G. White, “And Now for Something Completely Northern: Institutions of Governance in the Territorial North,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35:4 (Winter 2001)

**Overview**

Paper examines some distinctive/unique institutions of governance in the territorial North with two goals: (1) draw wider attention to unusual and innovative structures/processes of government in the North; and (2) to demonstrate that beyond the status quo exist alternatives for national/provincial political institutions. Prominent within the paper is the theme that Aboriginal peoples in the North have had a significant influence on the political institutions and processes.

**Thesis:** much of interest and value is to be learned from the political and governmental institutions of northern Canada – which are qualitatively different from those institutions in southern Canada. Northern experience is important because it demonstrates:

1. Options beyond the status quo exist for the structuring and operations of central institutions of governance;
2. That the effectiveness of these institutions depends (largely) on the extent to which they are meaningfully rooted in their societies

**Background/Analysis:**

* Territories are something of ‘proto-provinces’ – in all substantive ways they are autonomous, self-governing entities that exercise a wide range of jurisdictional powers, but they lack constitutional status
* Consensus Government
  + Type of gov’t in NWT and Nunavut – in essence it is a non-partisan Westminster cabinet-parliamentary regime. Premier and the cabinet are chosen by secret ballot of all MLAs, with the premier assigning ministers to portfolios, subsequently able to shuffle them. Premier is truly the “first among equals”
  + Consensus style emerges from Aboriginal presence in these governments
  + Some believe party politics are beginning to emerge in the NWT
  + Consensus gov’t has its failings – it can be highly parochial and inclined to behind-the-scenes log-rolling on capital projects, govt jobs, factionalism and individualism in the legislature, and limited control by the premier can undercut policy coherence
* Aboriginal Self-Government
  + No resolution of mega-constitutional exercises in sight, and thus there is no clear picture of the new institutional framework that has emerged. As self-government agreements come into play, the structure and nature of NWT and Yukon govt will be affected
* Co-management boards
  + Derive from the settled comprehensive land claims that exist almost as a distinct level of govt – independent of territorial/federal governments and of Aboriginal organizations, and exercising (on occasion) significant governmental authority
  + Represent a political compromise between Aboriginal organizations (who want control over land and wildlife that is central to Aboriginal peoples) and government (who insists on maintaining authority of use and management of public lands)
  + Not without issues – i.e. one observer noted “co-management arrangements oppress traditional Inuit forms of management”
* Integrating traditional knowledge

Central elements of government in the territorial North differ substantially from those of the provinces and federal govt – but to dismiss these differences as exotic and irrelevant to southern governance would be a mistake.