

# G20 Performance and Prospects, 2008–2021

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## Introduction

Today's Group of Twenty (G20) systemically significant states was created in 1999 as an informal international institution of finance ministers and central bank governors (Kirton 2013). It arose in response to the Asian-turned-global financial crisis of 1997 to 1999, with which the established multilateral organizations from the 1940s could not cope. It became a leaders' level summit in 2008, in response to the faster, broader, deeper American-turned-global financial crisis erupting then. It has now become the central global summit institution governing the much larger COVID-19-catalyzed crises that emerged in 2020 and that still dominate our lives today.

It is thus of vital importance to our human and national security to know what the G20 is, how well it has worked, why it has done so and how it can be made to work better in the months and years ahead.

For this lecture I will thus examine the G20's creation, institutional evolution, performance, their propellers, and my proposals for reform. This lecture draws from, among other sources, research reproduced in the appendices to this text.

I will argue that the G20 has become the central, increasingly successful, global governance institution, capable of handling the unprecedented, interconnected crises we face today. But it can be, and must be, made to work better now, for the deadly global challenges we face are growing faster than the G20's performance is. To control them in time, there is nowhere else to go.

## The Concept of Systemic Significance

Historically, global governance has come from a small group of major powers who came together as self-contained, sovereign, territorial states to shape the slow moving world of old (Ikenberry 2001). A country's relative capability – its power - determined how that world worked.

Yet as the 21st century started, the process of globalization made connectivity among countries and their societies as important as their relative capabilities in defining who was needed in the top-tier global governance club. Connected countries were vulnerable to importing contagious infections from elsewhere and made others vulnerable by exporting home-grown ones abroad. These globally contagious infections arose in finance in Thailand in 1997, in finance in the United States in 2008, and in the COVID-19 virus in China in December 2019.

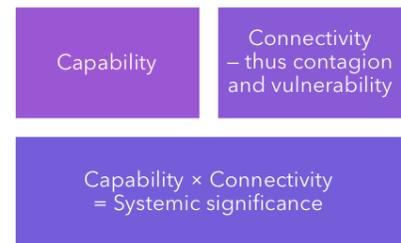


Figure 1. Concept of systemic significance

Capability and connectivity combined to create a new concept and category of “systemically significant” states (see Figure 1). This concept guided Canadian finance minister Paul Martin and U.S. treasury secretary Larry Summers when they created the G20 in 1999.

## **Membership: Capable, Global, Compact, Balanced**

When these two visionary founders applied the concept to the candidates for membership, 19 countries made the cut (Kirton 2013, 464–45, Hajnal 2019). They came in four categories.

First, the Group of Seven (G7) major market democracies of the United States, Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Canada.

Second, the BRICS, as they were later labelled, of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (Larionova and Kirton 2018).

Third, the MIKTA middle powers, labelled even later, of Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia.

Fourth, the two outsiders of Saudi Arabia and Argentina.

This combination of countries provided great global capability, geographic representativeness, compact interaction and balance.

Their combined capabilities contain about 80% of the global economy, population, territory and most of the specialized capabilities needed for global governance. Today these capabilities include the invention and production of safe, effective, fully tested COVID-19 vaccines, led by the United States, United Kingdom and Germany from the G7 and Russia, China and India from the BRICS.

Members came from all global geographic regions.

Asia had five: Russia, China, Japan, Korea and Australia.

Europe had four: Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Italy.

North America had three: the United States, Canada and Mexico.

South America had two: Brazil and Argentina.

The Middle East had two: Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Africa had one: South Africa, with Nigeria initially assigned a seat it never assumed.

Compact membership allowed each member to see itself as part of an exclusive top-tier club (Naylor 2019). Here it could exercise its systemic responsibility by adjusting to the others, as a leader or follower, and by adequately monitoring its partners to see if they complied with the collective commitments all made.

Balance came from the relatively equal number of advanced and emerging countries, and of fully democratic and less democratic ones.

The G20 innovatively added as full members the old multilateral organizations born at Bretton Woods in 1944: the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

Unlike most such plurilateral summit institutions (PSIs), such as the G7 or the BRICS, the G20's membership has remained the same to this day, for more than three decades now.

## Mission

The G20 has two distinctive foundational missions. The first is to promote financial stability. The second is to make globalization work for the benefit of all. Both directly reflect the intense connectivity that defines the 21st-century world.

## Finance Ministerial Meetings, 1999–2008

During its first decade, from 1999 to 2008, the G20 met only among its finance ministers and central bank governors, and did so only once a year (see Figure 2).

During this first decade, hosting passed from the G7 to the non-G7 members. The world's two most economically powerful countries, the United States and Japan, never served as host. They let the lesser powers lead.

The G20's agenda quickly expanded. It added the security subjects of terrorist finance and the war in Afghanistan at its third meeting, in Ottawa, in November 2001.

The G20 produced some successful solutions that had eluded other bodies. The biggest was reforming the IMF to give the emerging powers a proportionately great share of the executive board's overall voice and vote.

## Summit Meetings, 2008–2020

The equalization in hosting at the finance G20 has been repeated at the 15 scheduled summits held since the G20 became a leaders' level summit in November 2008. Hosting started with the G7 members (of the United States, United Kingdom and Canada), then the members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Korea in 2010 and Mexico in 2012), then the BRICS (Russia in 2013 and China in 2016), then the outer ones of Argentina in 2018 and Saudi Arabia in 2020 (see Figure 3).

G20 summitry started with two meetings a year from 2008 to 2010, to confront the American-turned-global financial crisis raging then. It dropped to only one a year from 2011 to 2019. But it returned to two in 2020, to confront the COVID-19 crises that dominated that year.

<b>1999</b>	December 15-16	Berlin	Germany
<b>2000</b>	October 24-25	Montreal	Canada
<b>2001</b>	November 16-17	Ottawa	Canada
<b>2002</b>	November 23	New Delhi	India
<b>2003</b>	October 26-27	Morelia	Mexico
<b>2004</b>	November 20-21	Berlin	Germany
<b>2005</b>	October 15-16	Beijing	China
<b>2006</b>	November 18-19	Melbourne	Australia
<b>2007</b>	November 17-18	Kleinmond	South Africa
<b>2008</b>	October 11	Washington DC	United States
<b>2008</b>	November 8-9	São Paulo	Brazil

Figure 2. Finance Ministers meetings 1999-2008

<b>2008</b>	November 14-15	Washington DC	United States
<b>2009</b>	April 1-2	London	England
<b>2009</b>	September 24-25	Pittsburgh	United States
<b>2010</b>	June 26-27	Toronto	Canada
<b>2010</b>	November 11-12	Seoul	Korea
<b>2011</b>	November 3-4	Cannes	France
<b>2012</b>	June 18-19	Los Cabos	Mexico
<b>2013</b>	September 5-6	St. Petersburg	Russia
<b>2014</b>	November 15-16	Brisbane	Australia
<b>2015</b>	November 15-16	Antalya	Turkey
<b>2016</b>	September 4-5	Hangzhou	China
<b>2017</b>	July 6-9	Hamburg	Germany
<b>2018</b>	November 30-December 1	Buenos Aires	Argentina
<b>2019</b>	June 28-29	Osaka	Japan
<b>2020</b>	March 26	Virtual	Saudi Arabia
<b>2020</b>	November 21-22	Riyadh (virtual)	Saudi Arabia
<b>2021</b>	October 30-31	Rome	Italy

Figure 3. Summit meetings, 2008–2021

## Guests: Countries and International Organizations

G20 leaders have always invited to their summits a few other leaders as guests (see Figure 4). Spain has come to all. Other guests reflect the region or priorities of the summit host each year. Regular guests include the chair of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), but not the Gulf Co-operation Council.

Guests also come from the heads of selected multilateral organizations. They started with the United Nations, which has been at every one. Then came the International Labour Organization (ILO) since September 2009. Added later were the World Trade Organization (WTO) and now the World Health Organization (WHO) too.

- Country
  - Spain, Singapore and others, depending on the host
- International organizations
  - International Monetary Fund (2008-)
  - World Bank Group (2008-)
  - United Nations (2008-)
  - International Labour Organization (2009-)
  - Food and Agriculture Organization
  - Financial Stability Board
  - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
  - World Health Organization
  - World Trade Organization
- Regional organizations
  - Association of Southeast Asian Nations
  - African Union
  - New Partnership for Africa's Development
  - Others depending on host, such as Islamic Development Bank, Arab Monetary Fund, Gulf Cooperation Council

Figure 4. Guest countries and regional and international organizations

## Ministerial Meetings

Finance ministers and central bankers have met more frequently since the summit started in 2008.

They have been joined by ministers for:

- labour and tourism in 2010
- agriculture and development in 2011
- trade and foreign affairs in 2012
- energy in 2015
- digitalization and health in 2017
- education in 2018
- the environment in 2019, and
- anti-corruption in 2020.

In 2020, a dozen different ministerial groups met throughout the year, covering economic, social, ecological and security affairs.

## Working Groups

Working groups of officials have also expanded, since the first four were created in 2008. By 2020 there were at least 11 (see Figure 5).

## Civil Society Engagement Groups

Formal civil society engagement groups began in 2010 with the traditional ones for business and labour. Then came those for civil society organizations in 2011, think tanks in 2012, youth in 2013, women in 2015, science in 2017 and urban affairs in 2018. The Business 20 remains the most influential one.



Figure 5. Working groups, 2020

There are also unofficial engagement groups, such as the Young Entrepreneurs Alliance and the G(irls)20.

## Expanding Performance

This increasing institutionalization has helped foster growing summit performance. This has passed through three phases:

First, financial crisis response from 2008 to 2012;

Second, proactive, multi-subject, steering from 2013 to 2019; and

Third, COVID-catalyzed, comprehensive, crisis response since 2020.

## Six Performance Dimensions

In each phase, performance has expanded in most of the six core functions such summits have.

The first is domestic political management. Leaders go the summits to secure status for themselves and their country, and support for their policies, political positions and popularity back home. G20 summits are indeed a “photo op,” as their critics claim.

The second is deliberation. This takes pace privately and publicly where collective conclusions are produced. G20 summits in their private deliberations are indeed a global “hot tub party,” as their critics also claim.

The third is principled and normative direction setting. Here leaders come to consensus on facts, causation and rectitude and what is prescribed, prohibited and permissible (Krasner 1983). G20 summits can indeed be great global “bully pulpit” where leaders preach to the world.

The fourth is decision-making to create public, precise, future-oriented, politically binding collective commitments. G20 summits are indeed a global *directoire*, as a board of directors for the world.

The fifth is the delivery of those decisions through members’ governments’ compliance with their leaders commitments, before the next summit arrives.

The sixth is the institutional development of global governance, inside and outside the G20.

## Performance Table

G20 performance on each of these dimensions, at each of its 15 summits, can be carefully measured and compared (see Figure 6). Doing so shows a comprehensive rise to strong performance at Hamburg in 2017, with a substantial decline since then.

	Grade	Domestic political management			Deliberation			Direction setting				Decision making	Delivery		Development of global governance			
		Attendance	#compliments	%members complimented	# days	# documents	# words	Stability	Inclusion	Democracy	Liberty	# commitments	Compliance	# Assessed	Internal		External	
															# references	Spread	# references	Spread
2008 Washington	A-	100%	0	0%	2	2	3,567	16	2	10	2	95	75%	8	0	4	39	11
2009 London	A	100%	1	5%	2	3	6,155	29	6	9	0	129	57%	7	12	4	120	27
2009 Pittsburgh	A-	100%	0	0%	2	2	9,257	11	21	28	1	128	67%	15	47	4	115	26
2010 Toronto	A-	90%	8	15%	2	5	11,078	47	32	11	1	61	68%	15	71	4	164	27
2010 Seoul	B	95%	5	15%	2	5	15,776	66	36	18	4	153	67%	41	99	4	237	31
2011 Cannes	B	95%	11	35%	2	3	14,107	42	8	22	0	282	74%	22	59	4	247	27
2012 Los Cabos	A-	95%	6	15%	2	2	12,682	43	23	31	3	180	77%	19	65	4	138	20
2013 St. Petersburg	A	90%	15	55%	2	11	28,766	73	108	15	3	281	69%	24	190	4	237	27
2014 Brisbane	B	90%	10	40%	2	5	9,111	10	12	1	0	205	70%	27	39	4	42	12
2015 Antalya	B	90%	0	0%	2	6	5,983	13	22	0	2	198	71%	24	42	4	54	11
2016 Hangzhou	B+	95%	7	25%	2	4	16,004	11	29	34	5	213	71%	29	179	4	223	19
2017 Hamburg	B+	95%	0	0	2	10	34,746	42	61	2	11	529	76%	26	54	6	307	19
2018 Buenos Aires	B-	90%	0	0	2	2	13,515	23	53	7	2	128	78%	22	20	5	24	15
2019 Osaka	B	95%	2	66%	2	2	6,623	13	16			143	79%	19	56	5	54	17
2020 Riyadh	C+	100%	3	10%	2	1	5,697	13	20		0	107			30	6	58	16
Total	N/A	N/A	68	N/A	30	63	193,067	452	449	188	34	2,832	N/A	298	963	66	2,059	305
Average	N/A	95%	4.5	19%	2	4.2	12,871	20.1	29.9	14.5	2.4	188.8	71%	21.3	64.2	4.4	137.3	20.3

Figure 6. The G20’s rising performance record

## Performance Patterns by Dimension

This trend appears on most of the six functions, measured as dimensions of performance.

Domestic political management rose to peak in 2011 to 2014, then plunged but revived in 2019–2020.

Deliberation rose to peak in 2013 and 2017, then plunged to 2020.

Direction setting rose to peak in 2013 and 2017, then declined.

Decision making rose to peak at 529 commitments in 2017, then declined.

Delivery rose to 76% compliance with the commitments in 2017, then remained high at 79%, with Buenos Aires in 2018 at 78% and Osaka in 2019 at 79%.

Development of global governance rose to peak for outside institutions in 2017, then plunged since.

## Decision Making: Equality and Leadership

A close look at the dynamics of decision making and delivery shows that the G20 increasingly operates as a club of equals, when any member can lead and where all adjust.

This equalization arises in:

First, institutional leadership, through summit hosting and priority agenda setting.

Second, material leadership. Here the great transformation came at the Los Cabos Summit in 2012 (Kirton 2016). Then the G20 leaders helped stop the escalating European financial crisis by creating a \$500 million “firewall fund” at the IMF, without the United States contributing at all. The United States thus abandoned its longstanding hegemonic position as the international lender of last resort.

Third, policy leadership, as Australia did in its initiative on social media terrorism at Osaka in 2019, in response to the live-streamed massacre in Christchurch, New Zealand.

## Delivery: Growing Equal Compliance

The G20's compliance performance shows growing equality, too.

Compliance has averaged 72% over the first 14 years, nearing the levels of the smaller, more homogenous G7 and BRICS clubs.

G20 compliance has risen to 79% for 2018 and 79% in 2019.

All G20 members have complied more equally together, led by the members of the European Union, G7, BRICS and OECD clubs.

## Governing the Global Economy

In governing the global economy, its core focus, the G20 has produced several stand-out successes.

The finance ministers G20 solved the Asian-turned-global financial crisis from 1997 to 1999.

The leaders' G20 solved the bigger, faster, deeper American-turned-global financial crisis from 2008 to 2009.

It prevented the regional European crisis from going global from 2010 to 2012.

It prevented another regional or global financial crisis from erupting from 2013 to 2019.

It has thus far prevented such crises from breaking out during the COVID-19 crises since early 2020.

The G20 thus gets high marks for meeting its first mission of promoting financial stability.

But it has done less well on its second mission of making globalization work for all.

## Phases of G20 Economic Governance

The G20 summit's economic agenda has expanded through five overlapping phases of focus (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. Phases of G20 economic governance

## **G20 Social and Sustainability Governance**

The G20 increasingly added social policy subjects to its agenda too.

- 2009 Labour-employment
- 2014 Gender equality
- 2014 Health (with the Ebola epidemic, 2019 universal health coverage)
- 2017 Oceans (with marine litter)
- 2018 Land
- 2019 Aging

## **G20 Security Governance**

The G20's security agenda and successes have expanded too

- 2001 Terrorism finance and Afghanistan
- 2008 Crime-corruption
- 2009 Nuclear proliferation in Iran, and 2017 in North Korea
- 2013 Chemical weapons in Syria, which were removed until 2016
- 2015 Terrorism as a whole

Intellectual leadership equalized too. In November 2001, the United States depended on Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Indonesia to understand how Islamic finance was used to support the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 (Kirton 2013).

## **Successful Economic Solutions, 2008–2019**

The G20 summit produced many successful economic solutions from 2008 to 2019 (see Figure 8).

Global financial stability has been produced and preserved since 2008.

The IMF and World Bank have been given more money and have reformed their executive boards to give rising powers greater voice and vote.

Financial crises have not been in sight since 2013.

Growth was restored and shared after 2008, with and beyond the booming BRICS, until the great COVID-19 crises came in 2020.

Growth has quickly returned again in 2021, after a plunge of only one year for most members, with China bouncing back fast and first.

The G20 has brought the economic benefits of globalization to many, especially in China.

Digital tax governance transformation is due in mid-2021, having been delayed by half a year.

But how well did the G20 do in response to all the unprecedented global COVID crises that erupted as 2020 began and that are with us still?

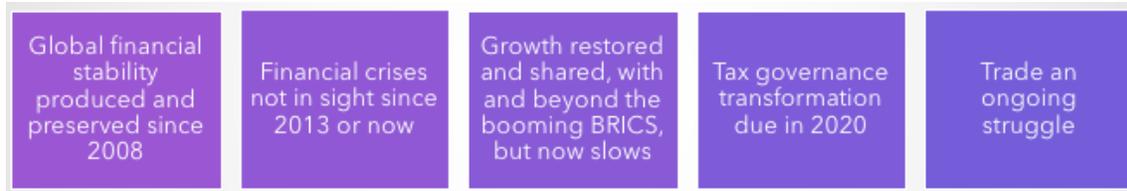


Figure 8. G20 successful economic solutions, 2008–2019

## 2020 Riyadh Summit’s Strong Start

The latest phase of G20 governance began on December 1, 2019, when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia formally took the chair and launched its ambitious agenda for its year as host (Kirton and Koch 2020). Its theme was “Empowering People, Safeguarding the Planet and Shaping New Frontiers.” For the first time, the G20 highlighted the ecological preservation of the planet, and did so in a broad, well-targeted way (Kirton 2019) (see Appendix A).

King Salman identified the “environmental changes” transforming the world and said that the G20 should “strive for sustainable economic policies to safeguard planet earth” (Saudi G20 Presidency 2019). He thus explicitly linked the economy to the planet’s natural environment and put the latter as the ultimate goal.

The first, economic aim, of “Empowering People,” had nine priorities. They included scaling up efforts for sustainable development and fostering inclusive and sustainable tourism.

The second, ecological aim of “Safeguarding the Planet” had all six of its priorities on the environment, with four explicitly referring to climate change.

The third, more security-focused aim of “Shaping New Frontiers,” had one of its seven priorities address the environment and climate change. It was on outer space.

Together, nine or 41% of the 22 priorities were explicitly ecological ones, far more than ever before.

## Emergency Virtual Summit, March 2020: Captured by COVID–19

Then, three months later, came COVID-19 to completely crowd out this ecologically focused start.

G20 leaders responded swiftly to the new crisis by holding the G20’s first ever emergency summit, and its first in virtual form, on March 26, 2020.

It produced selected steps against the comprehensive, swiftly-moving COVID-19 threat (Kirton and Warren 2020).

Its communiqué conclusions of about 1,500 words opened by declaring that “the unprecedented COVID–19 pandemic is a powerful reminder of our interconnectedness and vulnerabilities” (G20 2020). It then declared: “Tackling the pandemic and its intertwined health, social and economic impacts is our absolute priority.” Leaders promised to do “whatever it takes” to protect lives, safeguard people’s jobs and incomes, and improve people’s economic fortunes.

The first section, on “Fighting the Pandemic,” identified a wide range of instruments. The second section on “Safeguarding the Global Economy” promised to minimize the social as well as economic damage, restore growth, and maintain market stability. The third section, on “Addressing International Trade Disruptions,” addressed trade measures to “support the health and well-being of

all people.” The fourth and final section, on “Enhancing Global Cooperation,” integrated these measures, and added tourism, refugees, migrants, and the security issues of border management and citizen repatriation. The natural environmental, so prominent on December 1, had disappeared.

Leaders did affirm their mission of promoting financial stability. But they emphasized making globalization work for all. They said they would protect the most vulnerable, send supplies “where they are most needed,” offer “adequate social protection,” “support the health and well-being of all people,” and help developing and least developed countries, Africa, small island developing states, and refugees and displaced persons. They promised to mount a science-based global response. This was different than the message Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro emphasized back home.

G20 leaders produced 47 commitments (see Appendix B). Health came first, with 20, followed by the global economy with nine, trade with seven, international cooperation with four, financial stability and development with three each, and labour/employment with one.<sup>1</sup> Many promised to mobilize new money, with \$5 trillion devoted to economic growth.

Inside the G20, the leaders tasked their “Health Ministers to meet as needed to share national best practices and develop a set of G20 urgent actions to jointly combat the pandemic by their ministerial meeting in April” (G20 2020).<sup>2</sup> Leaders called for a joint meeting of finance and health ministers in the coming months. They asked their finance ministers and central bank governors “to coordinate on a regular basis to develop a G20 action plan.” They declared their support for the Financial Stability Board (FSB).

Outside the G20, leaders referred to the WHO seven times. All, including Donald Trump, declared “we fully support and commit to further strengthen the WHO’s mandate in coordinating the international fight against the pandemic, including the protection of front-line health workers” (G20 2020). They followed by guiding the IMF and World Bank Group with three references each. Then came one reference each to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation; Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; the United Nations; ILO; and the OECD.

Despite this strong start, there were several shortcomings, relative to the great and growing demand for G20 Action (see Appendix C).

## **Momentum from Compliance and Ministerials**

Further momentum came from members’ significant compliance with the priority commitments at this emergency summit and at the Osaka Summit in 2019 (Cicci, Motala and Wang 2020).

Two months after the March 26 summit, compliance was already 72%. However, health had only 62% (Cicci and Popova 2020).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This compares with the performance of G7 leaders in their emergency videoconference 10 days earlier on March 16, who produced 33 commitments, including 21 and health and 12 on the economy, to confront a crisis that was at that time less deadly than it is now (Kirton 2020a).

<sup>2</sup> Such meetings of ministers responsible for a particular subject are the strongest predictor of members’ higher compliance with their leaders’ commitments on that subject. Compliance with the 75 health commitments that G20 leaders had already made at their regularly scheduled summits had averaged 73%, so there was a firm basis on which to build.

<sup>3</sup> Compliance here was led by Australia, Canada, France, Germany Saudi Arabia and the European Union, each with 88% (Cicci and Popova 2020).

By October 10, G20 members' compliance with their priority Osaka commitments was 79% (Lopez and Popova 2020). Development commitments had 91%, macroeconomic policy 90%, climate change 89% and health 78%.

There was also an unprecedentedly intense schedule of G20 ministerial meetings throughout the year. By the eve of the Riyadh Summit, the Saudis had mounted at least 26 meetings of 12 different ministerial portfolios, alone or together, including the first one ever for anti-corruption.

## **Riyadh's Results**

Yet the Riyadh Summit itself, held virtually on November 21–22, was only a small, short-term success (Kirton 2020b, c, in press). It did just enough to hold out hope that the world would get through its immediate crises of COVID-19, economic recession and soaring developing country debt. Yet it did very little on the bigger, longer term issues of digitalization and, above all, the existential threat of climate change.

Controlling COVID-19 was Riyadh's strongest success. G20 leaders affirmed the proper principles — that safe, effective vaccines would be rapidly produced in large quantities, and rolled out in affordable, equitable ways around the world. On these “effective COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines,” they promised “we will spare no effort to ensure their affordable and equitable access for all people, consistent with members' commitments to incentivize innovation” (G20 2020). The qualification was an important limitation. Moreover, on the crucial issue of timing, leaders did not agree that these vaccines should go first to those in all countries who needed them most, with healthcare and other front-line workers first in line. Here they ignored the compelling calls of Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of the WHO.

Leaders did promise in general terms that they would provide the minimal amount of new money needed immediately — starting with the \$4.5 billion for the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) Initiative and the COVAX facility. But they offered no dollar figure or deadline that would lock them in.

On the economy, to stop the severe recession, leaders again promised to do whatever was necessary to stop the fall and support a recovery. But this was by continuing to do what they were already doing. They announced no new coordinated stimulus, let alone one close to the \$1.1 trillion G20 leaders had raised on the spot at their second summit in London on April 1–2, 2009, to counter the escalating global financial crisis then (Kirton 2013). Nor did Riyadh's leaders prompt the United States and European Union to provide any more serious stimulus, even as the second and third waves of COVID-19 again sent their economies into lockdown and decline.

On development and debt relief, leaders said more money would flow from a “Common Framework” that would provide a few countries with debt reductions in the future, rather than the money that many needed right away.

Several other shortcomings stood out.

On digital taxation, the launch of a new regime was delayed from the earlier deadline at the end of 2020 to mid 2021, just when G20 and other governments desperately needed more tax revenues to control their soaring deficit and debts and to save their people's lives (Saint Amans 2020).

On food security, leaders did not even acknowledge, let alone act against, the starvation currently spreading in places such as Yemen, thanks to COVID-19, climate change and conflict. They ignored the compelling plea of David Beasley (2020), head of the World Food Programme.

On climate change, very little action came (Warren 2020). All leaders, including Donald Trump did agree on a common text. But it was watered down. The central, long-unfulfilled commitment to phase out fossil fuel subsidies was simply repeated, rather than strengthened. G20 leaders could not even commit to doing their fair share to meet the long-agreed global goal of planting one trillion trees. This was despite the fact that Trump had publicly agreed to it long ago and had repeated it in his video address to the summit's side event on "Safeguarding the Planet," just a few hours before the communiqué appeared.

The issue of human rights was absent. This was unlike the declarations of all G20 summits from 2015 to 2019, including that hosted by Chinese president Xi Jinping in 2016. Intellectual property rights were the only rights that Riyadh leaders affirmed. It was a clear choice about who had the rights to the new COVID-19 vaccines.

Leaders also decided to hold their next summit a year later, on October 30–31, 2021 in Rome. They did not speed up the schedule to hold it between April and September, as they had done five times before.<sup>4</sup> Nor did they call an emergency summit much earlier, as Saudi Arabia had in March.

Another surprising setback was the shift in the future hosting sequence. India, which had been slated to host in 2022, was replaced by Indonesia, with India delaying until 2023.

## Dimensions of Performance

The Riyadh Summit's small short-term success is confirmed by a systematic analysis of its performance on the major dimensions of governance.

### Deliberation

In its private deliberations, Riyadh was the shortest regular G20 summit ever. It lasted about four hours, in two sessions of about two hours each, one held on each of its two days. Moreover, due to the digital format and constrained by globe-spanning time zones, there was no opportunity for intense personal discussions or interaction.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, although all G20 leaders attended, including Donald Trump on both days, several took advantage of the video format to skip some parts. For the closing session that handed the chair to Italy, Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin disappeared. Trump knew he would not be there next year.

In its public deliberations, Riyadh's communiqué conclusions consisted of 5,697 words.<sup>6</sup> This was the second smallest number at the G20's 15 regular summits.<sup>7</sup>

Health took 68% of the total. Macroeconomic policy came a close second, with an often overlapping 60%. Far behind were gender and climate change with 12% each and trade with 4%. The security subject of terrorism had 2%. The word "protectionism" did not appear.

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<sup>4</sup> In 2009, 2012, 2016, 2017 and 2019.

<sup>5</sup> The bilateral phone calls or possible use of any private chat function were a poor substitute for the coffee breaks, corridor conversations, pull asides, walks in the woods, or even accidental encounters between and among leaders at the summit site.

<sup>6</sup> They came in 78 paragraphs in 12 pages (including a one-page annex listing 33 documents previously produced by ministers and officials).

<sup>7</sup> It was the smallest since the first summit, prepared in only 24 days, at Washington DC on November 14–15, 2008.

## Domestic Political Management

Domestic political management came through four communiqué compliments. This was below the G20 average of 4.6, but more than those at the three summits immediately before. At Riyadh two compliments went to Saudi Arabia, including one on crime-corruption. One each went to Japan and China for the Olympics they would host.<sup>8</sup>

Media approval was low. The *Financial Times* (2020) in its lead editorial on November 23 concluded: “The G20 group, which met at the weekend, failed to agree to a new common framework for relieving the debts of poor countries but did continue to offer measures to delay scheduled repayments.”

## Direction Setting

However, Riyadh’s principled and normative direction setting was strong. The summit affirmed the principle of promoting financial stability 13 times and that of making globalization work for all 20 times. Thus the second, distributional mission of inclusiveness and equality, with 61% of the affirmations, dominated the first one of a global public good that, in practice, benefited the wealthy first and most. However, for the first time in several years, there was no affirmation of human rights.

## Decisions

Riyadh’s decision making was small. Its 107 commitments were the third lowest number ever.<sup>9</sup> They were one fifth the peak at Hamburg in 2017 and just over half the earlier summit average of 195 (see Appendix D).

Riyadh’s commitments were led by health and by crime and corruption with 13% each. Trade took 9%, macroeconomic policy 8%, and gender and development 7% each. Labour and employment, financial regulation, and the natural environment had 4% each. Energy and human security had four commitments each.<sup>10</sup> Three each came on climate change, the digital economy, international taxation, food and agriculture, and infrastructure. Reform of international financial institutions had two, and migration and refugees and international cooperation one each. These commitments covered 19 separate subjects, providing substantial breadth.

Riyadh produced no commitments with a specified dollar amount the G20 would provide, let alone by any specified date.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, there were far more siloed commitments on single subjects than synergistic ones that linked two or more (see Appendix E).

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<sup>8</sup> The communiqué “commend[ed] the Saudi Presidency for initiating discussions on the need for long-term solutions to address gaps” and welcomed it “joining the OECD Working Group on Bribery” (G20 2020). It complimented Japan for its determination to hold the Olympics in 2021 and looked forward to the Beijing Winter Olympics in 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Only the first summit at Washington in 2008 with 95 and the third summit at Toronto in June 2010 with 61 had less.

<sup>10</sup> The four energy commitments were: 2020-97: “We stress our continued resolve to ensure a stable and uninterrupted supply of energy to achieve economic growth as we respond to the challenges brought about by the pandemic” 2020-98: “We endorse the G20 Initiative on Clean Cooking”; 2020-99: “[We endorse the]...Energy Access and G20 Energy Security and Markets Stability Co-operation”; and 2020-100: “We reaffirm our joint commitment on medium term rationalization and phasing-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption, while providing targeted support for the poorest.” Human security is a composite category covering “child labor, forced labor, human trafficking and modern slavery in the world of work.”

<sup>11</sup> Yet it used numbers to highlight how much money the G20 had raised earlier that year. The implication was that no more money was needed now.

## Delivery

Compliance with these commitments will likely be small. The commitments came largely from the same subjects where G20 compliance had always been low (see Appendix F). Although the G20's overall compliance average was 72% with commitments from the summits between 2008 and 2019, during that time health had only 69%, crime and corruption 62%, and trade 66%. While macroeconomic policy had 81%, gender had only 61%, and development 67%. Thus on Riyadh's top six subjects, representing 58% of its commitments, the G20's average past compliance was only 68%. Moreover, the current and future hosts' past compliance had been low: Saudi Arabia at 56%, Italy 68%, Indonesia 59% and India 69%.<sup>12</sup>

## Development of Global Governance

In the institutionalized development of global governance, Riyadh's performance was similarly small.

Institutions inside the G20 had 30 references, the fourth lowest number ever.<sup>13</sup>

To institutions outside the G20, the 58 references were the sixth lowest number ever, and just over one third of the G20 average of 144. Those references were led, surprisingly, by the economic bodies, with only four going to health ones.<sup>14</sup>

In all, the Riyadh Summit contained many acknowledgements of what needed to be done, but relatively few commitments to do it, and ever fewer to do big, bold, new things. The few new commitments were primarily about launching low-level processes, rather than producing new money or taking big steps on the spot. But Riyadh's leaders did just enough to keep their G20 ship afloat, so they could do much more in the year ahead.

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<sup>12</sup> On compliance with macroeconomic policy commitments from 2008 to 2019, Saudi Arabia had 68%, Italy 76%, Indonesia 78% and India first at 86%. On financial regulation Saudi Arabia had 65%, Italy 71%, Indonesia 66% and India first at 75%. Development had Saudi Arabia 50%, Italy 63%, Indonesia 54%, and India first at 66%. Health has Saudi Arabia 58%, Italy 50%, Indonesia 46%, and India first at 66%. The digital economy had Saudi Arabia 57%, Italy 57%, Indonesia 44% and India tied for first with 57%. Climate change had Saudi Arabia 33%, Italy 69%, Indonesia 63% and India second at 65%. India thus almost always came first, but will not host for the next two years. A more detailed look comes from comparing the overall average compliance by subject with that of the past, present and future presidency on the same subjects since the G20 start (see Appendix E). On all of the 14 subjects where Riyadh made three or more commitments, none had higher average compliance from the four hosts. Indeed, the gap was greatest on subjects where Riyadh's commitments were concentrated, with crime and corruption at -18%, health at -14%, and trade at -10%. Climate change had -11%, and the environment the lowest at -22%.

<sup>13</sup> The summits that made more references to G20 institutions were 2008, London in 2009 and 2019. Riyadh was lower than the average of 67 references at the regular summits. These references were led by 10 of the G20 in general, 10 of a G20 member, four of G20 ministers, four of a G20 action plan (using the most generous definition of an institution), and one each of the G20 summit and G20 body.

<sup>14</sup> The IMF had 10, the OECD with nine, the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) with seven, the FSB with six, the ILO with five, the World Bank Group and the Financial Action Task Force with four each, and the UN, Paris Club, WHO and Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion (GPFI) with two each. One each went to the WTO, International Organization for Migration, the UN High Commission for Refugees, the ACT-A initiative and COVAX. By subject, there were 25 references to the economic and finance bodies (of the IMF, OECD and FSB), 25 to development ones (World Bank, DSSI, Paris Club and GPFI) but only four to health ones (WHO, ACT-A, COVAX). Despite COVID-19, the G20 summit remained heavily focused on economic-finance and development. That partly reflects the fact that the IMF and World Bank are G20 members. The balance also suggests that in this dimension, the Riyadh Summit gave relatively equal attention to each of its two distinctive foundational missions of promoting financial stability (through the IMF, OECD and FSB) and making globalization work for the benefit of all (through the World Bank, DSSI, Paris Club and GPFI).

## Rome Summit's Promising Prospects, 2021

So will the G20 do better this year?

The prospects are that the Italian-hosted G20 Rome Summit on October 30–31 will do much better than Riyadh's did. The Rome summit will compensate for the modest results of Riyadh, be boosted by G7's Cornwall Summit hosted by the United Kingdom on June 11-13 and be pulled by the UN's much-delayed, long-awaited Glasgow Summit on climate change on November 1–12.

Rome will be the first G20 summit hosted by Italy, a core member of the G7 and the European Union since their start. It brings G20 hosting back to a major democratic power, whose vast Mediterranean coastline puts it at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the Atlantic worlds.

## Participants

The Rome Summit will be hosted by Italian prime minister Mario Draghi, arriving on February 13, 2021. It will be further infused with fresh energy from several other new leaders, led by U.S. president Joe Biden who assumed office on January 20, 2021. It will welcome a new German chancellor, replacing the G20's all-time veteran Angela Merkel, in October 2021. Japan's prime minister Yoshihide Suga will attend his first in-person G20 summit, after his first virtual outing at Riyadh.<sup>15</sup>

## Priorities

These leaders will focus on Italy's priority pillars of "People, Planet, Prosperity." They were first presented by then Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte to the United Nations General Assembly on September 25, 2020. They included the traditional subject of the economy, but highlighted the newer ones of health and climate change. For the first time ever, health and the environment come first, with healthy people and a healthy planet presented as the central cause of the sustainable, inclusive and now resilient prosperity the leaders wish to build.

On December 1, Italy outlined five priorities (Italian G20 Presidency 2020).

First came addressing COVID-19, by "ensuring a swift international response to the pandemic," providing "equitable, worldwide access to diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines and building up resilience to future health-related shocks" (Italian G20 Presidency n.d.-b).

Second came commerce, covering livelihoods, economies, and trade, aimed at "a resilient, inclusive and sustainable economic recovery" (Italian G20 Presidency n.d.-a).

Third came climate change, including green growth, renewable energy and the environment.

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<sup>15</sup> These cooperative newcomers will be joined by many experienced G20 participants: Andrés Manuel López Obrador of Mexico (who did not attend the Osaka Summit), Argentina's Alberto Fernández, the European Union's Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel, and the United Kingdom's Boris Johnson, fresh from hosting his G7 summit a few months before. The older veterans will be China's Xi Jinping, who hosted in 2016, Russia's Vladimir Putin, who hosted in 2013, India's Narendra Modi, scheduled to host in 2023 and hosting the BRICS summit in 2021, and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who hosted in 2015. Other experienced leaders are France's Emmanuel Macron, Canada's Justin Trudeau, South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa, Australia's Scott Morrison, Indonesia's Joko Widodo who will host in 2022, and King Salman, who hosted at Riyadh.

Fourth came social cohesion, embracing inequality, women’s empowerment, youth, vulnerable people, jobs, social protection and food security.

Fifth came connectivity, through closing the digital divide and bringing digitalization to all.

The Italian presidency thus emphasized that the economic recovery must be more inclusive, greener and smarter, with a cross-cutting green agenda.<sup>16</sup>

Under Italy, the G20 would go green.

In the finance track, Italy considered six initiatives.

First, a G20 early warning mechanism that included economic, health and environmental risks, to enhance pandemic preparedness for the ones sure to come.

Second, a more coordinated economic action plan, emphasizing digital platforms to enhance productivity and finance investments for growth.

Third, shock-resilient, sustainable traditional and digital green infrastructure, including in transportation and urban areas and using nature-based solutions and creative finance.

Fourth, making sustainable finance integral to financial stability, by having central banks promote climate change control and environmental enhancement.

Fifth, improving financial inclusion by focusing on micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and their digital finance and awareness.

Sixth, sustainable, progressive environmental taxation that would steadily increase. This involved eliminating fossil fuel subsidies, increasing all forms of carbon taxation to decarbonize the global economy as quickly as possible, and using some of these revenues to retrain workers for new jobs. This could be a highlight of the Italian presidency.

## **Ministerial Meetings**

These initiatives will be advanced by the many ministerial meetings that Italy has planned (see Appendix D). Its 14 meetings, with almost all coming before the summit, involve 14 different portfolios and include five clustered gatherings (see Appendix G).

The involvement of so many Italian ministers is important, given the rapidly rotating, multi-party coalition governments it traditionally and currently has and the boost to compliance with leaders’ summit commitments that the ministerials provide (Rapson 2020).

## **Promising Pushes**

Several forces promise to push Rome toward summit success.

In a reversal of the cadence of Saudi Arabia’s year, Italy started its year with a bad pandemic and economy, which were becoming progressively better, as vaccinations rolled out and raced ahead of the many more dangerous COVID-19 variants starting to appear.

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<sup>16</sup> The G20’s central finance track accordingly sought a transformative economic recovery that was healthier, greener, digitized, inclusive and backed by reformed multilateralism.

COVID-19 cases and deaths globally peaked in January, then plunged, especially in the United States, a rapidly vaccinating United Kingdom, and India.

Fiscal stimulus grew.<sup>17</sup> It started with the \$900 billion stimulus the U.S. Congress authorized in late December 2020. It was about to add President Biden's new \$1.9 trillion support package by March (Goolsbee 2021).<sup>18</sup> The European Union started allocating its multi-trillion dollar, multiyear spending package too.

President Biden's administration took office on January 20 with strong economic, medical and environmental experience and expertise. It immediately acted on its priorities, which highly matched Italy's G20 ones.<sup>19</sup> Biden began on his first day by rejoining the WHO and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

## **Constraining Push Backs**

Yet Italy's G20 faced several constraints.

Vaccine nationalism was first. The United States and other G7 members rushed to give their initial scarce supply exclusively to their own citizens. In contrast, Italy sought to convince all that vaccinating poor people and countries would enable them to rejoin the economy and be a great growth stimulus.

Debt and deficits came second. More experts increasingly questioned the high and soaring government deficits and debts, even as leading economists such as Larry Summers argued that the advanced economies could accommodate much more debt (Yang 2020). Although many took solace in historically low interest rates to finance this debt, increasing inflation in commodities, food and key countries cast doubt on how long this would remain.

Development finance came third, as the IMF and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) needed more money to meet the need.

China came fourth. It was breaking the WTO trade rules and thus remained reluctant to reform them in the desired way.

Populism came fifth. Even after Biden had replaced Trump in the United States, populism would grow. Technology and capital were relentlessly substituting for labour, thus destroying secure, well-paying middle and working class jobs and making the many losers feel that globalization and its governance did not work for them (Oldani and Wouters 2019). This eroded the very legitimacy of both national and global governance, and the democratic principles at its core since the Cold War victory in 1989.

Climate change came sixth, and could be the greatest one. The one thing certain to be much worse in 2021 was the cumulative rise to critical thresholds in global temperature, greenhouse gas

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<sup>17</sup> The United States swiftly passed a record stimulus at the end of March 2020 under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

<sup>18</sup> Moreover, since at least the 1930s, U.S. gross domestic product growth and jobs have grown significantly faster under Democratic Party presidents than under Republican ones, according to recent research by Alan Blinder and Mark Watson (Leonhardt and Serkez 2021).

<sup>19</sup> These were controlling COVID-19, restoring the economy in a more inclusive way, countering climate change, enhancing digital connectivity and resuming multilateral cooperation.

concentrations and the new emissions that drove them up. The latter were due to rise as major economies, led by China, opened up and grew again.

## Propellers of Performance

Amidst these many pushes and constraints, the proven propellers of G20 summit performance suggest that the Rome Summit will be at least a substantial success.

Shock-activated vulnerability will spur performance on the Italian priorities of COVID-19, the economy, development and climate change. Here leaders increasingly understand how interconnected their challenges and their countries are. COVID-19's subsequent waves and new variants will push the G20 to combat the current pandemic and prepare for the next one in more coordinated ways. Financial crises erupting in more countries will prompt G20 leaders to better coordinate their current massive stimulus and increase support from and for the development banks they control.<sup>20</sup> Food crises will prompt G20 action too. Above all, the climate crisis's visible, damaging, deadly, extreme weather events in more G20 countries will lead to stronger common and collective action here, beyond that contained in the Paris Agreement from a long six years ago. The first six weeks of 2021 had already seen several deadly climate shocks (see Appendix H).

International institutional failure will grow, as the major multilateral organizations cannot meet these shocks on their own. The WHO will need a much bigger, permanent base budget to deal with the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, the other health harms it has highlighted and heightened, and the treatments it has delayed.<sup>21</sup> The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) needs serious strengthening. The IMF and World Bank have insufficient funds to cope with the escalating demands for financial support, and will push the G20 to agree that the IMF can issue more special drawing rights. The weak, fragmented bodies for climate change and the environment, led by UN Climate in Bonn, UN Biodiversity in Montreal, UN Environment in Kenya, and the Global Environmental Fund in Korea, will need the G20 to spur them and their Glasgow summit to success.

The G7's virtual summit on February 19, 2021, and its Cornwall Summit on June 11–13 will help fill the gap. But more demands will arise in the months that follow. They will require help from China, Russia, Brazil and South Africa, on COVID-19, macroeconomic and financial support, and climate change.

Predominant equalizing capability is strengthening among G20 members, giving them the ability and will to do the job. Economic recovery in the G20 economies will bolster their over 80% global predominance in economic, medical and ecological capabilities, starting with vaccines, green technology and clean energy. Meanwhile, China will continue to grow faster and stronger than a recovering United States and Europe, even if the clean energy transition reduces growth in hydrocarbon- and resource-rich Saudi Arabia, Russia and South Africa.

Converging characteristics, however, are likely to drop, constraining the consensus likely to arise among G20 members to take transformational moves. Democracy is declining in the G20 as a whole, as it has during the past decade in the world as a whole. The G20's internal divide is deepening, between a democratizing United States under Joe Biden, and a de-democratizing China, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere.

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<sup>20</sup> The IMF by mid February 2021 already had significant support programs for Argentina and Pakistan.

<sup>21</sup> This is even after the United States announcing on February 17, 2021, that it would immediately pay the \$200 million it owes the WHO it has just rejoined.

Domestic political cohesion, which allows leaders to do big deals abroad, is mixed. It is limited in Italy, as Mario Draghi is a technocrat with great economic expertise and experience as head of the European Central Bank and the Bank of Italy but none in Italian politics. It is constrained in the United States by the Democratic Party's narrow majority in both the Senate and Congress. It is weaker in Japan and Germany than during the many years when Shinzo Abe and Angela Merkel were in charge. Beyond these G7 countries, Vladimir Putin faces protests throughout Russia, while Turkey's Recep Erdogan faces some too. Only China's Xi Jinping appears to have complete control at home. Much depends on how he chooses to lead, to put into practice his proclaimed support for multilateralism, health, consumer-led growth and climate change control.

The G20's status as a cherished club at the hub of a growing network of global summit governance will increase strongly, spurring its summit to success. It will benefit from the return of in-person summitry, where leaders can interact and bond directly in an intense, personal way, at both the G20 summit and the sideline BRICS one. Italy as G20 host connects the G20 to the G7 summit (with India, Australia and Korea now invited by the UK host) and the UN Glasgow climate summit, with Italy and the United Kingdom co-hosting it. And the virtual G7 summit on February 19, Joe Biden's Earth Day climate summit on April 22 and his call for a summit of democracies add more spokes to the wheel.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, four major points stand out.

### **Three Phases**

First, G20 summit governance has gone through three phases:

- financial crisis response from 2008 to 2012;
- comprehensive global steering from 2013 to 2019;
- and multidimensional COVID-19 crisis response from 2020 to 2021.

### **Growing Performance**

Second, G20 summit institutionalization and performance have grown to meet these proliferating challenges. The agenda and agreements have spread from the economic-financial domain into the social, ecological sustainability and political-security ones. Its members' compliance with their leaders' commitments have reached a sustained new high of 78%.

### **Recent Setbacks**

Third, this progress has recently suffered setbacks, at Buenos Aires in 2018 and Riyadh in 2020. They arose as summit hosts outside the inner hubs of the G7 and BRICS struggled to cope with new shocks, amid mounting tensions between the G20's most powerful members — the United States and China.

### **Rome's Promising Prospects**

Fourth, the forthcoming Rome Summit promises to produce high performance, as leaders focus on the central existential threat of climate change, where the needed Sino-American cooperation is most likely to appear.

## Climate Change as the Central Challenge

Climate change control will be critical to the G20 summit's future success (Kirton and Kokotsis 2015).

Today's science and extreme weather events show that the climate crisis is already here.

Climate change is a major economic-financial, social, sustainability and security threat.

It dominates the top ten threats in World Economic Forum's 2021 *Global Risks Report*.

The UN has delayed its 2020 climate summit in Glasgow for a full year, to November 2021

The small steps taken by the G20, G7 and BRICS on climate change in 2020 fell behind the growing demand.

Several nature-based solutions already exist, from forests, peat, plants and Oman's peridotite rocks.

Yet bolder climate change commitments need better compliance to have the needed impact.

## Improving Compliance

How can this better compliance come?

The evidence shows that there are proven, low cost, leaders-controlled steps that can improve compliance (Warren 2020; Rapson 2020). The G20 should thus:

- Institutionalize its new environment ministers meeting and have it meet more often.
- Make more strongly binding commitments on core subjects such as climate change (Warren 2020).
- Invite as summit guests the heads of UN Climate, UN Biodiversity, UN Environment and the OIE.
- Invite the leaders of the most climate vulnerable countries and the most committed carbon neutral ones.
- Make the UN secretary general equal to the heads of IMF and World Bank as a full member of the G20.
- Create an "Environment 20" engagement group.
- Hold a second, annual G20 summit, focused on the SDGs, at the UN General Assembly each September.

## No Alternative Arise

In closing, we must make the G20 work, because there is no alternative global governance body to take its place.

Those who see only a 'G-0' ignore the many existing contenders, which each add value, and the new ones arising in 2021.

But the UN summits, which have expanded since they started in 1990, still fail. And the UN's 17 SDGs are not on track and the COVID-19 crisis has pushed them further back.

The BRICS is too small, too diverse, and too constrained by military conflict between its two biggest members, China and India.

The Belt and Road Forum consists only of China and its several small, dependent partners and has only met twice.

The G20 is the only club at the hub of an expanding global summit governance network

There is nowhere else to go.

So we must make it work!

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## **Appendix A: Riyadh Host’s Ecological Priorities and Shortcomings**

Riyadh’s 22 priorities included nine ecological ones (Saudi G20 Presidency 2019).

“Safeguarding the Planet” began with the priority of “Managing Emissions for Sustainable Development.” It thus put climate change control first, and noted the “urgency” of this “imperative” need. It sought a new economic model to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions throughout the economy, calling for comprehensive measures in all sectors rather than the inadequate mainstream approaches used now. It embraced not just sinks but also sources, wisely selecting “nature-based solutions such as reforestation” and “restoring marine resources” as instruments of choice.

The second priority, “Combating Land Degradation and Habitat Loss” also put forests first, noting that “deforestation and other land use are also responsible for 24 percent of GHG emissions.” The G20 could thus lead the world through this one measure to solve 25% of its immediate climate crisis and contribute to biodiversity conservation too.

The third priority, “Preserving the Oceans,” noted how climate change is endangering coral reefs, on which up to half the world’s marine life depend. It promised to build on the advances of Japan’s 2019 G20 presidency, which in turn had expanded the work of the Group of Seven (G7) led by France in 2019 and Canada in 2018.

The fourth priority, “Fostering Sustainable and Resilient Water Systems Globally,” highlighted an immediate issue for all people in their daily lives and made a direct link to the United Nations 2030 Agenda’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It wisely noted that improving financing was a critical instrument here.

The fifth priority, “Promoting Food Security,” correctly noted that food security was harmed by climate change as well as biodiversity loss. It admirably identified the importance of “changing dietary habits” as a response.

The sixth priority, “Cleaner Energy Systems for a New Era,” promised “to further advance cleaner energy transitions” through use of all energy sources and innovative technologies. It further committed to discussing “the concept of circular carbon economy.”

These ecological advances were reinforced by two of the nine priorities under the economic aim of “Empowering People.”

The aim of “Scaling up Efforts for Sustainable Development” emphasized the importance of implementation now, above all the need to accelerate this and to strengthen accountability measures to support this cause.

The aim of “Tourism as a Force for Human-Centered Economic Growth” identified this sector as a “major force” in reaching the SDGs. It promised that the 2020 G20 will focus on the “social, economic and environmental impact of tourism and how to promote it for the benefit of both visitors and local communities and create a bridge between different societies.”

The third, security-oriented aim of “Shaping New Frontiers” added a final ecological priority to the already substantial list.

Its first aim of “Promoting Space Cooperation” was an innovative addition offered to advance sustainable development. “Space observation and sharing of information can contribute significantly to the protection of common global goods such as climate and the oceans.” Here the Saudi host built

on the initiatives proposed by members of the Japanese and German governments for the 2019 G20 and the results of the G7 environment ministers' meeting at Halifax in 2018.

These aims and priorities appeared even more promising from several key features of the context within which they were launched.

First, the heavy emphasis on ecologically safeguarding the planet showed the Saudi host was not deterred by the climate change skepticism of any G20 leader, either from a superpower or countries beyond, despite any vital energy and security ties it had.

Second, the Saudi priorities showed its G20 is fully aligned with the United Nations. The latter includes the UN's 25th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change taking place in Madrid as the Saudi G20 year began, the COP 26 Glasgow Summit originally scheduled for December 2020 just after the Saudi's G20 Riyadh Summit and the many ecological SDGs due to be improved in 2020 too.

Third, Saudi Arabia's agenda announced publicly in the name of King Salman on December 1, 2019, showed that Saudi Arabia has continued and indeed built on the many ecological priorities Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman announced to his fellow G20 leaders at the G20 Osaka Summit in June 2019.

Fourth, Saudi Arabia's G20 priorities flowed from and reinforced its domestic priorities presented in its Vision 2030. Saudi Arabia knew that the economic and physical survival of the Kingdom and its citizens depends on climate change control, at a time when the oil and gas on which its economy depends is destined to become a stranded asset and as the outdoor temperature of their country relentlessly and rapidly rises toward a levels that the human physiology cannot survive.

## Appendix B: 2020 G20 Extraordinary Summit Commitments

Subject	Number of commitments
Health	20
Global economy	9
Trade	7
International cooperation	4
Financial stability	3
Aid	3
Labour and employment	1
Total	47

Identified by Brittaney Warren, March 26, 2020.

### Commitments:

2020-1: We are strongly committed to presenting a united front against this common threat. (international cooperation)

2020-2: The G20 is committed to do whatever it takes to overcome the pandemic, along with the World Health Organization (WHO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank Group (WBG), United Nations (UN), and other international organizations, working within their existing mandates. (international cooperation)

We are determined to spare no effort, both individually and collectively, to:

2020-3: Protect lives. (health)

2020-4: Safeguard people's jobs and incomes. (labour and employment)

2020-5: Restore confidence, preserve financial stability, revive growth and recover stronger. (financial stability)

2020-6: Minimize disruptions to trade and global supply chains. (trade)

2020-7: Provide help to all countries in need of assistance. (aid)

2020-8: Coordinate on public health and financial measures. (health)

### *Fighting the Pandemic*

2020-9: We commit to take all necessary health measures (health)

2020-10: [We]...seek to ensure adequate financing to contain the pandemic and protect people, especially the most vulnerable. (health)

2020-11: We will share timely and transparent information; (health)

2020-12: [We will...] exchange epidemiological and clinical data; (health)

2020-13: [We will...] share materials necessary for research and development; (health)

2020-14: [We will...] strengthen health systems globally, including through supporting the full implementation of the WHO International Health Regulations (IHR 2005). (health)

2020-15: We will expand manufacturing capacity to meet the increasing needs for medical supplies and ensure these are made widely available, at an affordable price, on an equitable basis, where they are most needed and as quickly as possible. (health)

2020-16: We fully support and commit to further strengthen the WHO's mandate in coordinating the international fight against the pandemic, including the protection of front-line health workers, delivery of medical supplies, especially diagnostic tools, treatments, medicines, and vaccines. (health)

2020-17: We will quickly work together and with stakeholders to close the financing gap in the WHO Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan. (health)

2020-18: We further commit to provide immediate resources to the WHO's COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund...on a voluntary basis. (health)

2020-19: [We further commit to provide immediate resources to...] the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation (CEPI)...[on a voluntary basis.] (health)

2020-20: [We further commit to provide immediate resources to...] Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, on a voluntary basis)...[on a voluntary basis.] (health)

2020-21: To safeguard the future, we commit to strengthen national, regional, and global capacities to respond to potential infectious disease outbreaks by substantially increasing our epidemic preparedness spending. (health)

2020-22: We further commit to work together to increase research and development funding for vaccines and medicines (health)

2020-23: [We further commit to work together to]...leverage digital technologies (health)

2020-24: [We further commit to work together to]...strengthen scientific international cooperation (health)

2020-25: We will bolster our coordination, including with the private sector, towards rapid development, manufacturing and distribution of diagnostics, antiviral medicines, and vaccines, adhering to the objectives of efficacy, safety, equity, accessibility, and affordability. (health)

#### ***Safeguarding the Global Economy***

2020-26: We commit to do whatever it takes and to use all available policy tools to minimize the economic ... damage from the pandemic (global economy)

2020-27: [We commit to do whatever it takes and to use all available policy tools to]... minimize the ... social damage from the pandemic (global economy)

2020-28: [We commit to do whatever it takes and to use all available policy tools to]... restore global growth (global economy)

2020-29: [We commit to do whatever it takes and to use all available policy tools to]... maintain market stability (global economy)

2020-30: [We commit to do whatever it takes and to use all available policy tools to]... strengthen resilience. (global economy)

2020-31: We will continue to conduct bold and large-scale fiscal support. (global economy)

2020-32: We will continue to address risks of debt vulnerabilities in low-income countries due to the pandemic. (global economy)

#### ***Addressing International Trade Disruptions***

2020-33: Consistent with the needs of our citizens, we will work to ensure the flow of vital medical supplies, critical agricultural products, and other goods and services across borders (trade)

2020-34: [Consistent with the needs of our citizens, we will work to]...resolve disruptions to the global supply chains, to support the health and well- being of all people. (trade)

2020-35: We commit to continue working together to facilitate international trade and coordinate responses in ways that avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade. (trade)

2020-36: Emergency measures aimed at protecting health will be targeted, proportionate, transparent, and temporary. (trade)

2020-37: We reiterate our goal to realize a free, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent, predictable and stable trade and investment environment (trade)

2020-38: [We reiterate our goal to]...keep our markets open. (trade)

#### ***Enhancing Global Cooperation***

2020-39: We will work swiftly and decisively with the front-line international organizations, notably the WHO, IMF, WBG, and multilateral and regional development banks to deploy a robust, coherent, coordinated, and rapid financial package and to address any gaps in their toolkit. (financial stability)

2020-40: We stand ready to strengthen the global financial safety nets. (financial stability)

2020-41: We will strengthen capacity building and technical assistance, especially to at-risk communities [developing countries, least developed countries, Africa and small-island developing states] (aid)

2020-42: We stand ready to mobilize development and humanitarian financing. (aid)

2020-43: We stand ready to react promptly and take any further action that may be required. (international cooperation)

2020-44: We express our readiness to convene again as the situation requires. (international cooperation)

2020-45: We will protect human life (health)

2020-46: [We will]...restore global economic stability (global economy)

2020-47: [We will]...lay out solid foundations for strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth. (global economy)

The March 26 emergency summit generated 47 commitments, led by 20 on health and nine on the economy and three on development, but with only one referencing digitalization and none on climate change.

Of the 47 commitments, 33 were on single subject silos, while 14 synergistically linked two subjects (but none linked three or more). Of the 14 synergistic commitments, seven promised more financing, resources and spending on health, while another committed more manufacturing capacity for this purpose. Three linked health to trade. Two noted the pandemic's economic and social harm to developing country debt. None suggested that health created wealth. One promised to "leverage digital technologies" for health.

## **Appendix C: G20 March 2020 Summit Shortcomings**

First, there was no increase in the permanent base budget of the WHO. Instead, the focus was on disease- and instrument-specific purposes that raise issues of transaction costs and gaps in achieving the needed health-in-all policies, including the whole-of-global-governance and whole-of-society policies needed now.

Second, G20 leaders did not mandate medical assistance to be provided across borders, nor did they commend the world of non-governmental organizations such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent or Médecins Sans Frontières, which selflessly help perform such tasks.

Third, G20 leaders did not commit to debt relief for the poorest, in a way that could give hard-pressed recipients the funds for health care that they badly need.

Fourth, their promise to liberalize trade in health and related goods and services was partial and weak. Even in the section on trade the G20 leaders did not refer to the potential role of the World Trade Organization in this regard. Nor did they promise to temporarily suspend some of their members trade sanctions on Iran, Venezuela and other such countries now struggling with a COVID-19 crisis that could easily spread to their G20 neighbours close at hand.

Fifth, there was no reference at all to gender. This was despite the great gender divide in those who are current dying of COVID-19 as patients, many of whom are male, and the predominantly female health workforce, many of whom are now serving and dying on the front lines.

Sixth, there was no move to make the World Health Organization director general a permanent member of the G20 summit, as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank have been from the start.

Finally, the G20 leaders thus left much to do as the COVID-19 pandemic escalates in the coming months. But unlike the G7 leaders 10 days before, the G20 leaders did not promise to meet again next month to continue their work.

### Appendix D: G20 2020 Riyadh Declaration Commitments

Issue area	Number of commitments	Percentage of commitments
Health	14	13%
Crime and corruption	14	13%
Trade	10	9%
Macroeconomic policy	9	8%
Gender	8	7%
Development	7	7%
Labour and employment	6	6%
Financial regulation	6	6%
Environment	6	6%
Human rights	4	4%
Energy	4	4%
Climate change	3	3%
Food and agriculture	3	3%
Infrastructure	3	3%
Digital economy	3	3%
International taxation	3	3%
Reform of international financial institutions	2	2%
Migration and refugees	1	1%
International cooperation	1	1%
Total	107	100%

Note: Identified and compiled by Brittany Warren, November 22, 2020, percentages rounded up

## **Appendix E: Riyadh’s Synergistic-Siloed Commitment Balance**

The regular G20 Riyadh Summit on November 21–22, 2020, saw a similar emphasis on single subject silos, as COVID-19 crowded out Saudi Arabia’s opening promise to have its summit give more priority to environmental subjects than any G20 summit before. Riyadh’s 107 commitments were led by 14 on health, with trade taking 10, macroeconomic policy nine, development seven, the environment six, and climate change and the digital economy only three each (see Appendix B).

Of the nine macroeconomic commitments, seven were siloed and only two synergistic. One synergistic commitment did link to health, society and the environment, and the other linked to health alone. Of the seven development commitments, four were siloed and three were synergistic, with all of synergistic commitments linked to the economic subject of financing for development.

Of the 14 health commitments, 11 were siloed and only three were synergistic. All three synergistic commitments linked to development, and one added links to the economy and society as well. Of the three digital economy commitments, two were siloed, one was synergistically linked to youth, women, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Of the three climate change commitments, two made a synergistic link to the economy or energy, in ways seen to put the economy first.

In all, on these five key traditional and expanded subjects a strong majority of 25 commitments were siloed versus 11 synergistic. Four of the five subjects had a majority of siloed commitments, with climate change the sole exception. Only one commitment made a trilateral link among the economy, health and the natural environment. None of these 25 commitments, nor any of the full set of 107 commitments, made a trilateral link among the economy, health and climate change itself, or even a bilateral one between health and climate change. Thus the Riyadh Summit left a very fragile foundation on which to build the synergistic links needed in the years ahead.

## Appendix F: Estimated Compliance with 2020 Riyadh Summit Commitments, by Subject and Host

Subject	# commitments	Difference of average <sup>a</sup>	All compliance	Host's average	Saudi Arabia (Host: 2020)	Italy (Host: 2021)	Indonesia (Host:) 2022	India Host: 2023
All	107	-8%	71%	63%	56%	68%	59%	69%
Macroeconomic policy	9	-4%	81%	77%	68%	76%	78%	86%
Financial regulation	6	-7%	76%	69%	65%	71%	66%	75%
Trade	10	-10%	66%	56%	56%	59%	52%	58%
International taxation	3	-8%	77%	69%	59%	78%	62%	76%
Development	7	-9%	67%	58%	50%	63%	54%	66%
Digital economy	3	-8%	62%	54%	57%	57%	44%	57%
Labour-employment	6	-7%	76%	69%	63%	75%	57%	79%
Gender	8	-7%	61%	54%	66%	73%	31%	46%
Infrastructure	3							
Climate change	3	-11%	69%	58%	33%	69%	63%	65%
Energy	4	-7%	70%	63%	62%	69%	64%	58%
Environment	6	-22%	57%	35%	20%	50%	30%	40%
Health	14	-14%	69%	55%	58%	50%	46%	66%
Food and agriculture	3	0	73%	73%	60%	80%	70%	80%
Crime and corruption	14	-18%	62%	44%	46%	55%	68%	46%

Compiled by John Kirton, February 5, 2021<sup>01</sup>

Number of commitments assessed for compliance, 2008–2019 = 330.

a. Difference between the average per summit and the host's average.

Compliance with a summit's commitments can be identified at the time commitments appear at the summit in two ways. The first way is to match the subjects with the most commitments with the average compliance on those subjects since G20 summits started in 2008, or in the most recent summits. The second way is to see the match between the summit's most commitment-rich subjects and compliance on those subjects by the members that hosted the summit that made them (e.g., Saudi Arabia in 2020) and that will host in the following years (e.g., Italy in 2021, Indonesia in 2022 and India in 2023). The accuracy of this estimate can be assessed by comparing the resulting estimates with the actual compliance reported at the end of a summit's implementing year. One can start by doing this for Hamburg in 2017, where the German host had reliably high compliance.

## Appendix G: G20 Ministerial Meetings Italy 2021

Totals: 14 meetings, 14 ministers, 5 clustered, 14 pre-summit

February 26–27	Finance ministers and central bank governors (virtual)
April 7–8	Finance ministers and central bank governors, to be determined
May 3–4	Culture and Tourism, Rome
June 22–23	Labour and Education, Catania, Sicily
June 28–30	Foreign Affairs and Development, Matero
June 30	Ad Hoc Session on Development, Brindisi
July 9–10	Economy and Finance, Venice
July 22–23	Environment, Climate and Energy, Naples
August 5–6	Innovation and Research, Trieste
September 5–6	Health, Rome
September 19–20	Agriculture, Florence
October 5	Trade, Sorrento
October 15–16	Finance ministers and central bank governors, Washington DC
October 29 or 30	Finance ministers and health ministers, Rome (in-person with health ministers participating virtually)

## **Appendix H: Climate Shocks 2021**

John Kirton, February 16, 2021

### **January**

10 Spain's worst snowstorm (Filomena) since 1980s in Madrid, 4 dead.

### **February**

14 Himalayan glaciers' collapse caused by rising temperatures and deforestation kills 52

16 Record cold and snow throughout lower 48 U.S. states kills many, causes blackouts, delays  
COVID-19 vaccinations and sends energy prices to new highs

16 Snow smothers Athens, Greece