

A Critique of Australia's G20 Presidency and the Brisbane Summit 2014

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This article seeks to evaluate Australia as host of the Brisbane G20 Summit in 2014. The Australian G20 government, it appears, aimed to move the G20 from focusing on just responding to the financial crisis to a future growth orientation concentrating on structural reforms. To achieve this, Australia chose a narrow economic approach to the agenda. The Presidency sought to avoid engaging with broader security or climate change challenges. This effort to narrow focus and move away from a "war cabinet" approach met, however, with quite mixed success. A strong performance at the regulatory level, an emphasis on economic fundamentals and a place-branding approach to the Leaders' Summit, all efforts of the Australian host, appear to have been insufficient for Australia's G20 Presidency. Three additional factors seem necessary for a middle power like Australia to have impact on hosting the Leaders' Summit:

- evidence of substantial and effective political leadership;
- a credible outreach narrative to citizens broadly that emphasizes the unique perspective of the Host; and
- a serious investment in the troika style leadership of the Summit.

This essay raises questions over Australia's leadership of the G20, and then examines important broader questions of G20 leadership concerned with this institution's overall effectiveness and the success of the outreach efforts.

Introduction: Australia and the Brisbane Summit 2014

Brisbane is Australia's third largest city, in the tropical northern state of Queensland. It hosted the G20 Leaders' Summit in November 2014. This ended an intense year of diplomatic activity involving hundreds of officials in a wide variety of locations from Perth to Hobart to Uluru in Central Australia. The two-day summit led to extraordinary police powers for the security contingent of 6,000 troops and required an AU\$400 million commitment. At his closing press conference for the G20 Leaders' Summit in Brisbane, Prime Minister Tony Abbott stated:

... because of the efforts that the G20 has made this year, culminating in the last 48 hours, people right around the world are going to be better off and that's what it's all about: it is all about the people of the world being better off through the achievement of inclusive growth and jobs. (Abbott 2014)

Yet did Australia's efforts in fact lead to people around the world being better off? And even if this rather "high flying" objective is not achieved,

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can we judge the success of Australia's efforts? In particular, did Australia's efforts match other middle and emerging power hosts—Canada, the Republic of Korea (Korea), and Mexico?

This article first considers various constructions of success for a G20 host by global governance scholars, and then applies possible criteria to determine Australia's success. The analysis raises three particular challenges/criticisms of the Brisbane Summit and four legacy achievements contained in the final G20 Leaders' Communiqué and "Brisbane Action Plan."¹ Also released at the Summit were documents that outlined efforts on Ebola, Food Security, Infrastructure, Financial Inclusion, Anti-Corruption, and Beneficial Ownership (G20 2014).

The G20 in Transition

The G20 is currently the "premier forum for international economic cooperation," with political leaders from the nations that account for around 85 percent of the gross world product, 80 percent of world trade (or, if excluding EU intra-trade, 75 percent), and two-thirds of the world population. The G20 is composed of the established or traditional powers—the G7/8; namely Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United States, the UK (G7), and Russia.² The rest of the members are "structurally important" states Australia and Saudi Arabia, and the nine emerging market countries—Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa, Korea, and Turkey, and the European Union. Australia invited as its guests to the Brisbane Summit: Mauritania, as the 2014 Chair of the African Union; Myanmar, as the 2014 Chair of ASEAN; Senegal, representing the New Partnership for Africa's Development; Spain (permanent invitee); New Zealand and Singapore. Australia's troika partners were Mexico (2012), Russia (2013), and Turkey (2015). Following the Brisbane Summit, the troika members consisted of Russia, Australia, and China.

The Australian G20 Presidency aimed to move the G20 from responding to the previous global financial crisis to a future growth orientation focused on structural reforms. At the same time, Prime Minister Abbott determined that his presidency would focus on the core G20 agenda to provide economic growth and global financial stability. At a series of meetings, he was "adamant that the communiqué deal exclusively with the economy and abandon its previous issue of climate change and also . . . political security and global health concerns of the day" (Kulik and Bracht 2014).

While the great powers took control of the early crisis leaders' summits, since those initial summits there has been a series of nongreat powers—once known as middle power or emerging powers—which have received hosting privilege. To date this includes: Canada, Korea, Mexico, and now Australia. This group will be followed by Turkey in 2015. Experts, including Cooper and Mo (2013), have identified the opportunities and challenges for these states hosting arguably the most important economic summit for the international system. Three strategic elements are required, in my opinion, for such powers to achieve hosting success: evidence of political leadership; a

¹All primary documents referred to relating to the G20 in 2014 can be found archived on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, <http://www.g20australia.org/>.

²Following Russia's invasion of Crimea, the G7 suspended Russia and as a result the G8 became the G7 once more.

credible outreach narrative that emphasizes the unique perspective of the host; and a serious investment in the troika leadership.

The approach taken by this research is that of theory-guided process tracing.³ The evidence comes from comprehensive analysis of the “grey literature” produced by government and intergovernmental bodies; interactions with senior officials, ministers and shadow ministers and participant observation of policy forums by the author.⁴ The argument is influenced by the work of ANU’s [Ramesh Thakur \(2010\)](#), who argues that we are moving from a model of “club” diplomacy, which focuses on transnational elites who are culturally similar with only very powerful countries at the table (minilateralism), acting in secret, and dedicated to written agreements based on “high” politics such as traditional security threats to an alternative model. In contrast, the G20 should fuse the idea of network diplomacy and the distinctive features of economic diplomacy ([Woolcock 2013](#)), along with [Lawrence Susskind’s \(2009\)](#) ideas about multi-stakeholder dialogue at the global level. This would help us identify a wide array of actors, not exclusively states but additionally organized civil society, corporations, netizens, and others, but focus on which actors have influence, when and how. This prism opens up topics of “low politics” by using public diplomacy and increasing soft power. The G20 in 2015 is not quite the ultimate “club,” compared to the G7. However, it remains very opaque in its processes, which are run still by primarily finance officials though there is a second track—the Sherpa process that is focused particularly on agenda setting.

The analysis will also assess middle power strategies according to the criteria developed by global governance scholars such as [Andrew Cooper \(2010\)](#) and others, which often use Australia as an example. Australia, for instance, is working with Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, and Turkey to form MIKTA, a group led by foreign ministers at the moment with a wider remit than the G20, but with obvious advantages for G20 caucusing (see further [Jongryn](#)). Deliberative global governance theories are used to frame the risks and opportunities of various outreach activities, as explained by [Steven Slaughter \(2013a\)](#), and his definitions and use of terms legitimacy and accountability are adopted here.⁵ Civil society and its influence on global governance can be defined and examined using the work of Jan Aart Scholte, contrasting civil society influence and action around the World Trade Organization (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Group of 8 (G8).

Part One: Progress in the G20 under Australia’s Host Year

The G20 Leaders’ Summit is a new entity in international relations, only six years old. The G20 can itself be seen as the product of outreach by the G8, as the G8 faced challenges to its own legitimacy during the Asian financial crisis. It has become an important new global governance actor, more than a forum, dealing with crises, urging coordination to promote growth with a more representative group of states.

³For the use of in-case process-tracing combined with case comparison see [Waylen \(2014\)](#).

⁴The author was part of the Think20 process and a key adviser for the C20, and attended the St Petersburg and Brisbane Summits as a media commentator for the “Conversation” website.

⁵I focus on social legitimacy in the sense used by Max Weber, which may be defined as the property projected onto an action, rule, actor, or system by an actor’s belief that that action, rule, actor, or system is morally or legally legitimate. For discussions of G20 accountability see [te Velde \(2012\)](#).

Despite only six years and nine summits passing since the first leaders' meeting, the G20 is suffering a loss of confidence in its ability to successfully promote policy coordination between its members and achieve global economic stability and sustainable balanced growth, design financial regulation that prevents the next crisis, and progress financial architecture reform. Until now, the G20 has been seen as a nascent and "informal" economic forum with efficacy issues, and thus the main criteria for success focus on effectiveness. Effectiveness appears to be limited to evaluating whether a coordinated response to the 2008 crisis occurred, as debated by experts such as Daniel Drezner (2014) and Eric Helleiner (2014). Even on this limited but still complex criterion, eminent commentators such as these come to exactly the opposite conclusions.

Types of criticism depend on views of whether or not the G20 is a forum or an actor, or even a legitimate entity. Kharas and Lombardi (2012, 1) speak of "mixed" and "uneven" progress about the G20 as a whole, as do other well-placed commentators. Hugo Dobson (2007, 79) identified three key criticisms of the G8, which are now being levelled at the G20: low legitimacy, overlap with the work of other actors, and questionable effectiveness and value for money in terms of progress on its own agenda. Ian Bremmer (2012) writes of a "G-Zero world" without clear leadership. Many commentators criticize the G20 for its blinkered focus on economic issues and its lack of progress on allocating global public goods and solving transnational problems like climate change. Other critics (Cooper and Thakur 2013; Kirton 2013) focus on whether G20 members can achieve a targeted and appropriate agenda, and how leaders can demonstrate accountability to members and nonmembers for the implementation of this agenda. Even G20 success on individual measures is hotly debated, such as the implementation of G20 actions on fossil fuel subsidies, remittance targets and other promises (Harris Rimmer, 2013).

It is also difficult to disentangle which critiques are unique to the G20 itself or symptoms of wider diplomatic contestation or malaise. There are diplomatic impasses in a range of other international fora between rising powers such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (the BRICS), and the G7 countries (UK, United States, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, and Canada), but also other groups of nations, including regional actors in the Asia-Pacific (APEC and ASEAN) over questions such as maritime security, climate finance, and new development goals. As a result, more optimistic global governance scholars (Carin 2013) consider that the G20 should be a "lever for progress" on many issues facing global leaders because the correct actors are at the table to break these deadlocks. This latter approach was adopted by Australia. The Prime Minister Tony Abbott (News Corp Australia, 2014) stated the G20 is "large enough to be representative and small enough to be effective."

The effectiveness/efficiency claims of the G20 would seem to have been built on the idea of a small, compact and self-selected membership, which can move relatively quickly to make decisions, especially in a crisis.

The legitimacy of a global governance actor, on the other hand, usually rests on broad, expansive claims of representation, or a universal mandate, like the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. The solution for the G20 may be to improve its outreach to greater number and wider array of state, private sector and civil society actors, and increase accountability measures

at the leader level. This article therefore takes outreach seriously. As the Australian Sherpa Heather Smith noted:

Governments alone cannot solve the economic challenge. All parts of society have a part to play and have a significant stake in G20 outcomes. This was recognised in the 5th Anniversary Vision Statement that Leaders agreed upon at the Saint Petersburg Summit last year. (2014)

At this historical juncture, according to [Cooper and Thakur \(2013\)](#) the G20 can also be seen as a critical platform of the future of global governance, as it is a forum with deliberately shared membership between emerging powers and dominant or established powers, and nimble enough to move quickly. In August 2013, the IMF reported that for the first time in recorded history, the combined gross domestic product of emerging and developing markets, adjusted for purchasing price parity, eclipsed the combined measure of advanced established economies ([Yanofsky 2013](#)). This is not to dismiss the serious legitimacy issues the G20 has with membership and outreach ([Slaughter 2013a,b](#)), but to see them as intimately linked. Finally in Brisbane, for example, outside tensions were on display, as is true of any summit. In this Summit, there were tensions between G20 members, especially members of the G7 and Russia. Tensions ran high over the conflict in the Ukraine, culminating in President Putin leaving early.

In short, just as views of the G20 as a forum or an actor differ, there is no current consensus in the literature on how the success of a G20 Presidency should be measured, considering legitimacy, effectiveness, or accountability; with what priority; and using what indicators (see further [Kirton 2014b](#) for the most developed framework). Should we take an instrumental view of effectiveness, in that the G20's role is to prevent or mitigate crisis and absence of or diminution of crisis equals success? Should we prefer a normative view that focuses on accountability, and so judges any enhancement of cooperation on financial regulation as positive? Or should we focus on legitimacy and see the G20 as successful only if it provides opportunities for rising powers to become responsible rule-makers, and new architects of global governance?

Australia's host year showed a distinct preference for accountability at a technical level. This was a natural choice for a middle power, which was hosting the G20 at the leader level for the first time. Australia as a leader cannot guarantee the effectiveness, even of agreed G20 measures. A deeper understanding of the G20 mode of operation is important in this sense—G20 members can analyze, forecast, share information, model good behavior, sequence domestic reforms, support reform of institutions with universal mandates—but it cannot “do,” or pledge as a group. The United States, EU, or China might be able to underwrite effectiveness of particular measures agreed at the G20, but most other members cannot. The long-term effectiveness of the growth targets in the Brisbane Action Plan requires domestic implementation by each member, and will be monitored by the IMF and Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Australia is in no position to enforce compliance. Instead Australia relied on improving peer-review mechanisms and transparency, as other middle powers have done in the past. This is an important consequence of the individual country plans that have been agreed to meet the growth target.

Part Two: Australia's success as G20 President

Given the lack of agreement on what constitutes a hosting success, we are left with a modest test for Australia. Success can be measured first by focusing on Australia's own concerns and whether they were achieved. Even this discussion is complicated by the fact that the former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and former Treasurer Wayne Swan who had won the hosting for the G20 had enunciated an ambitious vision based on middle power strategy. Due to elections, these politicians were unable to participate in the Australian Presidency. The G20 political leadership team was entirely new. The Australian Sherpa Dr Heather Smith, a respected senior member of Treasury, was appointed after the change of government.

Nevertheless, it was clear that the Australian Government at a bipartisan level aimed to display leadership during its term and within the troika. At the same time, Australia was exploring its place in the "Asian Century" as a regional actor, and was an elected member of the UN Security Council for 2013–2014. Specifically with respect to the G20, Australia clearly wanted to bring some resolution to the crisis response phase of the forum and turn to the growth agenda, which was more relevant to the countries less affected by the crisis. This was in itself ambitious. [Beeson and Higgott \(2014, 215\)](#) argue that middle powers do have the potential to successfully implement "games of skill," especially at moments of international transition. As Australia's Sherpa [Heather Smith \(2014\)](#) stated:

As chair, we are taking a disciplined approach, focusing tightly on areas where the G20 can best make a real difference, while finding ways to maintain political momentum in the absence of an immediate crisis.

The Abbott Government also had promoted an attitude to its foreign policy captured by the phrase "Jakarta not Geneva." Such an approach signified a preference for bilateral interactions with the region rather than UN-based multilateralism. With Julie Bishop MP as Australia's first female foreign minister, the Coalition also prioritized economic diplomacy, as exemplified by the repeated refrain from Finance Minister [Joe Hockey \(2014\)](#) that Australia is "open for business."

On its own terms, Australia likely should have sought four key outcomes including:

1. to lead a successful year which produces clear outcomes, strengthens the G20 as a global governance actor, and produces a strong leaders' declaration;
2. to emphasize the contribution of the Asia-Pacific region to the global economy, and represent this contribution as ably as possible;
3. to represent Australia's foreign policy interests and highlight its own contribution to the global economy; and
4. to receive approval from the Australian citizenry, media and civil society actors in a political and democratic sense.

Australia on these terms succeeded partially in areas (1) and (3), but had mixed success in areas (2) and (4). This reflects my general conclusion that the activities led by officials as opposed to politicians were more successful.

The problem with elevating the G20 Summit to a political leaders' forum is that an interested observer then expects economic diplomacy par excellence, with displays of leadership, inspiration and political mediation and

triaging of the world's most difficult economic issues. What one gets at a G20 Summit, however, is often: personality politics, empty ritual, leaders struggling with complex economic briefs, an inability for leaders to switch out of the domestic frame, national grandstanding that falls flat in front of an international audience; and basic diplomatic missteps. As former British Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown wrote in 2013:

In short, precisely what world leaders sought to avoid—a global financial free-for-all, enabled by ad hoc, unilateral actions—is what has happened. Political expediency, a failure to think and act globally, and a lack of courage to take on vested interests are pushing us inexorably toward the next crash. (Kirshner 2014)

Australia's problems in regard to the objective noted above were mainly self-created. Australian politicians mishandled the climate change politics. There were some diplomatic errors as well, including Abbott's now famous threat to "shirtfront" President Putin⁶ and gaffes at the Summit itself, described below. Finally, the political leadership team lacked global governance experience, despite their ministerial experience under the previous Howard Government.

However, there was also a range of difficult global external issues such as the Ebola outbreak, the tragic Malaysian Airlines flights, the rise of Islamic State, and the annexation of the Crimea, which would have challenged likely any host. Moreover, the world economy is still changing rapidly and defying traditional economic theories with the "new normal." The troika is even more important as a "bloc breaker" in these circumstances, and so more nimble diplomacy is required by G20 hosts, such as Australia.

Australia's Achievements

Economic Growth

In a regulatory sense, the Australian presidential year left the G20 strengthened, which should improve effectiveness of G20 implementation in the short term. As Tristram Sainsbury (2014) reflected:

An energetic Australian Presidency has also strengthened habits of cooperation within the forum through improvements in managing time, the length of speeches, and maintaining the relevancy of the G20 discussions through peer-to-peer conversations and informality of interactions.

The legacy of the Brisbane Summit will be judged by the economic community over time, but I would suggest three "legacy achievements" from the agenda: the growth targets, the female labor participation target, and the Global Infrastructure Hub in Sydney. The growth targets aim to achieve a

⁶The tension between PM Abbott and President Putin in the lead-up to the G20 Summit was over the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 in eastern Ukraine. The Russian government was implicated in this tragic July 17 crash, which killed 298 passengers and crew members, of whom 27 had Australian passports and another 11 were Australian residents. Suddenly, Russia and its President Vladimir Putin were in the mainstream Australian news every day, along with a reminder of his expected visit to Brisbane in November. Senior Australian ministers spoke of "disinviting" him unless an inquiry was held. The Russian foreign minister responded, "We altogether, not just Australia, formed the G20." Prime Minister Abbott had to back down on the threat to ban. And so on 13 October, he made the "shirt-fronting" comment (a relatively obscure Australian Football League term), clearly an attempt to save face in front of a domestic audience.

2.1 percent increase in global growth over the following five years on top of business as usual. The *Brisbane Action Plan* contains over 800 separate reform measures, which must be implemented by each government. There is skepticism from observers such as University of Toronto's John Kirton (2014) about whether the targets are achievable. However, the identified measures may offer a more coherent accountability framework, and the list allows citizens to judge domestic progress against structural economic reforms.

Another economic achievement that has received significant positive acclaim is the "25 by 25" pledge by G20 countries to reduce the gap between female and male workforce participation by 25 percent over the next ten years. This equates to "100 million new jobs for women." There was also progress on the financial inclusion agenda. However, it does allow for "national circumstance" to be taken into account, which may allow countries to avoid accountability.

Gender Progress

Brisbane's legacy achievement was to highlight the importance of women as economic actors and provide some accountability in the form of a measurable target. The G20 needed to make progress on gender equality, as every other national actor has over the last twenty years. Despite a promising paragraph in the Los Cabos Leaders' Declaration and several references to health and education over the years, the G20 has failed to make progress on gender issues in the global economy, notwithstanding the evidence for productivity improvement.

Infrastructure

The G20 will establish a Global Infrastructure Hub to be located in Sydney. This Infrastructure Hub is designed to address the U.S.\$70 trillion gap in infrastructure. The Hub will be funded by contributions from governments and also from the private sector. This was a recommendation that initially came from the Business20 (B20) and was accepted.

Australia's Challenges

Legitimacy

The Australian leadership made breakthroughs in a number of issue areas. The question now is how will Australia preserve its legacy through participation in the troika? Australia lost opportunities to strengthen multilateral institutions. Paul Martin, Canada's former Prime Minister and a major advocate for a leaders' summit recently posited a piece that argued that a core element of G20 legitimacy is support for the importance of multilateral institutions "... for it is they who have been delegated much of the responsibility for ensuring that globalization works." Australia chose to set up the Global Infrastructure Hub outside of the current Multilateral Development Banks. It chose not to elevate discussion of the Sustainable Development Goals that follow on UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Leaders' Declaration on Ebola failed to deal with the problems in the World Health Organization. The exception to this failure to strengthen the multilateral institutions is Australia's strong support for the WTO. Yet at the national political level, Australia has been an active participant in the Trans

Pacific Partnership Agreement—one of a number of mega-regional agreements being negotiated outside the WTO.

Accountability

It is on development and climate change that the bifurcation of views on the legitimacy and accountability issues is most clear in the Asia-Pacific region. These issues also provide a case study of the Development Working Group (DWG). Under this approach, it is not just the diffuse focus of the G20 agenda that is the “problem”; it is the framing of that agenda, and outreach around that framing. From this perspective, Australia’s strict focus on the core economic agenda and growth targets did not appear to capture the historical moment, did not engage sufficiently with concerns about economic inequality and allowed Australia’s own foreign policy stance on climate change to become a contentious issue at the Summit.

Did Australia preside over “a tale of two G20s?” At the moment, there are two distinct narratives about the Brisbane G20. One narrative emphasizes collaboration between transnational business and the traditional economies to resist distribution of profit and value (“the hot tub party” thesis). The counter-narrative is that the G20 is a struggle of political will to regulate markets for the benefit of citizens in which emerging economies have the potential to become rule-makers (the “Anything but G-Zero” thesis).

The tale of the G20 as a “big hot tub party for leaders” (Kirton 2013) sees the G20 growth agenda as a Malthusian struggle—the richest countries set the rules, take the gains, grow even richer, and let the rest slip. The U.S. failure to approve IMF reforms, spills over from quantitative easing, and even Australian Treasurer Mr. Hockey’s “two percent growth targets” could fit that narrative. The BRICS are facing criticism that they will just join the hot tub party, not move the party to a bigger pool (Nigeria of South Africa, Malaysia of Indonesia, Chile of Argentina). All growth is not equally good for G20 legitimacy (Nnadozie 2014). If the G20 is not supporting rule of law or deriving legitimacy from universal mandate, then the question is “What has the G20 done for me lately?” Expectations turn to performance, with attendant pressure for short-term deliverables. Under this framing, the question is, “What can the G20 deliver for developing countries?”

The other tale of G20 is a forum where brave political leadership tries to coordinate markets, banks, and corporates using their regulatory power and political will to deal with inequality within and between G20 countries and grow the pie for all. Trade reforms, the role of the Financial Stability Board, ending corporate tax evasion and banking regulation fits that narrative. Financial stability is a global public good, and policy cooperation between the major countries is therefore valuable. The G20 offers space to consider the acceleration of the paradigmatic shifts caused by to the global economy of global value chains, Information and communications technology (ICT) and climate change, and also the impact of armed conflict and insecurity. One wonders if the main benefit of the G20 is making sure all the leaders are forced to understand the technical communiqués, and it certainly does not hurt the media contingent. The framing for this tale would be the G20’s comparative advantage as a forum for political leadership coping with the human consequences of globalization.

In terms of specifying the “people left better off” by the Brisbane Summit, Australia found it hard to answer the question, “What are the development

consequences of our focus on macroeconomic coordination and financial regulation, on our own populations and those in other states?" The nexus between the G20, rapid growth, and progress on development issues is contested. The policy efforts are deepening but not fast enough to deal with the parallel political negotiations over climate and development goals. Unless these efforts are recognized, the G20 will be seen as a finance forum with delusions of grandeur rather than the premier forum for macroeconomic cooperation.

The world may be facing a reckoning in 2015 over the many crucial international development issues including: climate change finance, aid effectiveness, transparency reforms, and the end of the UN MDGs, which provide the current global framework and targets for development. The Australian G20 year seemed to do little to move these conversations forward.

Australia has been explicit as the host nation that focusing on development is fundamental to its growth mandate. Australia stated that it considered the impact on developing countries of the G20 agenda as a whole by linking development actions to growth. As the Overview document notes, "[e]merging market and developing economies contribute around three quarters of global growth." For example, Prime Minister Abbott has focused on the development aspects of trade, specifically "working together on practical actions to remove obstacles to trade and enhance countries' ability to participate in global value chains through domestic reform." Finance Minister Hockey lauded the OECD Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) agenda as increasing domestic budgets for developing and developed countries.

Australia and Developing Countries

A challenge for the Brisbane Summit was how to identify and achieve practical actions to help developing countries, particularly the low-income countries, and elevate certain issues that relate to development to the Leaders' level. Australia prioritized the following three issues through the DWG, which were prosecuted successfully at the officials' level, but not raised apparently to the political.

Conditions for Attracting Infrastructure Investment

The DWG examined potential implications for Least Industrialized Countries (LICs) from work of the former G20 Study Group on Financing for Investment (SG) and strengthen their coordination with the now Infrastructure and Investment Working Study Group (IIWG), chaired by Germany, Indonesia, and Mexico. The leaders in St Petersburg also endorsed the Work Plan prepared by the G20 Study Group on Financing for Investment and called for particular attention to be given to ways to improve public-private partnership (PPP) arrangements.

The design/risk issues for investment in infrastructure for development outcomes is clearly an area of the development agenda that had the potential to be placed on the leadership track negotiations by Australia's "infrastructure prime minister." However, the issues of how to increase private investment are difficult to navigate, as shown by the recent G20 report, *Practical Solutions and Models for Addressing Obstacles to Institutional Investment in Infrastructure in Developing Countries* (2014).

The issue of PPPs in this area raises significant concerns for many development commentators.⁷ This debate comes in the context of more participation and consideration of the role and responsibilities of business in international development more generally, as well as dominance of economic diplomacy. A key debate for Brisbane should have been how to finance and handle the risk issues for what I term “leapfrog” green and clean infrastructure (including technology and social infrastructure) that meets the development needs of states and also safeguards vulnerable communities.

Is the new Global Infrastructure Hub in Sydney something that should be welcomed by non-G20 members, especially emerging and developing economies? Most development experts agree there is an underinvestment in pro-poor infrastructure globally. The OECD estimates global infrastructure requirements by 2030 to be around U.S.\$50 trillion. The International Energy Agency also estimated that adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change over the next forty years to 2050 will require around U.S.\$45 trillion or around U.S.\$1 trillion a year (OECD 2013, 26).

Infrastructure that opens access to markets or social infrastructure can improve the lives of poor people. The consequences of a lack of investment fall most heavily on the poor, such as the almost 900 million people in the world who do not have access to clean, safe drinking water, or the 2.6 billion living without basic sanitation. The question is how to make such infrastructure investment and implementation truly pro-poor. Focusing on infrastructure investment for macroeconomic growth can, but does not automatically, benefit people living in extreme poverty, as they can be affected by displacement, environmental damage, or being forced to pay more for basic services.

There is the larger issue too, of capital flowing “up-hill” (Strube and Grenville 2013, 2) from emerging markets to developed economies, instead of “connecting the surplus savings of developed countries with the high social-return infrastructure investment opportunities in emerging markets.” Linked to this idea is the urging of the OECD for nations to promote “patient, productive and engaged” capital when investing in infrastructure.

Australia needs follow-up by joining with Turkey and China to talk to LICs about the infrastructure investment agenda to be pursued by the Global Infrastructure Hub and the new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Australia needs to open debates about the issue of PPPs in this area, as such partnerships raise significant concerns. A key debate that seemed to be absent in Brisbane was how to finance and handle the risk issues that meets the developmental infrastructure needs of states and also safeguards vulnerable communities. The role of the multilateral development banks and the hard-won learning about the role of safeguards will be crucial to the success of this agenda. The Heinrich Böll Stiftung report (2014:2) asks, “What kind of infrastructure is necessary and where? For whose benefit? How should the cost/benefits of infrastructure proposals be assessed? How will proposed infrastructure affect the planet’s carbon footprint? How can investment be brought into underserved countries, or continents, such as Africa? How should infrastructure finance be generated? Are PPPs the right

⁷Callan, Margaret and Robin Davies, When business meets aid: analysing public-private partnerships for international development. *Development Policy Centre Discussion Paper No. 28*, 1 April 2013.

modality for infrastructure development?" These seem to be the right questions, and the best way to test them is to ask LICs and civil society how to proceed in particular contexts, bearing in mind the "do no harm" approach.

Strengthening Tax Systems

Civil society organizations have urged the G20 to take action to address tax havens and improve tax transparency so that developing countries do not lose the revenue they need to invest in ending poverty and inequality.⁸ This is in recognition of the fact that corruption "increases costs for businesses and deprives developing countries of up to USD 40 billion each year" (C20 2014).

The DWG stated that in 2014, they worked with the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes to identify and address the obstacles to Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI) for developing countries, and reinforce support to developing country systems. It will continue to promote the Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance among developing countries. In relation to the BEPS agenda, it aims to support revenue authorities both through bilateral programs and multilateral programs such as Tax Inspectors Without Borders.

The DWG worked with the Global Platform for Financial Inclusion in 2014 to explore options to strengthen financial inclusion work in developing countries and targeted actions to harness emerging mechanisms such as electronic payments and mobile technology that can significantly improve access. They intended to increase uptake by focusing on incentives, financial literacy, education, and consumer protection for the poor, in particular vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and migrants. Australian civil society leaders were advocating inclusive growth and addressing rising inequality within nations through the C20 (Civil 20).

Australia's efforts did partially lead to G20 advancing its key goal of Strong, Sustainable and Developed Growth because it attempted to align the efforts of the DWG with the core agenda of the G20 instead of remaining peripheral, and this is the beginning of a more productive G20 strategy. However, the work of the DWG was not sufficiently elevated to the Leaders' level, and was countered by the "focus on fundamentals" approach of the Treasurer.

Australia's Mistakes as Host

Australia demonstrated admirable proficiency in economic governance at least at the process and technical level. At the leader level, however, the G20 stumbled at times to step up to an economic leadership role. The relatively new Abbott Government was also distracted by domestic tension over the failure to pass its national budget measures. They focused on the security of the Summit at the expense of citizen engagement. Arguably, the Abbott team also may have paid too much attention to the B20 at the expense of other engagement groups with broader social concerns. The following is a brief sketch of incidents at the Summit itself that could be considered as diplomatic gaffes and mistakes.

⁸*Recommendations of the Civil 20 on the G20, the MDGs and the Post-2015 Processes, May 2013.*

The worst diplomatic mistake Australia made was revealed only well after the Summit, with revelations in March 2015 that the Australian Department of Immigration sent leaders' personal details, including passport numbers, to a senior official organizing the Asian Cup. The Department (Farrell 2015) then decided not to inform the leaders of the breach, as the risks were "very low."

Not all the leaders attended Brisbane. Argentina's President Kirchner was ill, and Saudi Arabia sent a prince. Some leaders, including Indonesian President Widodo, missed the second day, and President Putin left early.

The International Media Center in the Brisbane Convention Center was only ever half-full, with many complaints that visas and accreditation had been refused or approved too late to G20 participants. Members of the Labor20 (L20) received particularly bad treatment in terms of accreditation, and the Prime Minister refused to meet them. Communication to the Brisbane public about G20 security and travel restrictions were so successful that the center of the city was almost deserted. The feared protests in fact proved to be quite small, in part due to the searing heat. There was a barbecue held outdoors in over 40°C heat where leaders must have felt slowly roasted themselves.

The precedent of the Ebola declaration is still something for global governance experts to debate, but many criticized the adequacy of the declaration as a response. The lack of reference to the economic risks caused by Russia's annexation of Crimea also received adverse comment (Kirton 2014a).

Mr. Abbott began the program with a leaders' retreat, without officials but the remarks televised. It was widely reported that Abbott's remarks missed the mark in both tone and appropriateness for such an occasion (Dixon 2014). President Obama's remarks at the University of Queensland directly followed and, for most analysts, comparisons were odious.

Mr. Abbott's performance improved over the two days. The trade session was a highlight with real exchanges and animation. The closing press conference was nearly an hour late and unfortunately lost much of the international press who left to hear President Obama but was a commendable effort with a substantive and well-drafted communiqué to support his remarks. Mr. Abbott's efforts to frame his unwavering support of the coal industry as a development issue was met with raised eyebrows. Yet the follow-up proved a chimera. By the time of the first Finance Ministers meeting following Brisbane, Mr. Abbott and Mr. Hockey were fighting off a leadership spill and failed to send even a Cabinet Minister to the meeting.

The main mistake Australia made led to the world media focused on the fight over the climate paragraph. The G20 Leaders' Summit in Brisbane dealt with climate change in one paragraph of its three-page communiqué.

19. We support strong and effective action to address climate change. Consistent with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its agreed outcomes, our actions will support sustainable development, economic growth, and certainty for business and investment. We will work together to adopt successfully a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the UNFCCC that is applicable to all parties at the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) in Paris in 2015. We encourage parties that are ready to communicate their intended nationally determined contributions well in advance of COP21 (by the first quarter of 2015 for those parties ready to do so). We reaffirm our support for mobilising finance for adaptation and mitigation, such as the Green Climate Fund (G20 2014).

The complicated story behind this paragraph related to a recalcitrant host and leader; an effort to make history by the United States and China; and rising tension before COP 21 in Paris.

Australia's G20 Presidency was characterized by a perceived (or real) hostility to climate negotiations and progressive climate policy. The U.S.-China agreement, which immediately preceded the Summit, put pressure on Australia to pledge support to the Green Climate Fund, and led to public reproof from Australia's allies. This was clear in the speech delivered by President Obama at the University of Queensland (2014).

As we develop, as we focus on our economics, we cannot forget the need to lead on the global fight against climate change. Now, I know that's - (applause) - I know there's been a healthy debate in this country about it. (Laughter.) Here in the Asia Pacific, nobody has more at stake when it comes to thinking about and then acting on climate change.

Here, a climate that increases in temperature will mean more extreme and frequent storms, more flooding, rising seas that submerge Pacific islands. Here in Australia, it means longer droughts, more wildfires. The incredible natural glory of the Great Barrier Reef is threatened. Worldwide, this past summer was the hottest on record. No nation is immune, and every nation has a responsibility to do its part.

The G20 has never had an adequate response to climate change. But Australia has been out of step on climate issues in a variety of international fora, and so the resistance to broaden the agenda became perceived as almost climate denial. According to the former Australian official [Mike Callaghan \(2014\)](#) in our own summit, with our closest ally, Australia lost control of the headline, and we have only ourselves to blame.

The overall lesson for non-G8 G20 leaders dealing with difficult domestic reforms and faltering popularity is that the Summit does require significant investment from the leader personally in the lead-up to the Summit. Mr. Abbott stated in his closing remarks that he had left much of the G20 Presidential year in the hands of Mr. Hockey and Sherpa Heather Smith. Important political conversations require trust to be built and a leadership vision to be shared before demanding spontaneity. As [Prime Abbott \(2014\)](#) urged:

I asked all leaders to attempt, as far as they could, to throw away the scripts and speak from their hearts and to a remarkable extent that's happened over this weekend.

Even if a certain level of informality makes most Australians comfortable, it was not at all clear that the BBQ lunch made the Indonesian or Chinese Presidents comfortable. In any event, MIKTA leaders generally need to build their political capital before the next Summit and work with their trioka partners to amplify their efforts.

Australian Efforts at Outreach

Only in 2013 did G20 leaders identify outreach as crucial to their mission (St Petersburg Leaders Declaration 2013). The G20 "outreach strategy" refers to the diplomatic meetings and communications strategies used by the host state to let the rest of the international community know the priorities of the G20 Summits, to consult with nonmember states, regional and international organizations, and their own citizens on their priorities, and

take on board their suggestions and reactions. The strategy should aim to address the tension between effective crisis management by a small number of key G20 members and the long-term objective to be a legitimate global actor whose decisions are supported by nonmembers and citizens.

As the G20 hosting operates on a “troika” system, this poses challenges for consistent outreach. The G20 has evolved rapidly, and has large sections of the agenda led by central bank governors and finance officials. Anne-Marie Slaughter (2004, 1) has referred to these officials as regulators rather than diplomats. The governance systems of each G20 member are diverse, but all would seem to include in way or another outreach to civil society. Serious strategic and coordinated attempts at outreach, even if minimalist in nature, are likely to have impact.

In a dedicated Lowy Institute *G20 Monitor* in January 2014 (the Lowy Institute is a well-known Australian think tank), a group of experts and contributors considered how to improve the G20’s overall communication and transparency. Some of the key findings by Lowy (2014, 1) at that time were as follows:

The G20’s work has myriad implications for non-member countries. The G20 process needs to reflect this in a meaningful way. The first step for the G20 in assuming its broader, global responsibility is to push ahead with its efforts to promote growth in the G20 economies, since other countries will also significantly benefit from a stronger, more sustainable, and more balanced recovery in the world’s biggest economies. The G20 can do a lot to address non-member countries’ concerns without losing its focus and core agenda. Promoting reform in international organisations and facilitating productive cooperation with non-members and invited guests are two key areas ... Now that the G20 is approaching its sixteenth anniversary, the effectiveness of its outreach process warrants a constructive and outcome-oriented debate ...

Since 2010, the G20 should be considered an actor in its own right due to the activity and knowledge products it generates through officials and international organizations. Issues of legitimacy and accountability have become increasingly important for the G20.

The outreach opportunities are limited by the unfamiliarity of the citizens of non-G8 member countries especially with the nature of the forum, and the desire to “nation-brand” through hosting the Summit. An example of this is the “koala diplomacy” (Harris Rimmer 2014b) in the Australian case. The schedule of G20 activities can test the human resources of a country such as Australia, yet outreach deserves investment. The G20 cannot afford to take the “secret men’s club” or an alienating technocrat approach. The G20 should communicate that it is a site of demonstrable soft power and regulatory power. Below is a typology of outreach.

Track One and 1.5 Diplomacy

- “Inreach” within current G20 architecture – building relations between the troika, finance stream, leaders stream, central bank governors (Troika Diplomacy).
- Outreach to non-G20 countries, with special focus on the 3G group led by Singapore, the African Union, and Asia-Pacific actors, as well as critics such as Norway.
- Outreach to international organizations, including the UN and regional actors.

Track Two Diplomacy (Conducted by Non-State Actors, Outcomes Communicated to State Officials)

- Outreach to organized civil society, domestic and international, such as speeches to the World Economic Forum.
- The formal outreach activities pre-Summit – Business, B20, Think20, Labor20, Youth 20, Girls 20, Civil 20.

Public Diplomacy (Conducted by State Officials Directly to Citizens in Foreign Countries)

- Outreach to general public through international and national and nontraditional media, including gender and demographic analysis.
 - a. G20 citizenry.
 - b. Non-G20 citizenry.
 - c. Protest movements.

Australia's Track One – Non-G20 Members

International outreach to nonmember countries was led by Australia's G20 Special Representative Daniel Sloper in a punishing schedule of dialog visits "to ensure that the best possible outcome is achieved for all countries" (G20 2014).

Australia focused on dialog with countries in the immediate region and with Asia-Pacific groupings, including APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), EAS (East Asia Summit), and PIF (the Pacific Islands Forum). Despite this regional focus, Australia's G20 narrative was not specific to the region nor focused on the shifting of economic power to the region in a way one might expect.

Australia's energy was also directed to MIKTA. The Mexican presidency of the G20 hosted the first ever meeting of MIKTA foreign ministers in Los Cabos, Mexico, February 19–20, 2012 to discuss pressing global issues on the G20 agenda such as governance, transnational crime, green growth, climate change, and food security and also wider non-G20 issues. Under the Australian Presidency, MIKTA ministers met on the fringe of the UN General Assembly during the annual leaders' week and before the Brisbane Summit. As the former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (2015) stated recently in Turkey, Australia has a core interest in building confidence in the G20 and encouraging communication between the BRICS and the G7 through MIKTA:

... because all our economies are ultimately vulnerable to any missteps of the great powers. And we, the middle and smaller powers of the world, do not want to become collateral economic damage.

The ability of invitees to participate fully in the yearlong meetings schedule has still not been fully addressed. Singapore, as chair of the Global Governance Group (3G), participates actively and brings a representative role to its G20 outings, but it is not always clear whether countries are able to fully participate on the basis of a one-off invitation. In the Brisbane case, transitional Myanmar represented ASEAN and in Turkey, Zimbabwe will participate. The African delegates to the Brisbane Summit were active in the negotiations leading to the Ebola declaration.

Australia's Track Two Engagement Groups

The Australian Sherpa and ministers have worked with each of the engagement partners, the L20, C20, T20, Y20, G(irls)20, and B20 and attended their summits. It is clear the B20 has been most influential (assisted by Boston Consulting) in its policy recommendations. At the officials' level, the engagement groups had regular access to working group meetings. The contribution of ideas was deemed by most partners to be excellent, with real impact on the communiqué. As [Heather Smith \(2014\)](#) stated:

G20 engagement groups, representing sectors that operate across borders – whether it be the trade of goods and services, the breadth of civil society activities, labour conditions, the ambition of youth or the contest of ideas – also contribute to the discussion about the G20 agenda. As major international economic actors, these groups have constituencies in most G20 countries and have a voice in getting governments to respond to challenges.

However, the treatment of the engagement groups at the political level was problematic. L20, T20, and C20 members were denied or given very late accreditation to the International Media Center, and L20 leaders were denied a meeting with the Prime Minister. While the B20 was invited to a session of the Leaders' Summit, the other groups were not (although they were invited to the Leaders' dinner). Unequal treatment of the engagement partners can create unwelcome precedents for future summits.

Australia's Public Diplomacy

A list of over 35 public diplomacy activities are listed by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as well as extensive reporting of the Sherpa's travel. The two main leader-led activities that received public attention were Prime Minister Abbott's address to the World Economic Forum and Finance Minister Hockey hosting the G20 Finance Ministers' Meeting in Sydney in February 2014.

Australia undertook a place-branding campaign for Brisbane, with billboards in G20 capitals. They feature President Obama and Chancellor Merkel in the foreground of other G20 leaders at a previous Summit with the caption: "Brisbane: The new world city." It is interesting that Australia chose to advertise Brisbane using other nation's leaders, but the intention during the Leaders' Summit was to profile the international credentials of Queensland and its capital. The Media Center also emphasized a place-branding approach to Brisbane as an investment and tourism destination.

Outside the Summit, police dealt with the small number of protestors reasonably well in the extreme heat, but the security measures taken by Queensland contained in extraordinary state legislation were themselves so extreme that it created a climate unwelcome to lawful democratic protest. There were several arrests but no charges, and no disruptions to any G20 events in Australia.

The www.G20.org website was generally kept up-to-date in 2014 with lots of resources for interested parties. However, there is still not a clear list of Sherpas or other officials, or any record of what happened at meetings not followed by a Ministerial Declaration.

Twitter became an important outreach tool during the Australian Presidency (with 1.02 million tweets about the Brisbane Summit), and this is likely to continue.

However, outside of the “Ban Putin” debate and interest in possible protests, awareness of the actual agenda of the G20 Summit by the general community in Australia remained low. Australia required a credible outreach narrative to its own citizens and the broader public that emphasized the unique perspective of the President, explained clearly how people could be better off as a result of the G20, and demonstrated some flair. Australia should make a serious investment in an outreach strategy for the current troika in consultation with Turkey and China. The non-G8 countries are at a definite disadvantage in that their citizens have little experience of being at the heart of economic governance and in being a site of global summitry. Turkey has pledged that it “aims to ensure that discussions within the G20 resonate with the majority of our citizens” (G20 Turkey 2014).

Final Thoughts

Paul Martin, “father of the G20,” has recently despaired of the G20 for failing to live up its responsibility to “make globalization work in a world of differences” by strengthening multilateral institutions (2015). As a nimble middle or emerging power, Australia would be expected to promote the importance of multilateral institutions. But on particular issues such as climate change and development, Australia was more firmly on the side of transnational business.

At an officials’ and ministerial level in the lead-up to the Brisbane Summit, the Australian Presidency appears to have been a success, with a focused agenda, constructive interactions with non-G20 members and the engagement groups, and improved working group processes. The Leaders’ Communiqué is a substantive and focused document. Nonetheless, at the political level, Australia often seemed to lack strategy, distracted by its own domestic budget woes. Australia also had an ambiguous narrative to its own citizens about the G20’s overall mission. There was in fact very little public communication about the G20 agenda itself.

It was on development, inequality, and climate change issues that different views of legitimacy and accountability was most apparent. Is the G20 a club that keeps rich countries rich? Or is a group that seeks to exercise coordinated action that benefits its own citizens and the citizens of nonmembers? Inclusiveness, it would seem, needs to be at the heart of the G20 agenda and part of the “growth” message for the G20 if it wants to survive and thrive as the premier forum of international development cooperation. The G20 is a site where poverty and wealth exist very close together. It should do more to understand itself and the relationship between development, growth and inequality before the G20 can fulfill its global governance potential.

Prime Minister Abbott proclaimed the heart of the G20 was that “people right around the world are going to be better off” but spent much of his political capital speaking to the business community rather than the broader public about this vision for the G20.

The challenge now is whether Australia will be able to improve on what appears to be a rather mixed legacy coming from its hosting of the G20. One avenue is through participation in the troika, but it needs serious investment from each of the troika members, not just Australia, to determine whether the final judgment on Brisbane—and indeed, the follow-up summits—achieve a more legitimate, effective, and accountable G20.

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