

BOOK REVIEWS

The Global Governance of Climate Change: G7, G20, and UN Leadership

John J. Kirton and Ella Kokotsis, Burlington, Ashgate Publishing, 2015
doi: [10.1017/ae.2018.4](https://doi.org/10.1017/ae.2018.4)

Reviewed by S. Suresh Ramanan, Indira Nagar, Thirunagar, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India

The word ‘climate change’ has become a laymen’s term. Recently, there was a debate on the usage of the term itself. Few policy makers are even against the usage of this term. However, globally, people have recognised the significance of the issue and have taken actions. This book deals with the actions taken by governments in the form of institutional set-ups such as the G7 (Group of countries), G20, and UNO. The G7 comprises seven countries — Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, and the United States — that first met about the oil crisis in the 1970s. Thereafter, these countries met annually to talk about global economic issues, international security, and energy policies. Similar to the G7, the G20 is an international forum of 20 countries that at first focused on economic aspects. However, it has more recently taken an interest in other matters, such as sustainable development, the energy crisis, and environmental issues.

This book is a part of series titled ‘Global Environmental Governance’. There are other books in the series that complement the book reviewed here. The series editor, John J. Kirton, also the author of this book, writes in a manner that reflects his years of experience and authority on the matter. A book by Knieling and Leal Filho (2013), titled *Climate Change Governance*, includes chapters about the strategic selectivities of politics in climate change governance and describes five dimensions — multilateralism of the global market, the output side of fossil fuels, real economy side of fossil fuels, societal relationships, and neo-liberalism — that demand the interdependence and interactions between different institutions on climate change issue. Ultimately, the book signifies the role of the United Nations in climate change governance. On the other hand, this book by Kirton and Kokotsis highlights the climate change governance efforts and perspectives from G7, G8, and G20 countries.

The book is divided into five sections, with the first two sections providing details exclusively about G7 initiatives. The formation of the G7 then became the G8 (a group of eight) after Russia joined in 1998. However, it is the G20 countries who are the major decision makers. Hence, the authors have centred their discussion on the G7 and the G20. The details provided on the formation of the G7 have made the first part compulsive; for example, the Amoco Cadiz oil tanker disaster in 1978, which made the G7 leaders look into environmental protection.

The book coherently puts the details in chronological order. First, two parts detail events from 1979 to 1988. The next part details the actions taken by the end of 1988 that led to the reinforcement of UN leadership on the climate change agenda. The authors portray the six important events in this regard: the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the G8’s preoccupation with new policy issues, the 1992 Earth Summit, the lack of formidable leaders

in the G8, the inclusion of more countries to the G8 club, and the withdrawal of influential countries from climate change issues. All these made the United Nations the leader in global climate governance. From 2005 to 2014, there was a tremendous shift in the seat of power. In 2006, countries such as China, India, Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico attended the G8 summit as a group of five. This ultimately led to the inauguration of the G20 in 2008. This forms the fourth part of the book, where the authors elaborate on this event of the UN Copenhagen in 2009. At certain places, the authors could have been more precise in explaining certain matters. For instance, some chapters give a lengthy description of meetings or summits under the subheadings of ‘Preparations’, ‘At the Summit’, and ‘Results’.

The authors conclude with the decline of G7’s leadership in climate change governance. It summarises the creation, retreat, and return of the group countries in taking up leadership for climate change governance. This was emphasised by the statement: ‘The process of replacing the old, divided, development-first, failing, UN-led climate control regime with a new, inclusive, environment-first, effective one led by the G7/8 and the G20 is now well underway’ (pp. 305–306). Similarly, another statement in the concluding chapter — ‘Should the UN’s Paris COP [Conference of the Parties] fail, G7 summitry in 2016 could take the form ...’, which is bit rhetorical, especially after the smooth and successful Paris COP.

In a holistic approach, the authors want to highlight the role of the Group of Countries (G7, G8, and G20) in climate change governance. Despite the detailed coverage on the G7 and G20, the omission of the actions taken by UN-centred organisations on climate change front is a serious lacuna. At least a chapter to elucidate and compare the actions of the UN versus the G7 and G20 would have been interesting. As pointed out, the governments from G7 and G20 countries are major decision makers, for they are the major polluters. Therefore, one cannot ignore the active commitments and concern of G7 and G20.

The information and content of this book are unique, and it will help readers to understand the history of climate change governance. The extensive bibliography shows the intensive research done to put forth the facts as a testimonial to the credibility of the book. Still, the writing style is little different, especially for non-native English speakers. Overall, the book enlightens the readers on climate change governance. This is not a textbook, and I do not recommend it for a student’s bookshelf but rather as a needed reference book for researchers involved in understanding the international politics in climate change and an essential book for libraries of institutions focusing on environmental issues.

Reference

Knieling, J., & Leal Filho, W. (Eds.), (2013). *Climate change governance*. Springer Science & Business Media.

Reviewer Biography

S. Suresh Ramanan presently lives in India and is a doctoral student in forestry. His research area is forestry and ecology, with a special interest in policy decisions pertaining to environmental issues. He is presently working on long-term studies in forestry.