

## 6. Compliance and the G7/G8 Summits

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Hello, my name is Dr. Ella Kokotsis, Director of Analytical Studies of the University of Toronto's G8 Research Group.

In this session, "Compliance and the G7/G8," I will explore the issue of compliance with commitments reached at the annual G7/G8 Summits by examining some of the empirical findings on compliance and offering explanations for three important questions:

- To what extent and under what conditions do G7/G8 members abide by the collective commitments and decisions reached at the Summit table?
- How does the pattern of compliance vary by issue area, country, and over time?
- What accounts for causes of high and low levels of compliance?

Doubts have traditionally arisen over the effectiveness of the G7/G8 as a collective institution inducing its members to fulfill their commitments once the Summit is over, the media have dispersed, and the leaders have returned home. Because the G7/G8 consists of autonomous, sovereign states with democratically elected leaders who are driven by differing national interests and domestic demands, there are real limits to how much commitments collectively made at one moment can constrain or produce compliance in national government behaviour the coming year.

I argue, however, that it makes little sense for the leaders to invest their time and resources, potentially risking their political and personal reputations, in order to generate collective agreements if they do not comply with these commitments once they return home at Summit's end. As such, these meetings do matter, for they have proven over time to yield tangible and credible commitments that are timely, appropriate, and, in many

cases, highly ambitious; above all, they are complied with as well.

### A. Defining Commitments

Prior to explaining patterns of Summit compliance, I will define what is meant by a **commitment**. Commitments are discrete, specific, publicly expressed, collectively agreed statements of intent; in other words, they are promises or undertakings by leaders to take future action to move toward an identified target or commitment. A number of criteria fit this definition:

- commitments must be discrete — meaning each target represents a separate commitment;
- commitments must be specific, identifiable and measurable and must contain specified parameters;
- commitments must be future-oriented rather than present endorsements of previous actions; in other words, they must represent a pattern for future action; and
- commitments must not consist of statements that identify the agenda or priority of issues, or offer descriptions containing logical language (for example, "sustainable development is a critical concern" or "debt relief helps promote democracy").

Given our definition of a commitment, what constitutes **compliance**? Compliance is achieved when national governments alter their own behaviour and that of their societies in order to fulfill the specified goal or commitment. In other words, leaders legitimize their commitments by:

- including them, for example, within their national agenda;
- referring to them in public speeches or press releases, or in internal policy debates;
- forming task forces or assigning personnel to negotiate the mandates;

- launching new diplomatic initiatives;
- allocating budgetary resources; or
- making recommendations for increased research and development in projects relating to that particular commitment.

## **B. Charting Compliance**

Now that we understand what constitutes compliance, what do we know about the actual record of summit compliance? The classic study by George von Furstenberg and Joseph Daniels (1992) measured Summit compliance scores with economic and energy undertakings between 1975 and 1989, finding overall compliance scores to be 32%. Compliance varied by country and issue area, with the highest compliance by the United Kingdom and then Canada, and in the areas of international trade and energy, and lower compliance by the United States and France, and in the areas of interest and exchange rate management.

My subsequent compliance studies, in the areas of the environment and development between 1988 and 1995 (with a focus on Canada and the U.S. within the broader G7/G8 framework) found compliance to be generally positive with an overall compliance score of 43% (Kokotsis 1999, Kokotsis and Kirton 1997). Again, compliance scores varied, with Canada at 53% and the U.S. at 43%. Higher compliance was found in the areas of debt and international assistance than in the environment, specifically climate change and biodiversity.

Every year since 1995, the University of Toronto's G8 Research Group has assessed the compliance records of the G7/G8 with the major commitments identified in the Summit communiqué, using similar methodological approaches to previous compliance studies. Compliance scores have varied over this period as follows:

- 36% in Lyon in 1996;
- 13% in Denver in 1997;
- 32% in Birmingham in 1998;
- 38% in Cologne in 1999; and
- 81% in Okinawa in 2000.

Average compliance scores between 1996 and 2000 have therefore averaged around 41%, consistent with the results found during the earlier Summit cycle from 1988 to 1995. Compliance has been highest in this period in the political security domain at 67% (including traditional east-west relations, terrorism, arms control, regional security and conflict prevention), with the core economic sector at 37%, followed by global/transnational issues at 34% and global governance (focused on reform of the United Nations) at 14%. During this period, Britain continued to lead, the U.S. came in second, followed by Canada, Italy, Japan, Germany and finally France. The European Union and Russia remain last.

## **C. Explaining Compliance**

What do these findings suggest? What accounts for overall positive compliance patterns over time?

The direct involvement of leaders, and not lower level officials, means that the heads of state and government themselves have often approved, discussed or altered the commitments and have forged a consensus on how these commitments will be implemented domestically. Deep public support for Summit leaders and the commitments they embrace grants the leaders an enormous amount of political capital. During the last summit cycle, the G7/G8 has been less afflicted by electoral uncertainties with the re-elections, for example, of Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Jean Chrétien and the advent of somewhat longer lived governments in Italy. This has meant leaders with more experience, leaders with greater G7/8 summitry skills, less socialization at a personal level among leaders, balanced expectations and, therefore, greater possibilities for Summit compliance.

Compliance is highest when a country's domestic administrative and bureaucratic structures are organized in a way that allows for prompt implementation. For example, whereas departments of finance or foreign

affairs serve as repositories for implementing G7/G8 agreements, smaller, less institutionally entrenched departments (such as the environment), lack co-ordinative centres for G7/G8-related activity and oversight.

Higher levels of compliance are assured in such cases where the G7/G8 are members of existing broader regimes, such as the **International Monetary Fund** and the **World Bank** and subsequently extend commitments reached in other regimes into their own annual meetings.

Domestic political factors also matter because commitments are generally complied with when the leaders who made them enjoy credibility, popular and party support and have demonstrated a strong personal commitment to both the G7/G8 as an institution and the issue itself.

The depth and breadth of G7/G8 ministerial institutions has also increased over time, particularly during the third and fourth Summit cycles, thereby also attributing to higher levels of compliance. The growth of ministerial and official institutions takes the pressure off leaders by allowing others to prepare and implement G7/G8 consensus and commitments within their areas of competence, freeing leaders to focus on only the most difficult and timely issues. With the rise in compliance levels in 1998, for example, for the first time the leaders found themselves without their foreign and finance ministers. This gave them the opportunity to focus on specific themes. This situation generated a stronger depth of understanding and personal commitment to the agreements, and ultimately carried through into more effective compliance the following year.

The sharp drop in 1997–1998 followed by the sharp rise in 1998–2000 suggests the impact of changes in the Summit format introduced in those two periods. In 1997, the Russians were admitted to the “Denver Summit of the Eight,” leaving little time for the seven other leaders to meet alone. The new

diversity of membership and lack of grappling with substantive issues may have produced less psychological “buy in” on the part of the leaders and thus less compliance with their commitments the ensuing year. By contrast, the 1998 Birmingham Summit was the first permanent G8, giving Russia a level of assurance with its membership, and hence contributing to higher compliance scores.

During the fourth Summit cycle (1996–2000), Britain continued to lead, the U.S. came in second, followed by Canada, Italy, Japan, Germany and finally France. The EU and Russia are last — consistent with cumbersome decision-making authority in the EU and the lack of implementative capacity in Russia. This supports the argument that democratic polities with popularly elected leaders, coupled with the socializing effects of the G7 as an international institution, generate higher compliance levels over time.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The issue of how well each the Summit member does with respect to complying with their commitments in previous years is a critical one, for its answers point to areas where the G8 needs to take remedial action. Furthermore, it allows us to assess how much credibility the leaders bring to the Summit table, and whether the products of the Summits, proudly announced at their conclusion, deserve to be treated with any degree of seriousness at all.

Systematically assessing compliance with Summit commitments is, however, a formidable exercise, involving a number of analytical complexities and heavy data demands. These studies are useful to the extent that they offer a definition of identifying commitments, and a procedure for recognizing them, resulting from deliberations at the leader’s level. These studies also analyze what qualifies as compliance behaviour and present a scale for measuring compliance. However, these scores are offered with an invitation for others to challenge, confirm, enrich and supplement them.

We welcome contributions to this on-going empirical, methodological and analytical exercise.

If we look forward to Kananaskis, a relatively experienced group of leaders will be represented, with general domestic popularity amongst G8 leaders at home. This popular support enjoyed will serve contribute to the Summit's success. However, the question remains of whether and how Russia will be inserted into the hosting rotation in 2003, and, if so, what impact this would have on Summit compliance the following year and in the long term?

The Japanese-hosted Okinawa Summit was certainly one of the most ambitious, serious and substantive G7/8 Summits ever held, and provided a very high benchmark for the 2001 Genoa Summit. As we continue our analytical assessments of Genoa, we look forward to a highly ambitious agenda this year in Kananaskis, with strong expectations that Summit success, measured by compliance with commitments achieved, will continue in into the next cycle of Summits.

## References

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## Further Readings

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## Discussion Questions

1. Are high levels of compliance always a good thing? Why or why not?
2. How would you reform your own country's government in order to improve its compliance score?
3. Do the patterns of compliance with Summit commitments confirm the traditional realist adage, based on relative capabilities that large countries do what they want, small countries do what they must? Or do scholars of comparative politics, with their emphasis on the differences in domestic political system — such as that between Parliamentary and presidential systems — have a better explanation?
4. Why was compliance so high with the commitments made at the Okinawa Summit of 2002?
5. Is compliance higher in those issue areas where the G7/G8 have their own well-established set of ministerial and official level bodies to assist with implementation and preparation?

## Quiz

1. From 1975 to 1989, G7 members complied with their economic and energy commitments at an overall average level of:
  - a. 0%
  - b. 12%
  - c. 32%
  - d. 86%
2. From 1988 to 1995, Canada and the United States complied with their environment and development commitments at an overall average level of:
  - a. 17%
  - b. 32%
  - c. 43%
  - d. 67%
3. From 1975 to 1995, Canada's average compliance score is:
  - a. higher than that of the U.S.
  - b. lower than that of the U.S.
  - c. equal to that of the U.S.
  - d. cannot be assessed because of missing data
4. The Summit with the highest overall measured compliance score is:
  - a. Toronto 1988
  - b. Birmingham 1998
  - c. Cologne 1999
  - d. Okinawa 2000
5. The country that consistently has the highest measured level of compliance is:
  - a. Canada
  - b. Britain
  - c. France
  - d. U.S.