

Committee/Council: Political

Issue: The problem of legitimacy of G8 Summits

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Introduction



The G8 is often viewed as an 'unofficial world government'. While that view might be an exaggeration, the G8 nations do have a lot of power and influence in global governance and their decisions and policies have an effect on the whole world. The G8 countries play a significant role in international institutions, such as the World Bank

and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) where they collectively hold almost 50% of the vote, as well as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the UN Security Council, where they hold four out of the five permanent seats. Through these institutions the G8 can push their agendas and realize them. Despite the fact that their agendas and policies often differ they can reach agreements and form powerful alliances. This is why their annual summits are considered good opportunities to discuss important political, security, economic, social and other transnational issues. Over the past decade there has been an increasing amount of criticism of the G8, particularly concerning its legitimacy. The legitimacy of the group has been greatly harmed by its limited representation and its ineffectiveness, as well as the way in which it has placed itself in the centre of global governance, thus undermining international organizations like the United Nations and exacerbating the crisis of global governance. Reforms of the G8 and international organizations are necessary in order to achieve a system of global governance capable of dealing with the new global challenges.

Definition of Key Terms

G8

G8 stands for Group of Eight and it is comprised of eight of the “major industrial democracies”¹ of the world. Its membership consists of the following countries: France, USA, UK, Russia, Germany, Japan, Italy, and Canada. They hold an annual meeting, known as the ‘summit’, in order to discuss issues pertaining primarily to the economy and politics. In addition to the eight countries, the European Union is also represented at the summits. The term G7 refers to the same group without Russia, which was the last country to join.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy can be defined as “lawfulness by virtue of being authorized or in accordance with law”², or as “undisputed credibility”³. *Political legitimacy* is “the popular acceptance of an authority, usually a governing law or a regime”⁴. If the existing political institutions did not have legitimacy, in other words if the society did not accept them as the appropriate ones for them, they would face serious legislative deadlocks and would eventually collapse.

Sherpas

The *Sherpas* are the personal representatives of the G8 leaders and the ones who organize the G8 summits. The Sherpas hold regular meetings and discussions throughout the year on the agenda and the progress their countries are making, but though they may reach agreements they do not possess the authority to make the final decisions on them.

G20

¹ "What Is the G8?" What Is the G8? N.p., n.d. Web. http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/what_is_g8.html

^{2,3} "Legitimacy." *The Free Dictionary*. Farlex, n.d. Web. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/legitimacy/>

⁴ "Political Legitimacy." (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). N.p., n.d. Web. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/legitimacy/>

G20 stands for Group of Twenty and it is comprised of finance ministers and central bank governors from 19 countries with large economies, as well as representatives for the European Union.

G77

G77 stands for Group of Seventy-Seven and it is the UN's largest intergovernmental organization of developing countries. It was established by 77 countries in 1964 but today has 131 members. Its aim is to "provide the means for the countries of the South to articulate and promote their collective economic interests and enhance their joint negotiating capacity on all major international economic issues within the United Nations system, and promote South-South cooperation for development"⁵.

G24

G24 stands for Group of Twenty-Four and it is an intergovernmental group on International Monetary Affairs and Development. It was established in 1971 with the aim of "coordinating the position of developing countries on monetary and development issues, and ensuring increased representation and participation of developing countries in negotiations on the reform of the international monetary system"⁶. The members of the G77 that are not also members of the G24 can participate in its meetings.

Background Information

History of the G8

In November 1975, upon request of the French government, the following six nations met in Rambouillet, France: France, the USA, the UK, Germany, Italy, and Japan. The purpose of their informal meeting was to work together to overcome the economic crises of the mid-seventies. The group of countries, then known as the G6, held a meeting every year after that in order to discuss the financial and economic situation. In 1976, due to the insistence of the

⁵ "About the Group of 77." *About the Group of 77*. N.p., n.d. Web. <http://www.g77.org/doc/>

⁶ "About the G-24." *About the G-24*. N.p., n.d. Web. <http://www.g24.org/about.html>

USA, Canada was invited to join the G6, turning the group into the G7. From 1977, the European Community was also invited to the annual G7 Summits, as is the European Union today. In 1991, the USSR took part for the first time in forums taking place alongside the G7 Summit, and then in 1994 the Russian Federation was invited to join the G7 Summit. Russia participated fully for the first time in the 1998 Summit marking the creation of the G8. However, despite the fact that Russia was a member of the G8, the finance ministers and central bank governors of the G7 continued to meet in between the summits without the presence of Russia. After the economic crises of 1997-98, the G7 ministers created a new forum, the G20, which was comprised of finance ministers from the G8 and the largest emerging markets.



The G8 leaders at Camp David

The first few G6/G7 summits focused on economic and financial problems but over the years the agenda has greatly broadened to include a wide range of political, security, social and environmental issues. All these years, the G8 summits have maintained their

informal nature and the final statements issued are not binding. They are, however, important because they indicate the measures that the G8 is planning on taking in order to tackle the issues at hand. The last G8 Summit took place in May 18-19, 2012 in Camp David, USA.

How the G8 operates

The heads of state and government of the G8 only meet once a year at the annual summit. As mentioned previously, the Sherpas organize these summits and meet regularly to discuss the agenda of the summit, monitor the progress the G8 are making in carrying out the decisions made, and make agreements that the G8 leaders will then decide upon at the annual summit. The G8 have also created a network of ministerial meetings that take place throughout the year in order to carry out the work they decided on at the

summits. Sometimes the G8 leaders establish task forces and working groups to deal with specific issues, for example nuclear safety and transnational organized crime. The meetings of the G8 are still considered informal because the G8 does not have any formal or legal powers, nor set rules to regulate its operations. The presidency changes each year, and the country that holds the presidency must host the summit, choose the issues on the agenda, and decide on the ministerial meetings to be held.

Criticism of the G8

The G8 have been accused by many of causing most of the crucial issues the world is facing, such as global warming due to their carbon dioxide emissions and poverty in less economically developed countries due to the exorbitant subsidies they provide to their farmers and the high tariffs they impose on exports. They have also been criticized for the fact that they do not include all relevant parties in their discussions on such issues, for example when discussing poverty in Africa they do not invite African nations to join them. Moreover, the G8 have failed to abide by their promises of aid to the African nations as their donations have fallen short by billions. The G8 is also currently under great criticism for their failure to contain the financial crisis that is plaguing many European countries.

Since the controversial 2001 G8 Summit in Genoa where there were approximately 200,000 protesters, one of which was killed by the Italian police, the G8 Summits have been accompanied with street protests and campaigns. Because of this, since 2001 the Summits have been held in remote areas. The 2012 G8 Summit was supposed to have been held in Chicago but its location was changed to the less accessible Camp David out of fear for widespread protests. On May 12-13 an Occupy G8 People's Summit was held in order to oppose the G8 by suggesting an alternative course of action to deal with the economic recession, and other pressing global issues. One of the organizers of the People's Summit stated "From its founding, the G8 has existed to represent the wealthiest people and financial institutions in a handful of nations and has been in conflict with everyone else. The losing side of this corrupt bargain has increasingly come to include many people within those wealthy countries, as well". His sentiments are shared by



Occupy G8 street protests in Chicago

an increasing number of people, who believe that the G8 summits are merely an opportunity for these wealthy countries to discuss how to ensure the freedoms of multinational corporations and promote free markets at the expense of poorer nations.

The illegitimacy of the G8

Groups of countries such as the G8 have the right to have formal or informal meetings. The problem of the legitimacy of the G8 is not, therefore, related to its right to exist. The problem lies instead in the way in which the G8 has managed to appoint itself the leading role in global governance, its unrepresentativeness and its ineffectiveness. Though the group's initial focus was their countries' economic and financial problems, its agenda now includes numerous issues of global concern, thus it has managed to maneuver itself into what some call 'a global steering committee'. It has also been increasingly formalizing its summits. The G8 represents the international reality of the 1970s and excludes many of today's influential countries with emergent economies from its deliberations. That is why it has been characterized 'unrepresentative'. Since the G8 have broadened their agenda the need for a membership with more geographical and cultural diversity has arisen. The under-representation of developing nations is hampering the G8's ability to determine priorities for the international community and to mobilize governments to find ways to deal with new global challenges. The group's failure to provide effective solutions on an issue-specific basis has substantiated the argument against their effectiveness and legitimacy.

It is difficult for a governance body to strike the perfect balance between representativeness and effectiveness, which would give it legitimacy. The G8 have expressed concerns that if they increased their membership, on the one hand they would achieve greater representation, but on the other hand it

would be more difficult for them to reach consensus, hence leading to greater ineffectiveness. Of course implementation effectiveness is another imperative, since it is important not only for consensus to be reached but to also have the support of all major countries so that the measures agreed upon are actually implemented.

The G8 and their ministers usually discuss major international initiatives before the measures are taken by any multilateral organizations. They also make a lot of decisions outside of UN frameworks and often support solutions that bypass them, thus undermining the role of the United Nations in global governance. Civil society has demanded that debates concerning the financial crisis take place within the UN General Assembly as the most legitimate forum of global governance. In response to this the Sherpas of Germany and Japan claimed that though the UN had legitimacy it did not have the same effectiveness that a smaller group of countries like the G20 did, thus between the two they had to choose effectiveness. The G8 leaders made it clear that they are aware of their group's illegitimacy but have no intention of replacing it with an as widely representative arena as the United Nations.

Crisis of global governance

Institutions of global governance, such as the United Nations and International Financial Institutions (IFIs), like the World Bank and the IMF, currently face identity and representational crises. They are considered by many as ineffective and their inability to prevent conflicts, to contain the economic crises, and to regulate transnational corporations, has been cited as a characteristic example. They're being called upon to undertake large-scale structural reforms in order to meet new global challenges. Some people believe that even reforms of existing organizations will not be enough to create an effective system of global governance, supporting instead that new institutions should be established. One of the reasons that the G8 has managed to gain a leading role in global governance is the anachronistic structure of the UN Security Council, which has maintained the five permanent members it had when it was created and excluded G8 countries Germany and Japan. Those who support that the United Nations should be at

the centre of global governance believe that the Security Council must become more representative of the current international reality.

The G8 have done little to deal with the crisis of global governance, which it has in fact contributed to by supporting solutions that bypass the UN and that favor transnational corporations over public welfare. An even bigger challenge to global governance is considered to be the USA that has established hegemony and supremacy in all international affairs, ranging from military and economic to social and cultural. The failure of Japan, the Russian Federation, and the European nations to prevent this has illustrated to some that the G8 Summits are merely a chance for the US to get the support of the rest of the world's wealthy democracies for its own plans and policies.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

G8

Obviously the major party involved in this issue is the G8, about which most of the basic information has already been provided. The G8 leaders are aware of their group's illegitimacy and in order to appease their critics they formed the G20, with the initiative of the USA. The UK and France have expressed their support for an expansion of G8 membership to include the Outreach 5 (China, India, Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa). The other members, however, have not expressed support for this measure and so it seems unlikely that it will happen in the immediate future.

G20



The 2008 G20 Summit

As stated in the definition of this term, the G20 is a group of finance ministers and central bank governors from the European Union and 19 countries with major economies. The G20 was formed in 1999 by the G8 in response to a US initiative to create a forum that would include representatives from

the world's emerging markets. The G20 held their first summit in 2008 and has since then held biannual and, more recently, annual summits. The G20 deals with issues concerning the international financial system, in which they have great influence since they account for approximately 80% of world trade. On September 25th, 2009, the leaders of the G20 announced that it would now act as the main economic council of the world's wealthiest countries, replacing the G8 which had until then had that role. Because of its geographical and cultural diversity, its representativeness (the G20 account for two thirds of the world's population) and its effectiveness thus far, it has been suggested that the G20 completely replace the G8 as the forum of decision-making on all global issues. This is viewed as the most realistic solution to the legitimacy problems that the G8 faces.

Table 1: The G20 membership

Industrialized Economies	Developing Economies
Australia	Argentina
Canada	Brazil
France	China
Germany	India
Italy	Indonesia
Japan	Korea
Russia	Mexico
United Kingdom	Saudi-Arabia
United States of America	South Africa
European Union	Turkey

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
May 1, 1974	The UN General Assembly made the report entitled <i>Declaration for the Establishment of a New International Economic Order</i>
November, 1975	The first G6 Summit was held

June 27-28, 1976	Canada joined the Summit turning the G6 into the G7
May 7-8, 1977	The European Community participated for the first time in the G7 Summit
May 15-17, 1998	Russia's full participation in the 1998 Summit marked the birth of the G8
September 25, 1999	The G20 was formally created
July 20-21, 2001	The G8 Summit in Genoa was accompanied with huge street protests which turned violent, resulting in the death of a protester
September 14-16, 2005	The World Summit was held, where among others reforms of the UN were decided on
November 14-15, 2008	The first G20 Summit was held
September 25, 2009	The G20 announced that they were replacing the G8 as the main economic council for wealthy nations
September 21, 2009	The UN made the report entitled <i>The Commission of Experts on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System</i>
May 12-13, 2012	The Occupy G8 People's Summit took place
May 18-19, 2012	The latest G8 Summit was held at Camp David, USA

Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

The United Nations have not yet been directly involved in the issue of the legitimacy of the G8, meaning that no resolutions have been adopted on this issue, nor have any ever been put forward. The UN Secretary General though is invited to and participates in the annual G8 Summits.

The United Nations have taken some measures that are relevant to the G8 and global governance. In 1974, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration for the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (1 May 1974, A/RES/S-6/3201), which was revising the international financial system to be more favourable to less economically developed countries. The existing system of course benefited the wealthier nations, in particular the United States. In order to preserve its hegemony the US led a campaign to crush those within the UN that supported the revisions and did so by imposing aid embargoes against their leaders. The next year, the G6 was formed in order to help preserve the developed countries' economic interests. In 2009,

another similar document was produced entitled The Commission of Experts of a New International Economic Order, but again no major changes to the financial system were ever made. An organizer of the Occupy G8 People's Summit referring to these two documents stated "Both these UN reports are consistent with a recently announced international occupy manifesto which calls for a democratized economy that works for the people's welfare, supports the environment, and appreciates the value of labor. Our vision is a political system that actually represents and benefits the variety and diversity of our societies".

In September 2005, a World Summit took place and among the issues of the agenda was the much-needed reform of the United Nations. There were high expectations at the time that the reforms would strengthen the UN and hence the system of global governance, but unfortunately little was achieved.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

So far few attempts have been made to solve the issue of the illegitimacy of the G8 and the crisis of global governance which it has contributed to. Over the years the G8 have invited leaders of other countries to join parts of their Summits in order to achieve greater inclusiveness. The UN Secretary General is among those invited. The G8 also decided to create the G20 for the same purpose of better representation, in particular of developing nations, and agreed that it become the leading forum for economic and financial discussions. The group has not shown any leadership, however, in addressing the crisis of global governance and has not given any indication that it will undergo changes in the immediate future.

Possible Solutions

Self-constituted groups like the G8, the G20, the G77, and the G24 can play a constructive role in global governance. However, the status quo is far from desirable; the G8 have acquired a large degree of power due to the absence of other strong country groups and the problems intergovernmental institutions like the UN are facing, with negative consequences for the less economically developed nations. The groups of developing nations must be

supported in order for them to be strong enough to oppose the agendas of the G8 and create a more equitable international reality.

The legitimacy of the G8 can be regained to some extent with reforms of the group. Some people have suggested that its membership is expanded to include China, India, Brazil, and South Korea, or instead the Outreach Five (China, India, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa) whose economic power has greatly increased since the group's creation. Another suggestion has been for the G20 to completely replace the G8 as the forum for discussions of wealthy nations. The latter is viewed as the simplest way to solve the legitimacy crisis the G8 is facing. Of course both of these measures would ensure that there is geographical and cultural diversity thus offering the group more legitimacy but there are concerns that with the inclusion of an authoritarian country like China the group will no longer be comprised of like-minded countries and consensus will not easily be reached. Though the expansion of the membership would give developing countries a bigger role in global governance, it is very likely that the G8 would continue to hold their own informal meetings just like the G7 continued to meet after the inclusion of Russia in the group. Therefore, the situation might not significantly change. Another measure that might improve the legitimacy of the G8 is the inclusion of representatives of more organizations and countries in the G8 Summits or parts of them at least, in order for the views of those most affected by the G8 agendas to be heard. For example, it has been suggested that the African Union be invited to the Summits, just like the European Union is.

In order to ensure a just global governance system, however, intergovernmental institutions like the United Nations must be at the center of it. The UN must itself achieve better effectiveness and representativeness so that it can secure that position. If the UN and the IFIs carried out structural reforms to make themselves strong, effective, and representative, the legitimacy of the G8 would not be an issue. The future of global governance should be strong decision-making institutions having the leading role and informal, consultative groups like the G8, the G20, the G77, and the G24 aiding them. The G8 have been called upon to help realize this global governance system, while others view the G20 as the appropriate forum to decide upon the reforms of international institutions.

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