

Economic Summits and G7 Policymaking: Improving Compliance and Credibility

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The paper surveys the compliance of the G7 member states with their summit commitments, presents explanations in variations in compliance by country, issue-area (environment and development, child labour and human rights, nuclear safety and weapons proliferation) and over time. Generally, the increasing level of compliance with Summit commitments can be explained by institutional variables and the role of regimes, and the political control exercised by leaders in accounting for compliance behaviour. The institutional variable is based on long-established departments possessing well-defined domestic implementation responsibilities and also manifesting strong institutional links to powerful multilateral organisations (i.e. Department of Finance versus Department of the Environment). Political control by leaders means that commitments made by Heads of State or Government carry greater weight and will be more likely to be complied with than those by ministers, tempered by approval ratings and popularity with the electorate. While past studies indicate an overall and rising level of Summit compliance in the positive range by Canada and the US with environment and development issues recently and with all issues overall, ultimately, the Summit process requires reform to improve compliance and advance Canada's foreign policy priorities.

Seven general recommendations to improve Summit compliance in ways that support Canadian foreign policy priorities include:

- focus Summit agendas on those issues where the G7 can credibly make a notable difference;
- ministerial meetings of Foreign Ministers should precede and follow G7 Summits;
- domestic issues that have not yet been internationalised should not be considered at G7 Summits and instead should be addressed in the Chairman's Summary;
- focus should be placed on policy initiatives whose means-ends relationships are well understood and accepted;
- commitments should be advanced where individual leaders and the collective heads of state and government hold both formal and real authority, and, consequently, avoid decisions on monetary policy;
- policy dialogue at Summits should embrace those areas where adequate domestic institutional bodies exist to develop and implement domestic policies;
- heads of state and government should meet at the same time ministers meet.

Specifically, the Canadian government should:

- maintain the resources required to monitor implementation initiatives;
- continue to provide annual reports on its own compliance and encourage others to do the same;
- increase awareness of Summit issues;
- privately disseminate information about compliance by their peers;
- mobilise expertise outside of government to encourage feedback and suggestions from other groups on implementation, monitoring and enforcement.