



# THE CASE FOR GLOBAL CIVICS

Hakan Altınay

The Brookings Global Economy and Development working paper series also includes the following titles:

- Wolfensohn Center for Development Working Papers
- Middle East Youth Initiative Working Papers
- Global Health Initiative Working Papers

Learn more at [www.brookings.edu/global](http://www.brookings.edu/global)

**Hakan Altinay** is a nonresident senior fellow with the Global Economy and Development program at Brookings.

“We are experiencing unprecedented levels of global connectivity and interdependence. I agree with Altinay that in order to navigate our global interdependence, we need processes where we all think through our own responsibilities toward other fellow humans, and discuss our answers with our peers. A conversation about a global civics is indeed needed, and the university campuses are ideal venues for these conversation to start. We should enter these conversations with an open mind, and not to insist on any particular point of view. The process is the key, and we should not wait any longer to start it.”

Martti Ahtisaari, 2008 Nobel Peace Laureate

“In the age of interdependence, we need a take the concept of civics—long associated with local communities and nations—to the global level. Universities have a vital role to play in developing the concept of global civics and including it in their curricula. By doing so, those universities will perform a service not just to their students but to the societies of which they are a part. And by using the opportunities of networking and exchange programs, universities will be able, over time, to form a virtual global agora in which to promote, in the 21st century, Socrates’ idea that we are all ‘citizens of the world.’”

Strobe Talbott, President, Brookings

“Globalization has set in motion a process of far-reaching change that is affecting everyone. It spans not only growing interdependence in economic relations, but also social and political interaction among organizations and individuals across the world. The growing interconnectivity among people across the world is nurturing the realization that we are all part of a global community. This sense of interdependence, commitment to shared universal values and solidarity among peoples across the world can be channeled to build enlightened and democratic global governance in the interests of all. I hope that universities and think tanks around the world will deploy their significant reservoirs of knowledge and creativity to develop platforms to enable students to study and debate these issues. This project is a contribution towards this goal and I look forward to following it closely.”

Kofi Annan, Former Secretary-General of the United Nations, 2001 Nobel Peace Laureate

## CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Surrogate Debates.....	2
The Need for a Compass.....	4
The 7-Billionth Human Being .....	5
A Global Veil of Ignorance .....	7
The Vital Role of Universities.....	11
Endnotes .....	12

### *Acknowledgments:*

*This publication was made possible by grants from the Jenesis Group and the Open Society Foundation, as well as support from the Yale World Fellows Program.*

*I am grateful for invaluable feedback from Aysegul Altinay, Valerie Belanger, Unmesh Brahme, Leslie Brown, Kemal Dervis, Raymond Duvall, Heather Grabbe, Catherine Guisan, Vusi Gumede, Ali Riza Gursel, John Hendra, Tim Jarvis, Lou Anne Jensen, Osman Kavala, Claudia Lopez, Brooke Shearer, Strobe Talbott, Haynie Wheeler and Jian Yi. Gorkem Aydemir, Ipek Bahceci, Cansu Ekmekcioglu, Mehmet Energin, and Can Ozden have been outstanding interns, and have contributed to the dissemination of this working paper.*

# THE CASE FOR GLOBAL CIVICS

Hakan Altinay

## INTRODUCTION

“Civics” often refers to the familiar constellation of rights and responsibilities emanating from citizenship in a nation-state. But what about *global civics*? Would this be feasible—or even desirable?

There are several plausible objections to the concept of global civics. One can argue that allowing for even a modest level of responsibility toward all the world’s 6.7 billion people is so overwhelming that it is a nonstarter. Furthermore, it can be argued that any meaningful experience of pan-global solidarity among human beings is nascent at best, and therefore cannot form the basis for a formidable constellation of rights and responsibilities, and that the experience of being a global citizen is restricted to a few activists and international elites like those who gather for the World Economic Forum in Davos. Finally, one can argue that civics assumes effective enforcement and a state, and since we do not have a world government, any talk of global civics is whimsical.

Notwithstanding such skepticism, here I attempt to demonstrate that it is in fact possible to imagine global civics. First I consider the unhelpful views that have impeded fruitful consideration of the concept of global civics. Then I outline the rationale for global civics and offer two thought experiments to operationalize this new concept. Finally, I argue that universities should be key sites for the conversation about global civics. One of the invaluable missions of a university education is to equip younger generations with the information and analytical tools for them to exercise competent control over their lives and become conscientious citizens. Given our increasing interdependence, a university education which does not provide effective tools and forums for students to think through their responsibilities and rights as one of the several billions on planet Earth, and along the way develop their moral compass, would be a failure.

## SURROGATE DEBATES

**I**t is not surprising that there is skepticism about the concept of global civics, because surrogate discussions about global civics have left much to be desired. And a case for global civics needs to start out by defusing several minefields. Let me first attempt to do just that.

The first minefield is formed by the group believing in *world federation by stealth*. Proponents of this view see each international problem as a way to get closer to some federal world government. They seem to be intent on delivering the good life through global structures. They doubt the legitimacy of nation-states and do not appreciate their ability to command allegiance and deliver results. They also have seemingly blind faith in international schemes, and overlook legitimate misgivings of those in many nation-states about turning over their sovereignty to woefully inadequate international institutions. The major negative consequence of this group is to raise diffuse suspicions concerning international frameworks, and to scare reasonable people who might otherwise be open-minded about pragmatic international cooperation.

**It is not surprising that there is skepticism about the concept of global civics, because surrogate discussions about global civics have left much to be desired. And a case for global civics needs to start out by defusing several minefields.**

The second minefield is formed by the group advocating *radical cosmopolitanism*. This argument, which is advocated by a small but influential group, posits that anyone who does not care about people halfway around the world as much as their own families and immediate neighbors is somehow morally reprehensible. These radical cosmopolitans argue that we should

be ready to give up all wealth until the last person in the world is not worse off than the rest of us. Critics have rightfully described advocates of these views as being interested in a hypothetical humanity while possessing a good deal of disdain for the actual fallible and imperfect humans themselves. Such morally virtuous cosmopolitans also underestimate how modern capitalism has improved the living standards of billions. Like the stance of the first group, this group's excessive demands intimidate reasonable people, who in turn build up resistance to any conversation about global normative frameworks.

The third minefield is formed by the *doomsday advocates*, a diffuse group of people who tend to think that tomorrow will be worse off than today or yesterday. Often, their scenarios of impending doom, unless some form of global cooperation is achieved immediately, are meant to spur people in action. However, these doomsayers do not seem to realize that crying wolf one too many times is unproductive. Nor do they appreciate the impressive progress made by humanity through piecemeal and pragmatic international cooperation schemes.<sup>1</sup> And even more important, they seem oblivious to the fact that fear is not a very potent motivator for the most important constituency we have for global cooperation—youth.

The fourth and final minefield is formed by the *cynical realists*, who readily argue that life is not fair and that one should grow up and not chase elusive and impractical global frameworks. Most of these cynics live in the advanced industrial countries. They contend that real power is not soft, that the rise of new powers around the world is inconsequential and that the United States, like Gulliver, needs to be liberated from self-restraint and Lilliputian inhibitors. They view all attempts at international cooperation with utter suspicion and are deeply skeptical about all national

contributions—in treasure or in sovereignty—to global solutions. Yet they underestimate the need for proactive cooperation by many players to solve tomorrow's problems and the opportunity costs of common cynicism for that cooperation. These cynics also exist in the developing world, where they view any attempt to reform multilateral institutions as a plot to consoli-

date the power of the privileged few. They pontificate on the inherent unfairness of the status quo without any hint of what they might be prepared to do if they were to be convinced that a fairer order was within reach. Both sides relish pointing to the unreasonableness of the other party as the justification of their own position.

## THE NEED FOR A COMPASS

**T**he minefields formed by these four groups have made starting a thoughtful conversation about global civics a forbidding task. Yet it will be next to impossible for the people living on Earth to navigate our fast-growing interdependence if we do not at least begin to think about a global social contract. The contours of our interdependence have become increasingly evident. We have seen how financial engineering in the United States can drastically affect economic growth in every part of the world; how carbon dioxide emissions from China can end up determining crop yields and livelihoods in countries such as the Maldives, Bangladesh and Vietnam; and how an epidemic in Vietnam or Mexico can also endanger the rhythm of public life in the U.S. or Western Europe. And there is no reason to assume that this kind of interdependence will not continue or even accelerate in the near future. Therefore, we need a moral compass—a set of guiding principles—to enable the people of the world to navigate the treacherous waters of our epic interdependence.

One could think of it like driving a car. Each day, millions of people drive at speeds above 50 miles an hour in a ton of metal extremely close to others who are doing the same thing. A slight move of the steering wheel in the wrong direction would wreak havoc, but we cruise carefree, because we have reasonable expectations about the behaviors of other drivers. Our expectations of other drivers, which serve to mitigate the theoretical risks of driving, can exist because people follow a long-established framework of laws, habits and conventions about how to operate automobiles.

In an increasingly interdependent world, we need a corresponding global framework to put our minds at relative ease. Part of that reference framework has to be based on global civics, a system of conscious responsibilities which we are ready to take on after due deliberation and the corresponding rights that we are ready to claim. We all need to ask ourselves: To what responsibilities to other human beings are we personally ready to commit? What would global civics look like? Two thought experiments can help us figure this out.

## THE 7-BILLIONTH HUMAN BEING

**T**he first thought experiment to help us imagine the shape of global civics is to imagine what we would say to welcome the 7-billionth human being, who will join the rest of us on this planet in roughly a thousand days. A worthwhile exercise would be for each of us to take 15 minutes out of our day to imagine what we would say to our fellow 7-billionth person about the human condition awaiting her. This conversation, however hypothetical, would help us take stock of the global situation that we have all helped produce. It would also set us on a path toward discovering our most imminent responsibilities to each other and the next generation—the essence of global civics.

The first thing we could tell our newcomer is that she can expect to live more than 70 years, and that this is twice as long as what people counted on a century ago. We would tell this newcomer that though the world is a very unequal place in terms of income and wealth, disparities in life expectancy are decreasing. We could report in good conscience that the world possesses some effective global public health instruments, and that we have eradicated smallpox and might see the end of polio and malaria in her lifetime. She could be told to expect to have more than 11 years of schooling, education being another area where gross but diminishing global disparities loom large. We could also report that the world that awaits her prizes gender equality more than any other era, so she can anticipate a more enabling world than her mother or grandmother experienced.

In the spirit of first giving the good news, we can in good faith report that this 7-billionth person will have capabilities that cannot only empower her but would have been the envy of emperors and tycoons from earlier centuries. In terms of information and knowledge, our newcomer will have unprecedented ac-

cess through the likes of Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Wikipedia. The breadth of information and knowledge and the ease of her access to such information would have been unfathomable to the Encyclopédistes and Academies of Sciences of previous centuries.

At the same time, we should admit to her that there are critical risks. Although we know about the mind-numbing horrors of previous genocides and have profusely sworn not to allow this ultimate crime to ever take place again, the sad fact is that nobody would likely come to rescue our 7-billionth fellow human were she to face genocide. We would have to tell her that not only have world's military powers abdicated their solemn responsibility to protect, but they have also not allowed the development of procedures and institutions for people to join a UN volunteer army to intervene in cases of imminent genocide.

**Imagining what we would say to welcome the 7-billionth human being would help us take stock of the global situation that we have all helped produce, and would set us on a path toward discovering our most imminent responsibilities to each other and the next generation—the essence of global civics.**

We would also need to tell this newcomer that we have set into motion, first unknowingly and then in full realization for the past 20 years, a chain of events related to climate change that may very soon become irreversible and lead to catastrophic environmental consequences. We would need to add that while we were able to devise a plan for collective global action to prevent depletion of the ozone layer, a similar framework to mitigate climate change has thus far eluded us.

Finally, we would need to tell her that for decades in the 20th century, the world's superpowers gambled

with human civilization by amassing thousands of nuclear warheads, and that on more than one occasion, humanity was remarkably close to a nuclear holocaust. Although, as of today, we have not realized the 40-year-old goal of total nuclear disarmament enshrined in the nonproliferation treaty, we have reduced the active nuclear arsenal to a fraction of what it once was.

Working on a welcome message for our 7-billionth fellow human being provides us with an opportunity for

introspection as well as a frank accounting of the implicit responsibilities we have to other human beings and future generations, which constitutes the very essence of global civics. Doing unto others what we would have them do unto us remains the most resilient benchmark for decent conduct in human history. This hypothetical conversation with our newcomer could set us on a path to answering some of these cardinal questions, and help us elucidate what global civics would entail.

## A GLOBAL VEIL OF IGNORANCE

In considering the shape of global civics, a second, more elaborate thought experiment is the global veil of ignorance, inspired by John Rawls and his book *A Theory of Justice*.<sup>2</sup> Rawls proposes both thinking about justice on procedural grounds and a particular definition: “justice as fairness.” According to this definition, hypothetically, the organizing principles for a society would be agreed upon in an initial position of equality, and these principles would end up governing all further agreements and the kinds of social cooperation and government that could be established. This situation would put people behind a “veil of ignorance,” which would keep them from knowing their position in society or their fortune in the distribution of assets and abilities. The point of all this is to ensure that the organizing principles agreed to behind the veil of ignorance could not be designed to favor any particular condition, and that these principles would be the result of fair deliberation and agreement. Although Rawls’ basic proposition is a familiar Kantian move, one can argue that all major philosophical and religious traditions have similar tenets, whereby we are asked to treat others as we wish to be treated by them in commensurate situations. This is both a simple proposition, and quite possibly one of the most radical ideas in history.<sup>3</sup>

So how would the world look behind a global veil of ignorance? For what key issues would we want to set rules behind this veil, and what would we leave to the actual business of life and politics after the veil is lifted? My hunch is that we would want to have rules for things that we are absolutely sure about, and for vital risks that we would want to have meaningful guarantees against. Constituent features of a good life cannot be delivered through global constellations. A good life has much more to do with camaraderie,

friendship, family and affection than global measures. Therefore, the global rules to be set behind the veil of ignorance would need to be minimal, not the result of a familiar temptation to engage in global social engineering and to deliver the good life through global governance. Furthermore, rules set behind the global veil of ignorance ought not to aim to replace politics. The majority of the issues we care about should and will remain the subject of national and local politics. A global veil of ignorance would simply help us identify those exceptional issues that we would want to regulate before engaging in the essential business of life and politics, and thus giving us invaluable insights to what needs to be encompassed by global civics.

**Constituent features of a good life cannot be delivered through global constellations. A good life has much more to do with camaraderie, friendship, family and affection than global measures. Therefore, the global rules to be set behind the veil of ignorance would need to be minimal.**

Assuming that we are all present at the founding moment behind the global veil of ignorance, our first question would be whether we would want a world government, a world federation, or opt for the nation-state as the primary unit of allegiance and international cooperation. From Kant to the World Federalist Movement, many have argued for a World Parliament. If we were behind the veil, what would probably strike us is how little support movements like the World Federalists have had over the years. Manufactured or otherwise, allegiance to other people who speak our language and share a territory with us seems to have survived the test of time. Therefore, the hypothetical founders behind the veil would be likely to opt to keep the nation-state, but I imagine they would also hope that nation-states were more prone to coopera-

tion than today. Even without the veil, global opinion surveys show that even in more unilateralist and sovereignist countries such as China, India and the U.S., more people support the UN's responsibility to protect and complying with the World Trade Organization's rulings against their own countries, than those who oppose such multilateral acts.<sup>4</sup>

**Climate change is an especially difficult challenge. There is a gap of about 30 years between carbon emissions and the full consequences of those emissions. The fact that significant percentages of adults continue to smoke demonstrates that humans find it difficult to give up immediate gratification in anticipation of deferred costs in 30 years.**

The second vital question that we can reasonably expect to come up is whether people would still want capitalism as the system of production and distribution. From the Luddites to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, various anticapitalist traditions have maintained that capitalism destroys more than it creates and leads to gross inequalities, which in turn rob humans of their dignity. Yet in the last two centuries, we have witnessed a material prosperity totally unprecedented in human history. It is true that there are dramatic inequalities in the world—the world's richest 2 percent owns more than half its assets.<sup>5</sup> This is unlikely to look very agreeable behind a global veil of ignorance. Yet we also know that the dramatic increase in income inequality between households is a result of the early industrialization process in the West and its immediate aftermath, from 1820 to 1950. Inequality between households, though very high, has held steady and not increased further since 1950, even though there is a common impression that income inequality has been increasing in the world in the last few decades.<sup>6</sup> Increased communication and awareness of disparities may partially explain the difference

between our impressions and what various studies show. While income inequality has held steady for the last 60 years, we know that the inequalities in years of schooling around the world and disparities in life expectancy have both seen dramatic improvements. The median human being today has far greater capacities, per Amartya Sen, available to him or her than Genghis Khan or Napoleon.

Therefore, when we review the evidence behind the global veil of ignorance, we are likely to be distressed by the size of income inequalities. However, we are even more likely to be impressed by the creative energies unleashed by capitalist modernity, and thus we would opt to keep the capitalist system while continuing to think and negotiate the appropriate mechanisms to reduce the negative externalities of these inequalities. The founders would probably be dismayed by the hubris found at the commanding heights of capitalism, but they might decide that these excesses would be better addressed through activism and politics rather than any timeless rule to be set behind the veil of ignorance.

So far, I have suggested that the founders behind the global veil of ignorance are likely to keep the fundamentals the same. This could be an important revelation for the shape of global civics. We sometimes treat the status quo as an arbitrary state of affairs that we need to tolerate and endure. Yet, if this experiment points toward the truth, the status quo is also likely to be a situation we would have reached through meritocratic deliberation.

However, not all issues are like that. For instance, if I were a founder behind a global veil of ignorance, I would want to institute much more effective guarantees against major risks such as climate change. Most simulations show that business as usual with respect

to the climate will soon mean crossing the point of no return, triggering a chain reaction with catastrophic results for human existence and civilization on Earth. Yet the qualities of the underlying dynamics make climate change an especially difficult challenge—for instance, there is a gap of about 30 years between carbon emissions and the full consequences of those emissions. The fact that significant percentages of adults continue to smoke demonstrates that humans find it difficult to give up immediate gratification in anticipation of deferred costs in 30 years. Furthermore, even if half of humanity practices prudence and restraint, the lack of cooperation by the other half may preclude our chances of survival.

Given the high stakes and the difficult nature of the climate change problem, if I were a founder behind the global veil of ignorance, I would want a clear rule to be established. That rule would need to be based on the recognition of the equal rights of all human beings to emit carbon dioxide and other equivalents. We need to find the maximum safe level for carbon dioxide and its equivalents, and divide that level equally among 6.7 billion humans. Anyone who wanted to consume more than their equal and safe share could then do so only after receiving emission credits from others. Advanced societies could acquire emission credits through the provision of clean production, mitigation and adoption technologies to others, but the basic rule could not be negotiated.<sup>7</sup> Given the dramatic adjustments which would need to be made to the way economies are structured, the founders may choose to institutionalize a meaningful grace period where carbon intensity would be the benchmark instead of per capita emissions.

Humanity has dared faith and gambled with its very existence through nuclear arms for decades in the 20th century. The contingency of a nuclear holocaust

is likely to trigger a reaction by the founders behind the global veil of ignorance. The nuclear arsenals have been reduced in the last two decades, but the noble and rational goal of total nuclear disarmament which was central to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, has still not been realized. The founders are likely to insist on the swift realization of that goal.

A similar risk that those behind the global veil of ignorance are likely to seek guarantees against is genocide. Humans have frequently been subject to this ultimate crime, and the solemn responsibility to protect (R2P) has equally frequently been abdicated for parochial reasons. This is unlikely to look acceptable behind a veil of ignorance. The International Criminal Court (ICC) would need to be strengthened. Founders behind the global veil of ignorance may insist that parties which refuse to join ICC need to lose some of their sovereign privileges, such as their seat at the UN General Assembly. Furthermore, the chronic shortage of UN military capacity would need to be overcome through a volunteer UN army. The moment we accept the nation-state as the primary unit of allegiance, we also accept that citizens cannot be compelled to risk life and limb if there is no national interest. Yet, national conscription is not the only option available to honor R2P and prevent genocide. Humans have always taken up arms in other countries for their beliefs. The international brigade at the Spanish Civil War is the most celebrated example, but the practice is older. The UN would need to have a mechanism to accept volunteers for its army, ensure balanced representation from all global regions so that no particular group ends up dominating the UN army during any given conflict, and monitor these soldiers to be disciplined during their mission, as there are too many examples of presumed rescuers harassing the very people they are meant to rescue. One can even imagine a setup where not just the UN Security Council but

also the UN secretary-general (UNSG) or a college of all former UNSGs can endorse a given mission, so that action cannot be held hostage to veto by the five permanent members. Whatever risks may be associated with this iconoclastic system would pale in comparison to the opportunity cost of inaction by powerful military nations refusing to get involved in the face of imminent genocide.

One final fundamental issue that is likely to come up behind the global veil of ignorance is economic redistribution. Would the founders behind the global veil of ignorance feel compelled to set rules regarding redistribution or will they leave this to the actual business of life and politics for when the veil is lifted? I suspect that the founders are likely to feel uneasy about the size of the disparities. They are likely to be comforted that recent decades have seen decreases in some global disparities. When reviewing our current tool kit

in mitigating disparities, they are unlikely to be overly impressed by the track record of traditional overseas development assistance. Sui generis programs such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria are likely to commend greater approval and acclaim. They are also likely to be impressed by the effects of allowing people from poorer countries to reside and work temporarily in advanced economies. Remittances often have greater multipliers than official development aid and uplift the receiving communities more effectively. The issue comes under the WTO agenda and would merit greater attention than it currently receives. But given the mixed record of much global trade, development, and aid assistance, the founders behind the global veil of ignorance would probably institutionalize a review of disparities and various tools, rather than be convinced of the timeless superiority of any rule or tool.<sup>8</sup>

## THE VITAL ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

In the two thought experiments above, the point, of course, is not the brilliance or ineptitude of any particular set of results or answers but the process. My goal is to show that there are some worthwhile issues with which to grapple, and that this is an inquiry worth engaging in. The similarities in what the two experiments reveal are also telling. Both experiments point to very analogous successes, as well as issues in need of imminent response.

The ideal venue for the conversation about global civics is the university campus. Global challenges, from climate change to nuclear proliferation, have a generational cleavage, and thus there is more at stake for 20-year-olds than 60-year-olds. The previous generation built its networks and assets during a time when nation-states reigned unchallenged. Yet 20-year-olds must contend with a much more interdependent world, where their well-being depends in part on people who live and work in other countries. Universities offer a unique context where young people can grapple with new and thorny issues and pursue interconnections beyond what first meets the eye. Furthermore, as a global middle class emerges, university populations are becoming more representative of the myriad points of views on our planet.

Liberal arts education aims to equip students with information and analytical tools to better exercise command on their lives. In a recent commencement

speech, Bill Gates expressed dissatisfaction with his education at Harvard, asking why during his time there he did not learn about the vast amount of misery in the world. We would not want future generations to tell us that their university experiences did not prepare them for life in an interdependent world. To be sure, students may well decide that they do not have any responsibilities toward those who are not their compatriots, but this ought to be their conscious, deliberate decision, not an implicit default option.

**We would not want future generations to tell us that their university experiences did not prepare them for life in an interdependent world.**

Given how interdependent our lives have become on this planet, we cannot go through life without some sort of a concerted effort to address our responsibilities to each other on this Earth, and our rights as members of the world community, the central questions of global civics. If universities in the 21st century do not provide their students with the forums and the tools to discuss and figure out what their responsibilities are to their fellow human beings, and develop the requisite normative compass to navigate the treacherous waters of global interdependence, then they would be failing in their mission. Therefore, we need visionary universities that will make a strong organizational and normative commitment to ensure that all their graduates have their own working answers to these seminal questions.

## ENDNOTES

1. For an audit of existing global governance schemes, see Hakan Altinay, "The State of Global Governance: An Audit," *YaleGlobal*, <http://yale-global.yale.edu/about/altinay.jsp>.
2. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 2005).
3. There are, of course, writings by Rawls and other Rawlsians on these issues. For our purposes, the intricacies of that debate are not all that relevant. Two caveats should suffice: I find Rawls's methodology in *A Theory of Justice* much more interesting than his later work *The Law of Peoples: With "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited"* (Harvard University Press, 2001). I also think that Rawls' veil of ignorance is too thick, namely, that he does not allow us to possess vital knowledge necessary for thoughtful deliberation. He allows us to know only very general facts about our society, and not its economic or social level, culture or civilization. This seems to me to be too limited, and not even necessary for the justice as fairness principle to work. Under the global veil of ignorance, we should be allowed to know history—for example, to be able to judge various alternatives.
4. An April 2007 survey by World Public Opinion at the University of Maryland ([www.worldpublicopinion.org](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org)) shows that pluralities of Chinese, Indians and Americans support compliance with adverse WTO rulings, and the UN's responsibility to authorize the use of military force to protect people from severe human rights violations, such as genocide, even against the will of the government committing such abuses. A more recent World Public Opinion Survey in November 2009 showed that 57% of the people surveyed in 24 countries agreed that "our nation should consistently follow international law," as opposed to the 35% who agreed that their government should not feel obligated to abide by international law if the government deemed international law not to be in the nation's interest. The same survey showed that the average person underestimates how prevalent multilateralism is in their society and tends to consider their own multilateralist views to be the exception, which opens up interesting questions about distortions in perception.
5. It has been estimated that top 2% of the richest adults in the world possess more than half of global wealth; see James B. Davies, Susanna Sandström, Anthony Shorrocks and Edward N. Wolff, *The World Distribution of Household Wealth*, UNU-WIDER Discussion Paper, 2008, [www.wider.unu.edu/stc/repec/pdfs/rp2008/dp2008-03.pdf](http://www.wider.unu.edu/stc/repec/pdfs/rp2008/dp2008-03.pdf). In terms of income, the top 10% is estimated to get half of the global income; see Branko Milanovic, *Global Income Inequality: What It Is and What It Matters*, UN DESA Working Paper, 2006, [www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2006/wp26\\_2006.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2006/wp26_2006.pdf).
6. Income inequality between countries has continued to increase since 1950. Income inequality within individual countries has also increased in the case of several countries. Yet inequality between all the households in the world has not increased, and this is likely to be the key indicator that the founders behind the global veil of ignorance follow most attentively.
7. Although the issue of intergenerational and international burden sharing receives most of the attention, the issue of technological advance is equally important. If average temperature increase is to be capped at 2 °C, we would need to decrease global emissions from their current levels of about 40 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents to 20 gigatons. This would need to happen at a time of continued population and economic growth, and cannot be achieved without multiple technological breakthroughs.
8. For a recent review of available policy options, see Jessica Cohen and William Easterly, *What Works in Development: Thinking Big and Thinking Small*

(Brookings, 2009). For an interesting methodology for assessing option—albeit with disappointing results—see Bjorn Lomborg, *Global Crises, Global Solutions* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).





The views expressed in this working paper do not necessarily reflect the official position of Brookings, its board or the advisory council members.

© 2010 The Brookings Institution

ISSN: 1939-9383

# BROOKINGS

1775 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-797-6000  
[www.brookings.edu/global](http://www.brookings.edu/global)

