

INSIDE THE G20
PROCESSES OF LEGITIMIZATION AT
A CONTESTED MECHANISM OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

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Summary

This paper explores how the G20 despite obvious institutional shortcomings managed to find and maintain a sense of legitimacy. More specifically, it explores how the G20 during its formative years, i.e. between 2008 and 2011, resorted to claims of (1) necessity, (2) competence and (3) reach as a means to portray itself as a legitimate mechanism of global governance. By means of discourse analysis of six communiqués and a special report by British Prime Minister David Cameron, the paper concludes that the G20 can rightfully be seen as having convincingly presented itself as a capable, necessary, and, indeed, legitimate mechanism of global governance.

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1. Introduction

An informal institution without membership criteria or permanent secretariat, the G20 was created on an *ad hoc* basis in response to the 2008 global financial crisis. It was much to the surprise of the international community, then, that in the fall of 2009 the G20 proclaimed itself a “premier forum for international economic cooperation” (G20, 2009b, para 19). Accordingly, and in the years that followed, the G20 was heavily criticized, among other things, “for not being an open and transparent institution with respect to its decision-making, and for assuming a mandate as leading international economic policymaking body without any formal legal mandate or consent by non-G20 member countries who are subjected to its norms and standards” (Alexander et al., 2014, p. 2). Despite its obvious shortcomings, the G20 in the early years of its existence managed to expand its influence and obtain an authoritative position in the existing institutional landscape. The paper at hand aims to explore how the G20 managed to find and maintain legitimacy in a context of continuing criticism. More specifically, the paper sets out to examine how the G20 during its formative years, i.e. during the onset and aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, managed to address the question of legitimacy and positively affect the way in which its existence (i.e. its value as an institution) was perceived. To that end, the condensed research question of this paper reads: *How did the G20 during its formative years contrive its own legitimacy?* In order to provide a preliminary answer to this question the paper draws on the work of James Rosenau (1995) and Rolf Weber (2013) and, in light of their explications on new and evolving conceptions of global governance and legitimacy, tests official G20 documentation for signs of power-oriented arguments, namely (1) claims with regard to *necessity* (e.g. with regard to urgent and/or complex external circumstances), (2) claims with regard to *competence* (e.g. in terms of capacity and/or approach) and (3) claims with regard to *reach* (e.g. in terms of financial

capacity and/or political influence). Appropriately, the paper is structured as follows. First, and in order to construct a foundation from which to proceed, it examines the concept of global governance. Second, and with an eye on the foregoing discussion of the concept of global governance, it traces the historical origins of the G20. Third, and upon first expounding on the relevant conceptual framework and methodology, it provides a comprehensive analysis of the G20 in terms of its self-presentation and demonstrates how it adopted various aspects of the concept of global governance, at the least in the form of its formal communications, in order to legitimize its role international affairs.

2. Global Governance

The concept of global governance is notorious for its ambiguity. As such, Matthias Hofferberth in “Mapping the Meaning of Global Governance: A Conceptual Reconstruction of a Floating Signifier” (2015) contended that “there is not *one* concept of global governance lacking specificity but *many* with different meanings and very different normative commitments” and that most of us do not know “how to even speak and think [about it] – [i.e.] as a mere description of world politics, as a theoretical perspective to explain it, or as a normative notion to be realized through global policy” (Hofferberth, 2015, p. 598-600). Similarly to Hofferberth, Thomas Weiss in “Governance, Good Governance and Global Governance: Conceptual and Actual Challenges” (2010) intimated “the conceptual and operational challenges of global governance [to be] formidable” (p. 808), and Lawrence Finkelstein in “What is Global Governance” (1996) argued that while it is certainly “reasonable to be uncomfortable with traditional frameworks of and terminologies associated

with the idea of international relations in an interstate system”, the notion of “global governance [as it stands today] appears to be virtually anything” (p. 368). In light of these admonitions, then, and with an eye to creating some clarity as regards *de facto* implications of the concept of global governance, the following section (2.1) retrieves the concept to its indivisible starting point, namely an essay written by American political scientist James Rosenau in November 1995 as the result of “a growing dissatisfaction among students of international relations with the realist and liberal-institutionalist theories that dominated the study of international organization” (Weiss, 2010, p. 796).

2.1. Global Governance According to James Rosenau (1995)

Eliciting the start of an ongoing scholarly debate, James Rosenau in “Governance in the Twenty-first Century” (1995) defined global governance as “systems of rule at all levels of human activity – from the family to the international organization – in which the pursuit of goals through the exercise of control has transnational repercussions” (Rosenau, 1995, p. 13). Central to this definition is the understanding that “in an ever more interdependent world where what happens in one corner or at one level may have consequences for what occurs at every other corner and level, it seems a mistake to adhere to a narrow definition in which only formal institutions at the national and international level are considered relevant” (ibid.). As such, Rosenau insisted that mechanisms of global governance can be differentiated by their location on “a continuum that ranges from full institutionalization on the one hand to nascent processes of rule making and compliance on the other” (Rosenau, 1995, p. 20) and encompass not only “the activities of governments and organizations, but also the many other [types of] channels through which commands flow in the form of goals framed, directives issues, and policies pursued” (Rosenau, 1995, p. 14). Likewise emblematic of Rosenau’s understanding

of global governance was his disposition that “a new form of anarchy has evolved in the current period – one that involves not only the absence of a highest authority but that also encompasses such an extensive disaggregation of authority as to allow for much greater flexibility, innovation, and experimentation in the development and application of new control mechanisms” (Rosenau, 1995, p. 17). As such, Rosenau contended that “systems of rule can be maintained and their controls successfully and consistently exerted even in the absence of established legal and political authority” (Rosenau, 1995, p. 15), and that these same systems of rule more often than not are accompanied by “shared fates and common histories, the possession of information and knowledge, the pressure of active or mobilizable publics, and/or the use of careful planning, good timing, clever manipulation, and hard bargaining” (ibid.). Construing global governance as a phenomenon rooted in “mechanisms that manage to invoke the consent of the governed, [i.e. in] self-organizing systems [or] steering arrangements that develop through the shared needs of groups and the presence of developments that conduce to the generation and acceptance of shared instruments of control” (Rosenau, 1995, p. 17), then, Rosenau’s rendered the possession of “intersubjective consensus” more valuable than “mandate or statute” (Rosenau, 1995, p. 20). Lastly, and with regard to the conjectural purpose of global governance, Rosenau contended that transnational mechanisms of global governance “tend to be essentially forward looking” and that although “they may be propelled by dissatisfactions over existing (national or subnational) arrangements, [...] their evolution is likely to be marked less by despair over the past and present than by hope for the future, by expectations that an expansion beyond existing boundaries will draw upon cooperative impulses that may serve to meet challenges and fill lacunae that would otherwise be left unattended” (Rosenau, 1995, p. 21). As such, Rosenau averred that “whether explicitly and formally designed or subtly and informally constructed [...], transnational systems of governance tend on balance to evolve in a context of hope and

progress, a sense of breakthrough, an appreciation that old problems can be circumvented and moved toward either the verge of resolution or the edge of obsolescence” (ibid.).

2.2. The G20 as a Mechanism of Global Governance

While the G20 Leaders was created in 2008, the origins of the G20 can be traced back much further. As such, it was the advent of the 1994 Mexican peso crisis and the 1997 East Asian financial crisis (Wade, 2011, p. 354; Beeson & Bell, 2009, p. 67) that made evident that the G7 was no longer “able to effectively respond to the challenges of the global economy” (EURO-CEFG, 2015, p. 12; Kirton, 2000, p. 153) and that a more representative forum than the G7 was needed (Callaghan, 2013, p. 4). On that account, and in an effort to bring together economically advanced and emerging marked countries on the topic of restoring international financial stability, the G7 in September 1999 commissioned the creation of a ministerial G20 (Alexander et al., 2014, p. 1; Beeson & Bell, 2009, 67). An inaugural convention was held three months later that comprised finance ministers and central bank governors from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States as well as a high representative from the European Union (EURO-CEFG, 2015, p. 27). Between 1999 and 2008, G20 finance ministers and central bank governors convened annually. Public attention for these meetings dwindled, however, when the perceived threat of the 1997 East Asian financial crisis began to fade (Callaghan, 2013, p. 4; Debaerte et al., 2014, 8). The onset of the 2008 global financial crisis put an end to this and constituted a “turning point in the history of the G20” (EURO-CEFG, 2015, p. 13). As such, on November 15, 2008, for the first time in the history of the G20 a conference was held with heads of state and government as opposed to finance ministers and central bank governors

(Alexander et al, 2014, p. 1-2). Constituting “a seamless transition from a forum of finance ministers to a summit of leaders” (Cooper, 2010, p. 742-743), the G20 in 2008 moved “from relative obscurity to center stage in media coverage of global economic governance” (Vestergaard, 2011, p. 14) and in 2009 surprised the international community when it announced itself as “a premier forum of international economic cooperation” (G20, 2009b, para 19). In light of the G20’s sixth anniversary, President Nicolas Sarkozy asked Prime Minister David Cameron to write a special report on the achievements of the G20. As such, and in coordination with the G20’s sixth summit in Cannes in 2011, David Cameron published an evaluative report of the G20 in which he explored the G20’s biggest achievements so far, as well as its challenges for the future. Today, the G20 is by some considered to constitute “a direct answer to the rise of multipolarity” (Wade, 2011, p. 354) and, on that account, to signal a “shift from international cooperation based on hegemony to a system of slightly more diverse membership reflecting the increasingly important role of emerging countries in the global economy” (EURO-CEFG, 2015, p. 12). Additionally, and beyond its immediate role as “the primary locus for concerted initiatives on the crisis”, the G20 has also attracted attention as “a new form of reordering in global governance” (Cooper, 2010, 742).

3. Conceptual Framework

In “The Rise and Challenges of Informal International Lawmaking” (2011) Joost Pauwelyn argues that “whereas the second half of the twentieth century saw a move toward international law and international organizations, the first part of the twenty-first century is marked by a move away from law and international organizations, toward more informal cooperation” (p.

125). Describing this development as “a trend toward informality” (ibid.), Pauwelyn contends that contemporary forms of international cooperation are inclined to “occur in greater variety and, more often than not, through less formal, less traditional channels, such as G-groups or issue-specific coalitions or networks” (p. 127). Naturally, this regulative development raises questions of authority, especially as regards global economic governance. As such, Alexander et al. in “The Legitimacy of the G20 – A Critique under International Law” (2014) can be seen to criticize the G20 for “assuming a mandate as leading international economic policymaking body without any formal legal mandate” (p. 2), and Jakob Vestergaard in “The G20 and Beyond: Toward Effective Global Economic Governance” (2011) can be seen to reckon the G20 categorically “illegitimate” (p. 6). Nevertheless, and in spite of (or rather: in addition to) acknowledging that “the factual power of the G20 does not have a stable legal foundation based on traditional concepts of legitimacy” (p. 405), Rolf Weber in “The Legitimacy of the G20 as a Global Financial Regulator” (2013) argues that “traditional principles of international law – [and] in particular the notion of sovereignty known since the Peace of Westphalia – are no longer suitable to cope with the present needs of an international order” (p. 393) and that the concept of legitimacy “needs to be adjusted to [fit] the requirements of the modern world” in accordance with premises provided by Rosenau (p. 404). As such, and rooted in the conjectures that (1) “a new form of anarchy has evolved in the current period – one that [...] encompasses such an extensive disaggregation of authority as to allow for much greater flexibility, innovation, and experimentation in the development and application of new control mechanisms” (Rosenau, 1995, p. 17) and, correspondingly, that (2) legitimacy should be viewed as “a relational concept that is institutionally and discursively constituted” rather than subordinate to law (Weber, 2013, p. 405), Weber draws on the work of Thomas M. Franck to define legitimacy more broadly as “the aspect of governance that validates institutional decisions as emanating from a right process”, i.e. as

emanating from what is “described in a society’s adjectival constitution or rules of order, or is pedigreed by tradition and historic custom” (Franck as cited in Weber, p. 391). Reinstating his focus on the G20, moreover, Weber alleges that “[l]ooking from the angle of factual acceptance [i.e. by the international community at large], while G20 governance cannot be justified with legal authority [i.e. in consonance with more conventional understandings of legitimacy], perhaps it may be using power-oriented arguments, since legitimacy must [also] be rooted in the acceptance of the rules by civil society” (p. 405). Proceeding from Weber’s careful proposition that perhaps the G20 may be using power-oriented arguments to legitimize itself vis-à-vis civil society, the paper at hand aims to test the G20 for signs of these power-oriented arguments as a means to find out how the G20 during its formative years envisaged its legitimacy as a contested mechanism of global governance. Considering that Weber does not elucidate the notion of power-oriented arguments himself, the paper at hand operationalizes the notion in ternary form as (1) claims with regard to *necessity*, (2) claims with regard to *competence*, and (3) claims with regard to *reach*. Naturally, some overlap between these types of claims is to be expected.

POWER-ORIENTED ARGUMENTS	Examples
1). Necessity	Claims with regard to the urgency and/or severity of the circumstances that led to the creation of the G20.
2). Competence	Claims with regard to the particular functioning of the G20 (i.e. in terms of capacity and/or approach).
3). Reach	Claims with regard to the G20’s financial capacity and/or political influence.

4. Methodology

In order to examine to what extent the G20 can be seen to resort to power-oriented arguments (i.e. claims with regard to necessity, competence and reach) to legitimize its role in international affairs, then, this paper will engage in critical discourse analysis. A qualitative type of analysis that “explores the ways in which discourses [i.e. collections of ideas and concepts] give legitimacy and meaning to social practices and institutions” (ibid.), critical discourse analysis is concerned with “analyzing, not just the text itself, but the relation of a text to its context (its source, message, channel, intended audience, connection to other texts and events), as well as the broader relations of power and authority which shape that context” (Halperin & Heath p. 309-310). The prevalent way to do so is by meticulously studying “(1) the linguistic features of text” (i.e. its linguistic structure), “(2) [the] processes relating to the production and consumption of text” (including how a text relates to other discourses, and the extent to which it reproduces or restructures them), and “(3) the wider social practice to which [a] communicative event [i.e. a text] belongs” (i.e. the extent to which a text [including its relation to other discourses] can be said to have consequences for the broader social practice [i.e. reality] of which it is a part) (Fairclough, p. 73; Jørgensen & Phillips, p. 68-69). As such, and in accordance with (1) the aforementioned precepts of critical discourse analysis and (2) the particular research question of *how did the G20 during its formative years contrive its own legitimacy?*, this paper sets out to analyze official G20 documentation published between 2008 and 2011, i.e. amid the initial upsurge and aftermath of the global financial crisis. This selection includes six G20 summit communiqués, namely those stemming from November 2008 (Washington DC, U.S.A.), April and September 2009 (London, U.K., and Pittsburgh, U.S.A.), June and November 2010 (Toronto, Canada, and Seoul, Republic of Korea), and

November 2011 (Cannes, France), as well as an evaluative report written by British Prime Minister David Cameron on the occasion of the G20's sixth anniversary.

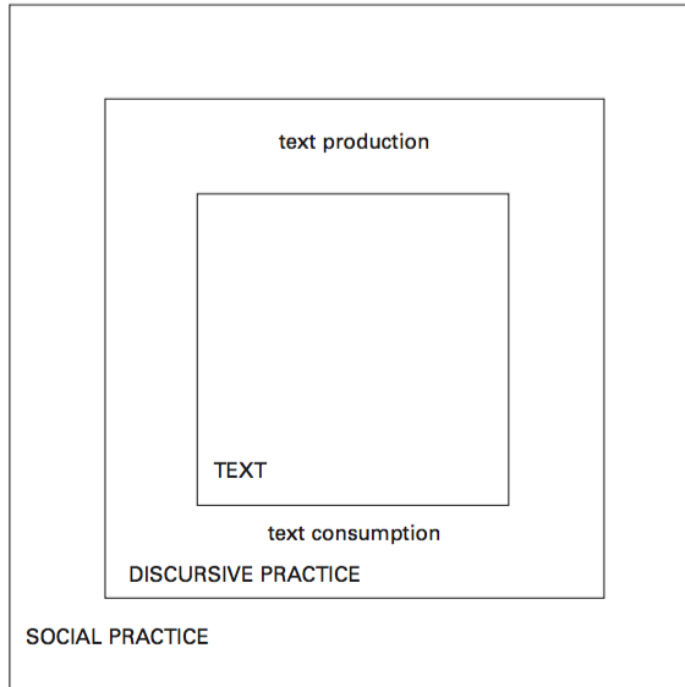


Figure 1. Fairclough's three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis (Jørgensen & Phillips, p. 68)

5. Analysis

5.1 Necessity

Close examination of official G20 documentation shows that the G20 regularly commented on the urgency of external circumstances and conditions as a means to (1) justify its creation in 2008 and (2) account for its continued existence. Claims of *necessity* (and, correspondingly, of responsibility and obligation), then, can be seen to lie at the heart of the G20's incipient quest for legitimization.

5.1.1. The global financial crisis

During the first two years of its existence, the G20 cited the urgency associated with the global financial crisis as the single most important reason (and, by implication, justification) for its immediate creation in 2008. As such, at its first summit in Washington, the G20 stated that it was meeting “amid serious challenges to the world economy and financial markets” and that it was due to these challenges that members were “determined to enhance [their] cooperation and work together to restore global growth and achieve needed reforms in the world’s financial systems” (G20, 2008, para 1). By that same token, the G20 at its first summit stated that the global financial crisis demanded “urgent and exceptional measures” (G20, 2008, para 2) and that the G20 would commit to take “whatever actions necessary” to surmount the unfolding trial (G20, 2008, para 7). At its second summit in London, the G20 reiterated these proclamations and declared that it was facing “the greatest challenge to the world economy in modern times; a crisis which has deepened since [they] last met, which affects the lives of women, men, and children in every country, and which all countries must join together to resolve” (G20, 2009a, para 2). Besides citing the global financial crisis as the single most important reason for its immediate creation in 2008, however, the G20 also cited the global financial crisis as a means to advocate sustained precaution and, herewith, to account for the G20’s continued existence and leadership. In London, for example, the G20 asserted that a “global plan for recovery must reflect the interests, not just of today’s population, but of future generations too (G20, 2009a, para 3) and that it was striving “to prevent a crisis like this from recurring in the future (G20, 2009a, para 4). Similarly, in Pittsburg the G20 warned that “a sense of normalcy should not lead to complacency (G20, 2009b, para 8) and that the G20 would “act forcefully to overcome the legacy of the recent, severe global economic crisis and to help people cope with the consequences of this crisis” (G20, 2009b, para 11). At its fourth summit in Toronto, the G20 reiterated that as “serious

challenges remain” (G20, 2010a, para 3) the G-20’s highest priority would be “to safeguard and strengthen the recovery and lay the foundation for strong, sustainable and balanced growth, and strengthen financial systems against risks (G20, 2010a, para 7). This was reaffirmed at its fifth summit in Seoul, when the G20 avowed that “the concrete steps [it has] taken will help ensure [it is] better prepared to prevent and, if necessary, to withstand future crises (G20, 2010b, para 1-3). Still a more urgent tone was taken in Cannes, when the G20 declared that “since [its] last meeting, global recovery [from the financial crisis] has weakened, particularly in advanced countries, leaving unemployment at unacceptable levels” (G20, 2011, para 2). Clarifying that “there are also clear signs of a slowing in growth in the emerging markets” (G20, 2011 para 2), the G20 edged forward to once again to “[reaffirm its] commitment to work together [...] and make globalization serve the needs of the people” (G20, 2011, para 3).

5.1.2. Local crises

Besides citing the global financial crisis as a means to justify its creation and account for its continued existence, the G20 during its formative years also cited numerous smaller, local crises as a means to reinforce a sense of urgency and draw attention to its intentness. For example, at its fourth summit in Toronto the G20 stated that it “[stands] united with the people of Haiti and [is] providing much-needed reconstruction assistance, including the full cancellation of all of Haiti’s IFI debt” and that that “following the recent oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico [it] recognizes the need to share best practices to protect the marine environment, prevent accidents related to offshore exploration and development, as well as transportation, and deal with their consequences” (G20, 2010a, para 42).

5.1.3. The global economy

The G20 also substantiated its continued existence and leadership in more structural terms, i.e. beyond the propinquity of any immediate crisis. As such, the G20 routinely validated itself by means of connoting the trials of the deepening integration of the 21st century global economy and the new type of leadership that this development requires. In London, for example, the G20 proclaimed that it was intent on “[reforming financial institutions’] mandates, scope and governance to reflect changes in the world economy and the new challenges of globalization” (G20 2009a, para 20), and in Pittsburg the G20 asserted that despite visible improvements, in the 21st century “over four billion people remain undereducated, ill-equipped with capital and technology, and insufficiently integrated into the global economy” (G20 2009b, para 23). British Prime Minister David Cameron in his commissioned report on the future of the G20 furthermore stated that “the ever closer integration of the global economy has meant much greater diversity of economic actors, emerging markets that are growing in influence and issues that are complex and cross-cutting in nature (Cameron, 2011, p. 4) and that “clear and effective governance is crucial for tackling the challenges posed by this unprecedented level of economic integration” (Cameron, 2011, p. 10). Correspondingly, Cameron also argued that “at [this] time of intensifying integration in the global economy, [i.e.] characterized by emerging markets that are growing in economic and political influence; by increasingly complex and interdependent challenges; and by the development of economic and financial activities that are quickly outpacing the institutions and rules that had been established to support the effective functioning of the global economy” (Cameron, 2011, p. 10), the G20 has a increasingly important role to play.

5.2 Competence

Related to the notion that the G20 answered to a sense of urgency in the face of crisis and structural complexity, further examination of official G20 documentation shows that the G20 intimated notions of capacity and approach as a means to (1) justify its creation in 2008 and (2) account for its continued existence. As such, a claim of *competence* can additionally be seen to lie the heart of the G20's incipient quest for legitimization.

5.2.1 Generating political will

One of the G20's most promulgated capacities is its ability to bring about consensus, resolution, and intent. As such, and in view of the summit in Cannes in 2011, British Prime Minister David Cameron in his commissioned report on the future of the G20 stated that "what [the world needs] above all is the most precious and intangible commodity – political will", i.e. the "political will to act together, and to build consensus" (Cameron, 2011, p. 2), and that "the G20's primary role [and special capacity] is to generate and sustain [this] political consensus" (Cameron, 2011, p. 15). Accordingly, Cameron also argued that "the path to more effective governance does not always require the creation of new institutions and processes" (Cameron, 2011, p. 4), that "there is neither a shortage of international bodies, nor of blueprints to reform the global governance architecture" (Cameron, 2011, p. 5), and that "the priority now is to find ways of building political consensus where it is lacking and most needed, and deploying it to coordinate policy and to help existing institutions work more effectively within their current mandates" (ibid.). As such, according to Cameron what makes the G20 worthwhile (and, by implication, legitimate) is "its ability to [bring] together the political leaders of the world's major economies – advanced and emerging alike – on an equal footing" and "improve [their] capacity to drive and direct action" (Cameron, 2011, p. 4-5).

5.2.2. Developing international standards

Besides showcasing its capacity to generate political will, the G20 also underscored its ability to develop existing and future international standards in order to make them more pertinent. As such, Cameron in his commissioned report on the future of the G20 stated that “the G20’s informal character has enabled a diverse set of major economies to come together and get involved in the development of existing and, where the need arises, future standards so that they become more global in nature” (Cameron, 2011, p. 8). Accordingly, Cameron also argued that “the G20 should build on this and encourage opportunities to further develop standards and their governance” (Cameron, 2011, p. 8) and “support high-level principles that guide a more open, inclusive and practical process of developing and governing these standards” (Cameron, 2011, p. 33).

5.2.3. Strengthening the institutional landscape

The G20’s claims with regard to generating political will and developing international standards can be seen to be sustained by references to yet another professed competence, namely that of strengthening the existing institutional landscape and providing it with leadership. As such, at its first summit in Washington, the G20 stated that “the Bretton Woods Institutions must be comprehensively reformed so that they can more adequately reflect changing economic weights in the world economy and be more responsive to future challenges” (G20, 2008, action plan), and a year later, in London, the G20 proclaimed that “in order for our financial institutions to help manage the crisis and prevent future crises [the G20] must [and, by implication, will] strengthen their longer term relevance, effectiveness and legitimacy” (G20, 2009a, para 17). Accordingly, in London the G20 proclaimed that it was “fit to reform and modernize the international financial institutions to ensure they can

assist members and shareholders effectively in the new challenges they face” (ibid.), and that it was ready to “reform [international financial institutions’] mandates, scope and governance to reflect changes in the world economy and the new challenges of globalization (G20, 2009a, para 17). During that same summit, the G20 also announced the creation of an entirely new institution, namely the Financial Stability Board (G20, 2009a). At its fourth summit Toronto, the G20 reiterated its commitment to “strengthening the legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness of the [international financial institutions] to make them even stronger partners [...] in the future” (G20, 2010a, para 24), and at its sixth summit in Cannes the G20 again maintained to be “committed to strengthen our multilateral trade framework” and to “call on international organizations, especially the [United Nations], the [World Trade Organization], the [International Labor Organization], the [World Bank], the [International Monetary Fund] and the [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development], to enhance their dialogue and cooperation, including on the social impact of economic policies, and to intensify their coordination” (G20, 2011, para 29). In his commissioned report on the future of the G20 Cameron palpably subscribed to the aforementioned proclamations and stated that some of the G20’s biggest achievements include “improving the effectiveness of existing institutions and processes, and avoiding their duplication and proliferation; enhancing decision-making, implementation and progress monitoring across existing institutions; and strengthening the transparency of cooperation and communication between existing institutions” (Cameron, 2011 p. 39).

Underscoring its capacity as a buttress in institutional coordination and leadership (and, as such, suggesting competence), the G20 also invited existing institutions for assistance, advice, and expertise. At its second summit in London, for example, the G20 expressly “[welcomed] the reports of the London Jobs Conference and the Rome Social Summit and the key principles they proposed” (G20, 2009a, para 26), and at its third summit in Pittsburg the G20

admitted to needing “the [International Monetary Fund] to help [it] with its analysis of how our respective national or regional policy frameworks fit together” and wanting “the World Bank to advise [it] on progress in promoting development and poverty reduction as part of the rebalancing of global growth (G20 2009b, annex 1, para 5). In Toronto, the G20 asked “the [World Trade Organization], the [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] and the [United Nations Conference on Trade and Development] to continue to monitor the situation within their respective mandates, reporting publicly on these commitments on a quarterly basis” (G20, 2010a, para 36), and for “the [World Bank] to report on the benefits of trade liberalization for employment and growth at the Seoul Summit (G20, 2010a, para 37). In his commissioned report on the future of the G20 Cameron furthermore confirmed that “at the height of the economic crisis, G20 Leaders tasked the WTO Secretariat, working together with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), with preparing regular reports on protectionist measures taken by G20 countries” (Cameron, 2011, p. 28). Addressing the close working relationship between the G20 and existing international financial institutions and international organizations, Cameron stated that “the G20 attaches much value to the contributions by [international financial institutions] and [international organizations] to its work, and should ensure that they continue to make these contributions in specific areas where they have established expertise” (Cameron, 2011, p. 17). As such, Cameron voiced the opinion that “[G20] discussions should be informed by trenchant and candid analyses from international institutions to help frame the key questions across different parts of the G20 agenda” (ibid.). Equally in line with its self-proclaimed capacity to strengthen the existing institutional landscape and provide it with the necessary type of leadership, the G20 in its early years often designated moral support to struggling institutional efforts. As such, in London the G20 announced that it will “remain committed to reaching an ambitious and

balanced conclusion to the Doha Development Round, which is urgently needed” (G20, 2009a, para 23), and in Pittsburgh the G20 announced that it “will spare no effort to reach agreement in Copenhagen through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations” (G20, 2009b, para 29). One year later, in Toronto, the G20 called for “the ratification and full implementation by all G-20 members of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and [encouraged] others to do the same (G20, 2010a, para 40), and in Seoul the G20 made known to “welcome the Fourth UN LDC Summit in Turkey and the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Korea, both to be held in 2011” (G20, 2010b, para 15).

5.3 Reach

Official G20 documentation also reveals that the G20 regularly called attention to the scope of its material and political influence as a means to (1) justify its creation in 2008 and (2) account for its continued existence. As such, professions of *reach* can in addition to claims of necessity and competence be seen to lie at the heart of the G20’s incipient quest for legitimization.

5.3.1. Affluence

Comprising the leaderships of nineteen developed and emerging countries, as well as the European Union, and conjointly representing over 85% of the world economy (Cameron, 2011, p.5), the G20 has an abundance of resources at its disposal. One way the G20 made this palpable during its formative years was by invoking the scope of its financial capacity and willingness to allocate. As such, at its first summit in Washington, the G20 stated that it

would “review the adequacy of the resources of the [International Monetary Fund], the World Bank Group and other multilateral development banks and stand ready to increase them where necessary (G20, 2008, action plan). The following year, in London, the G20 was able to be more specific and declared that it would “treble resources available to the [International Monetary Fund] to \$750 billion, [...] support a new [special drawing rights] allocation of \$250 billion, [...] support at least \$100 billion of additional lending by the [multilateral development banks], [...] ensure \$250 billion of support for trade finance, and [...] use the additional resources from agreed [International Monetary Fund] gold sales for concessional finance for the poorest countries” (G20, 2009a, para 5). Contending that together these measures constituted “an additional \$1.1 trillion program of support to restore credit, growth and jobs in the world economy”, the G20 stated that “together with the measures we have each taken nationally, this constitutes a global plan for recovery on an unprecedented scale (G20, 2009a, para 5). With regards specifically to its ambition of restoring growth, and recapitulating a sense of urgency, the G20 furthermore proclaimed that it was “undertaking an unprecedented and concerted fiscal expansion, which will save or create millions of jobs which would otherwise have been destroyed, and that will, by the end of next year, amount to \$5 trillion, raise output by 4 per cent, and accelerate the transition to a green economy” (G20, 2009a, para 6). Reiterating its commitment (and assumed ability) “to deliver the scale of sustained fiscal effort necessary to restore growth” (G20, 2009a, para 6), the G20 made it a point to reiterate that “taken together, these actions will constitute the largest fiscal and monetary stimulus and the most comprehensive support program for the financial sector in modern times [...]” (G20, 2009a, para 9). In evaluation of the commitments it made in London earlier that year, the G20 in Pittsburg declared that it had successfully “acted together to increase dramatically the resources necessary to stop the crisis from spreading around the world” and that it had taken important “steps to fix the broken regulatory system [...]

implement sweeping reforms to reduce the risk that financial excesses will again destabilize the global economy (G20, 2009b, para 7). Two years later, at a summit in Cannes, the G20 extended the notion of its affluence. As such, it declared that it would “ensure the [International Monetary Fund] continues to have resources to play its systemic role to the benefit of its whole membership, building on the substantial resources [it had] already mobilized since London in 2009” and that it would “stand ready to ensure additional resources could be mobilized in a timely manner” (G20, 2011, para 11).

5.3.2. Interdisciplinary

The political influence of the G20 extends far beyond its financial capacity or willingness to invest and can, in fact, best be seen reflected in the expanding scope of its agenda. Already at its first summit in Washington D.C., for example, the G20 stated that in addition to wanting to improve financial regulation, it was also “committed to addressing other critical challenges such as energy security and climate change, food security, the rule of law, and the fight against terrorism, poverty and disease (G20, 2008, para 15). Accordingly, and in line with its mediating role in the existing institutional landscape (see 5.2.3. ‘Strengthening the institutional landscape’) and its financial capacity (see 5.3.1. ‘Affluence’), the G20 at its third summit in Pittsburg proclaimed that it “called on the World Bank to play a leading role in responding to problems whose nature requires globally coordinated action, such as climate change and food security, and agreed that the World Bank and the regional development banks should have sufficient resources to address these challenges and fulfill their mandates (G20, 2009b, para 21). In Toronto, the G20 articulated a “commitment to a green recovery and to sustainable global growth” (G20, 2010a, 41) and underlined the conviction that “narrowing the development gap and reducing poverty are integral to [its] broader objective of achieving strong, sustainable and balanced growth and ensuring a more robust and resilient

global economy for all” (G20, 2010a, 46). In an attempt to stretch its agenda even further, the G20 in Seoul stated that in order “to promote resilience, job creation and mitigate risks for development, [it would] prioritize action under the Seoul Consensus on addressing critical bottlenecks [such as] infrastructure deficits, food market volatility, and exclusion from financial services” (G20, 2010b, para 12). In addition, and in an attempt to provide broader, forward-looking leadership in the post-crisis economy”, the G20 in Seoul also committed to “continue [its] work to prevent and tackle corruption through [its] Anti-Corruption Action Plan; [to] rationalize and phase-out over the medium term inefficient fossil fuel subsidies; [to] mitigate excessive fossil fuel price volatility; [to] safeguard the global marine environment; and [to] combat the challenges of global climate change (G20, 2010b, para 13). In Cannes, a number of new items were included in the agenda. The agenda was stretched considerably. As such, the G20 emphasized a commitment “to strengthen the social dimension of globalization” (G20, 2011, para 6). Affirming its conviction that “employment and social inclusion must be at the heart of [the G20’s] actions and policies to restore growth and confidence”, the G20 announced that it would “set up a G20 task force which will work as a priority on youth employment” (G20, 2011, para 6). In addition to announcing a task force on youth employment, the G20 also announced renewed attention to the protection of agriculture and stated that “promoting agricultural production is key to feed the world population” (G20, 2011, para 19). To that end, the G20 disclosed that it would “act in the framework of the Action Plan on Food Price Volatility and Agriculture agreed by our Ministers of Agriculture in June 2011” and that “in particular, [it had decided] to invest in and support research and development of agriculture productivity” (G20, 2011, para 19). In Cannes, the G20 made a commitment to improve energy markets. As such, the G20 proclaimed that it was “determined to enhance the functioning and transparency of energy markets” and was “[committed] to improve the timeliness, completeness and reliability of the JODI-oil database and to work on

the JODI-gas database along the same principles” (G20, 2011, para 20). It also committed to pursue the fight against climate change. As such, and in line with its mediating role in the existing institutional landscape (see 5.2.3. “Strengthening the institutional landscape”), the G20 asked “relevant organizations to make recommendations on the functioning and oversight of price reporting agencies” and reaffirmed its commitment “to rationalize and phase-out over the medium term inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption, while providing targeted support for the poorest” (G20, 2011, para 20).

5. Conclusion

The paper at hand has set out to explore how the G20 managed to find and maintain legitimacy in a context of continuing criticism. In particular, the operative ideas have been sought out and examined by which the G20 during its formative years, i.e. during the onset and aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, was enabled to address the question of legitimacy and positively affect the way in which it is perceived by the international community. In order to provide a preliminary answer to this question, this paper has set out an analysis of official G20 documentation against a background of new and evolving conceptions of global governance and legitimacy. Accordingly, this paper found that the G20 tests positive for signs of Rolf Weber’s submission of power-oriented arguments, which for the purpose of this paper have been operationalized in ternary form as (1) claims with regard to *necessity*, (2) claims with regard to *competence*, and (3) claims with regard to *reach*. More specifically, this paper found that during the first four years of its existence, and as a means to justify its creation in 2008 and/or to account for its continued existence in 2009, 2010, and 2011, the G20 repeatedly cited (1) a sense of necessity arising from the global financial crisis,

(2) a sense of necessity arising from numerous smaller, local crises, (3) a sense of necessity arising from the deepening integration of the 21st century global economy, (4) a quality of competence as regards its own ability to generate political will, (5) a quality of competence as regards its own capacity to develop international standards, (6) a quality of competence as regards its own aptitude (and particular approach) to strengthen the existing institutional landscape, (7) an element of reach as regards its own affluence and financial capacity and, finally, (8) an element of reach as regards the interdisciplinarity of its own agenda (i.e. the reach and diversity of its interests and expertise). Accordingly, the G20 can rightfully (and despite its shortcomings) be seen as having convincingly presented itself as a capable, necessary, and, indeed, legitimate mechanism of global governance. In fact, in an increasingly complex, interconnected and yet unstable world, perhaps the informal and pragmatic constitution of the G20, openly and flexibly based on the changing conjuncture of economic and political power, can be seen as an example of how institutions will come about and legitimize themselves in the future.

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