlighted by scholars, Russia's climate actions in the Arctic are driven by its nuanced and powerful conceptions of national interests. They encompass economic and political benefits, as well as security concerns, while also addressing perceived threats from international climate policies. The recent conceptualisations of illiberalism involving ideational and practice approaches offer helpful insights to explain Russia's Arctic and dual climate policies when carefully contextualised with historic, economic, and political developments and power-elite struggles analysed by the rich IR literature. They allow to view Russia's policy choices in the Arctic by the ideological context and illiberal and authoritarian practices guiding the political processes and surrounding political actors, thus complementing the dominant research approaches and focusing on structural factors and agency-driven causalities. They help identify political ideas and narratives and identity concepts adopted in official rhetoric and texts that legitimise Russia's national interests and connect them to societal beliefs held by conservative groups promoting anti-Westernism, patriotism, sovereignism, and Russia's world power status. The inefficiency of Russia's environmental system apparently stems from identified authoritarian practices that restrict operations of environmental NGOs, limit the participation of regions, scientists, and non-state actors in climate policymaking, and curb public discussion of climate topics in the media. By disabling the voices of these groups, the Russian regime ensures top-down state-controlled climate policymaking.

Although Russia acknowledges anthropogenic climate change and its effects in its new climate doctrine, a dual approach emerges. It prioritises strengthening exploitation of the Arctic hydrocarbon reserves and enhancing Arctic shipping as state national and security interests over the global calls for

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green energy transition and mitigation of BC emissions and other climate forcers amid the country's focus on the war efforts against Ukraine. Scholars view post-war Arctic cooperation among climate scientists as preferable, although unlikely in short-term due to Russia's wartime policy choices. To conclude, further research is suggested to explore Russia's conservative environmentalism and conservative social media platforms promoting climate disinformation campaigns.

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