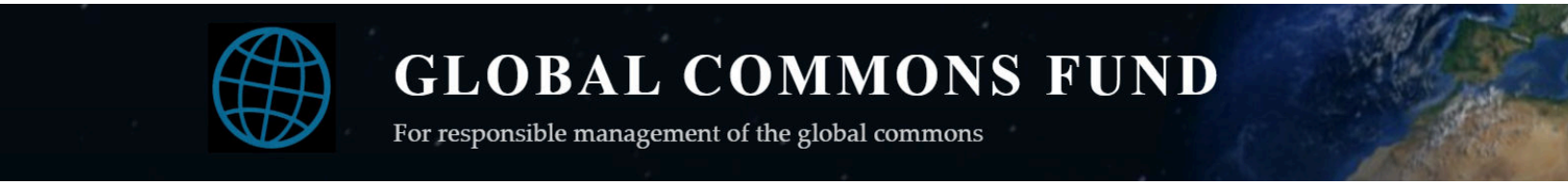
White Paper on the Global Commons and Philanthropy

A publication of the Global Commons Fund

www.globalcommonsfund.org

Published June, 2025



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The global commons - the air and water we share, etc. - are under-protected. As a result, our planet is facing grave ecological and geopolitical risks. Can humanity come together to create new systems for *responsible management of the global commons*? If so, how? What is the role of philanthropy?

1.0 - A Possible Future - Opening Fictional Narrative

The day started too early. Ana emerged from her small apartment to greet the streets of her new home, where she'd recently started college - a country that was technically a democracy. She questioned that reality more and more every week. The country's erratic leader seemed to issue new absurdities daily. The message was clear: politics here was not business as usual.

As she stepped off her bike to get breakfast from her favorite bakery, she walked into the shop and saw the news. Another heat wave had hit the west, and elderly people were dying in record numbers. Human-induced climate change or not, Ana knew one thing: trees made clouds, and clouds cooled the earth. Reckless deforestation across neighboring countries made no sense to her. If the sausage in her breakfast muffin was implicated in that destruction, how would she know?

She considered her meal for a moment. Policies controlling deforestation-related imports and exports - good or bad - were made by voters in other "democracies," overseas. How could she possibly do anything about it?

As the thought crossed her mind, Ana froze. She pulled out her wallet and looked at her two credit cards. One old, one new.

She began to remember the story. This new credit card was somehow a solution. By applying for it, she had become a "global citizen" of sorts. Each time she made a purchase, the issuing bank donated a small part of the transaction fee to a global fund that worked to protect forests and other shared resources of the "global commons." But there was something else: she was given a vote, whatever that meant.

As Ana finished her breakfast, locked up her bike, and descended into the metro, she pulled out her phone and visited the website again. There it was: another global referendum was coming up, this time about weapons in space. She could cast a vote herself or delegate it to others.

Ana paused. "Who am I to make decisions about outer space?" she thought. Another topic: should the new models of Artificial Intelligence be allowed to propagate autonomously, or should they face additional safety standards? She actually cared about AI, and had studied it after she

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and others were deceived by the deepfake video that had sparked riots in her aunt's village. Fortunately, only one person had died.

Climate change. Outer space. AI governance. All those issues had dominated the headlines of her Current Affairs class just last year.

She thought the geopolitical shift of the past few years seemed slow, but unmistakable. As nation-states competed to dominate the economy, OpenAI had launched the first virtual constitutional convention. It caught on. Ana's dad and brother had even taken part. Hundreds of millions of people gathered online, interacting with the latest Global Consensus-branded AI chatbot. Where nation-states had stalled on issues like AI governance, grassroots citizens and international NGOs banded together with big tech companies to debate solutions to global issues ranging from AI safety and ocean pollution to stopping corruption, pandemic prevention and refugee resettlement. At points, people were able to vote in the system.

Ana's father was initially alarmed by the effort, terrified by the idea of global government. His fears disappeared, however, when his son explained that the whole thing was only focused on international issues. "Dad, it's not about global government! It's about how to manage the global commons, responsibly, instead of every man for himself. It is only about the shared global stuff. Local things get decided by locals."

The process ultimately produced a Global Commons Charter - a new set of global principles and procedures that some companies quickly adopted and actively promoted, to the surprise of many. Ana's art teacher had even created a painting of children circling the Earth, with their words flowing upward toward the North Pole. It was meant to symbolize the spirit of the Global Commons Charter. Children understood it intuitively, but adults were learning too.

Apple and Mastercard were among the first big companies to sign on. After legal battles across multiple countries, with divergent outcomes, they cited the Global Commons Charter as a legitimate reference for their global-level jurisprudence and privacy policy development. Both companies simultaneously rolled out flashy new programs: cash-back deals tied to "global commons" credit cards and Apple Pay memberships that funded the global commons through tiny shares of transaction fees.

The news went viral. Taylor Swift, MrBeast, and other influencers promoted it. Millions signed up on the first day.

As Ana clicked through the website, her phone buzzed with a new text. Her old bank was trying to win her back - this time offering its own "global commons" card, with messaging about baby seals and biodiversity protection. Somehow, protecting nature had become consumer-friendly again.

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Just a few years ago, Ana's friends had organized campus walkouts to protest climate inaction. Now, those same students were becoming champions of the global commons and the Global Commons Charter. Her sister's friend Barbara had even secured a cushy job at the New York Times to cover the negotiations between governments and the growing global commons movement.

The balance of power had started to shift. Once the central player in international trade among nations, the World Trade Organization now negotiated not just with countries, but also with transnational groups of citizens who could sway entire markets. A unipolar world, dominated by the economic interests of a few nations, had transitioned painlessly to one that prioritized the needs of all, including the global commons.

Ana arrived at her stop and climbed the stairs to the street. A taxi blared its horn as a procession of indigenous leaders passed, heading toward the capitol for a ceremony honoring the new parliamentary session. The Global Commons Charter had emphasized the legitimacy of indigenous people in global decision-making, given their legacies as stewards of nature and sustainability throughout history.

Ana smiled. The fears she had carried in her youth - fears of a world sliding toward extinction - were gone. Thoughts of the future no longer filled her with dread. In fact, they now inspired her.

A new political system was opening to her and her generation - a system they could help shape. Maybe, they could finally govern their way out of the crises of the 21st century.

After all, even MrBeast and Taylor Swift thought they could.

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2.0 - Abstract

This white paper explores an emerging vision for 21st-century global governance centered on the stewardship of the global commons—resources like the climate, oceans, outer space, and digital infrastructure that transcend national borders. Through a compelling narrative and rigorous analysis, the paper argues that existing multilateral systems are inadequate for addressing today's planetary challenges, including climate change, artificial intelligence, global inequality, and nuclear risk. It posits that these challenges demand novel institutional designs grounded in the principle of subsidiarity—where decisions are made at the most local level possible, yet with global cooperation where necessary.

Drawing on historical precedents, current initiatives, and technological advances, the authors propose an innovative model for global participation, funding, and enforcement. This includes mechanisms such as transaction-fee-funded global commons credit cards, citizen referenda on cross-border issues, and institutional innovations like a Global Commons Fund. The paper also highlights the role of philanthropy, social movements, and corporate actors in catalyzing these shifts, emphasizing that meaningful global governance reform will require multi-sectoral leadership, mass participation, and inclusive frameworks that elevate underrepresented voices.

Ultimately, the white paper presents a roadmap for transitioning from a geopolitics of fragmentation to one of shared responsibility. It envisions a future in which individuals and institutions are empowered to collaboratively manage global risks and protect the commons. By rethinking governance through a transnational, participatory lens, the authors make a compelling case that global citizenship and systemic reform are not only desirable but increasingly necessary for humanity's survival and flourishing.

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3.0 - Introduction: Crisis and Opportunity

Humanity and nature are on the verge of multiple global tipping points, where small changes can lead to large, possibly irreversible shifts in our planetary system. The risks range from biodiversity collapse and catastrophic climate change to the breakout of rogue AI and disruption of the international rule of law. We are facing multiple worldwide emergencies all at once.

The scale of these problems and our collective inability to address them effectively demonstrate how our current systems for global problem solving need to change.

Founded in 1945, the United Nations was originally created to promote peace across the globe and prevent a third world war. While it has succeeded in that goal, article 2 of the UN Charter called for an equality of all nations, with the expectation that the UN system would evolve into a more democratic institution capable of managing many global affairs, including the "common heritage of humanity." Unfortunately, this goal has yet to be realized, with all major proposals to upgrade the UN system facing vetoes in the UN Security Council. Some countries do not want to cede power to others, even when it may benefit the whole.

As younger generations observe, the systems of statecraft that were created to solve the problems of the 20th century do not stand up to the needs of the 21st. The time has come to face these shortcomings and design a better global governance system with younger and older generations working together to ensure systemic change.

Every crisis contains a seed of opportunity. The current moment is no exception: it has awoken people everywhere to recognize that our existing structures urgently need updating. Can we meet this moment by thinking bigger, more boldly, and more inclusively? Can new concepts and new political frames help bypass the nation-state obstacles of the past? Can the next generation of philanthropies help to drive a shift?

3.1 - What are the Global Commons?

The global commons refers to natural resource domains that lie outside the political reach of any one nation-state and are considered shared resources for all of humanity. They are areas or systems that everyone relies on but no one owns outright. In her book, Governing the Commons, Dr. Elinor Ostrom recognized the need for governance, explaining that rules, defined boundaries, collective-choice arrangements, and conflict resolution mechanisms were essential for sustainable use of the commons. Sustainability is the key.

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Human activity is accelerating global environmental change in the Anthropocene. The Earth system - defined as the planet's interconnected physical, chemical, and biological processes - is becoming increasingly unstable and susceptible to severe disruption. Many of the processes that together maintain a stable Earth system have experienced significant shifts, with six out of nine planetary boundaries now breached. Several major components, known as tipping elements, could soon enter rapid, self-reinforcing, and potentially irreversible change.

In response, we urgently need to manage the global commons sustainably, to ensure the stability of critical Earth system functions beyond the constraints of national jurisdictions.

This should be feasible given our modern communication and financial management technologies. Facing this unmet need compels us to consider opportunities in global governance, augmenting multilateral systems like the UN, and extending toward systems of world law. Is such an approach possible?

As scholars of science and geopolitics, and as stewards of investment and philanthropic strategies, the authors of this paper consider the history of select global issues and strategies to solve them through global governance innovation and reform.

These approaches, generally overlooked, may unlock the necessary solutions to our most urgent challenges, which are proving intractable otherwise.

3.2 - Global Governance and the Subsidiarity Principle

Global governance of the global commons is essential, but global governance does not mean global government for everything. Subsidiarity remains central: the principle that local decisions are best made by local people, for most issues. There's no need for global participation in neighborhood zoning decisions, for example. The principle has a long history in Catholic social teaching and is a fundamental part of European Union law.

While countries typically resist some kinds of international governance, they usually welcome shared governance of issues that extend beyond their national borders.

3.3 - Tackling Global Issues

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Transnational issues are problems that cross national borders and cannot be solved by any single country alone. There is a long history of treaties, conventions and international organizations that have been created to address them, such as the many UN agencies. This paper explores select transnational issues, considers historic attempts to address them, and proposes new strategies for the future.

We start by examining risks to the biosphere, including climate change, tropical deforestation, and ocean pollution. Then we consider preventing international conflict with a focus on Ukraine, Palestine, Taiwan, and nuclear non-proliferation. We also explore global taxation, transnational organized crime and corruption, AI governance, pandemic prevention, refugee management, and regulation of outer space activities, among other issues. We conclude by exploring opportunities for global governance innovation.

The evidence is clear. Global challenges need global solutions.

While most issues we examine are under-managed at the global level, there have been some global governance successes. The Montreal Protocol successfully lowered emissions of chlorofluorocarbons. The International Court of Justice has effectively adjudicated border disputes, maritime conflicts and other issues. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers has successfully managed Internet affairs in transparent and democratic ways. The International Campaign to Ban Land Mines (ICBL) succeeded in its goal, in a prime example of citizen mobilization and civic participation at a global level.

New campaigns for sound Earth governance to manage global risks, like the International Anti-Corruption Court (IACC). draw strategic inspiration from the methods that made the ICBL successful. Such campaigns employ "smart coalition" techniques of civil society movements and like-minded states working together to achieve significant transformations in the international system.

There is hope.

3.4 - Innovation

While the prevailing analysis of global governance reform has long tended toward skepticism, the authors of this paper suggest the field and the time are now ripe for innovation.

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The architecture of the global financial system could offer a simple mechanism for revenue generation and regulatory oversight. Funded through transaction fees or interest payments, a global commons fund could finance nature-based solutions, refugee resettlement, and other global solutions. Socially minded consumers could lead adoption, as they have historically through campaigns like Product Red and its companion American Express Red credit card. Global citizenship education and celebration efforts could accelerate it further.

With the rise of Bitcoin and Ethereum, the development of global currencies seems inevitable, and could open a pathway to redesigning systems of global cooperation, policy development and enforcement. The development of new technologies that facilitate mass participation may make the concept of global, participatory governance viable for the first time in human history. Whereas trade liberalization has facilitated offshoring and inspired the anti-globalization movement in the past, new mass participation efforts might be able to foster new agreements that work for everyone today.

There have been numerous historic efforts to innovate global governance, ranging from the World Federalist Movement of the 1940s to proposals for "network states" today. Although previous efforts stalled in very different contexts in years past, global governance transformation is in the *zeitgeist* today.

Political, corporate, and philanthropic leadership will be key.

Philanthropists are needed to provide seed funding for a global governance redesign. Investors and policy makers are needed to help incentivize economic trends towards greater global cooperation. Corporate CEOs and entrepreneurs are needed to guide the markets toward greater interdependence and develop the business opportunities that arise as a result. And social movements are needed to expand the Overton window and build the base of support that makes the whole vision feasible.

Is it possible? To find out, join us for a journey through the history and future of the global commons and global governance with special consideration of the philanthropic sector and its role. The concept of global citizenship today is an idea whose time has come.

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4.0 - Global Problems Need Global Solutions

Many transnational issues are interconnected. The structural limitations that impede progress on one likely affect many others. What are these issues? What is the history of our attempts to address them as a global community? What are the treaties and institutions that have been created to make collective action possible? And, what are the pathways to resolution for the philanthropic community?

4.1 - Climate

Humanity's attempts at international solutions to the climate crisis so far are not working. Successfully reversing the trend toward disaster will require transforming our existing mechanisms with more robust global governance.

Our primary existing mechanism, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), is just that, a framework, under which more substantive treaties must be negotiated. An annual Conference of Parties (COP) takes place for this purpose.

Two agreements reached at COPs under the UNFCCC framework have been seen as significant steps forward, yet neither has succeeded in reducing worldwide emissions of greenhouse gases that cause climate change. Ominously, these have increased steadily with only brief dips coinciding with the 2008 financial crisis and the 2020-21 peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Kyoto Protocol, adopted in 1997, featured binding commitments by countries to reduce emissions between 2005 and 2020. Although 192 countries ratified it, the US did not, and Canada withdrew after ratifying. In all, over 35 developed countries participated fully, reducing their own emissions to a limited degree as agreed, even as total global emissions increased.

The Paris Agreement, in effect since 2016, set a goal of limiting the global average temperature increase. Nominally binding, it requires countries to set their own voluntary emission pledges rather than imposing targets. The pledges are generally seen as collectively insufficient, with the US and the EU also failing to meet their own pledges. The Paris Agreement also includes provisions on climate adaptation and finance. Although 195 countries ratified the Paris agreement, including the US, President Trump has withdrawn the US from it twice, once in each of his terms in office.

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A third, less ambitious COP accomplishment was the creation in 2022 of a climate loss and damage fund to compensate countries that bear the worst impacts.

Unfortunately, with these exceptions, annual COPs have generally been viewed as failures, leading to doubts about their value, even as the evidence of harm becomes increasingly clear and visibly urgent.

The unfortunate pattern is that a few countries typically block progress for the whole world. For example, the Council on Foreign Relations blamed developed countries for a failure to increase climate finance commitments in 2024. Experts at the Brookings Institution excoriated COP delegates for failing to commit to ending fossil fuel use in 2023. Moreover, in 2021, India obstructed a proposal to phase out coal. And in 2018, due to an objection from oil-producing countries the Conference failed to adopt its own report which it had commissioned from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Beyond the challenge of consensus decision-making, COPs have also been criticised for their protracted negotiations and weak follow-through on agreements. To address these limitations, structural reforms are needed to shift COPs toward delivery and action, sharing best practices, holding countries accountable, and financing the transition. Proposals for such reforms have been outlined in two open letters: one from the Club of Rome, released in 2023 and signed by former heads of state and influential decision makers, and another released by Transparency International in March 2025 and co-signed by more than 250 organizations. The letters highlight the urgent need to address conflicts of interest in climate negotiations. Among other things, the coalition called for exclusion of high-polluting industry lobbyists, adoption of stronger transparency standards, and a reformed COP presidency selection process to restore credibility and integrity to climate diplomacy.

This issue is also taken up in the Climate Governance Commission's (CGC) 2023 report, which highlights the urgent need for stronger global governance across key areas. Since the report's release, several high-priority proposals have been further advanced, including: (1) strengthening the Climate COP process, with closer alignment to the biennial Biodiversity COPs and a bold international climate and nature finance proposal, (2) establishing a Planetary Emergency Platform, alongside a UNGA Declaration on Planetary Emergency, (3) improving international Earth system monitoring and reporting to address risks from Earth system tipping points, including possible UNSC action, (4) creating an international Climate and Nature Policy Innovation Hub, in partnership with initiatives such as Climate Policy Radar and the Global Commons Alliance, and (5) advancing "next generation" global governance, including proposals for a Global Environment Organization and an International Court for the Environment, building on the current momentum at international courts such as International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and the International Court of Justice.

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Grantmaking foundations play a crucial role around the UNFCCC by funding civil society participation, advancing climate justice, and supporting the development of policies aligned with climate targets. They also help build the capacity of Global South actors, Indigenous communities, and youth to influence negotiations and implement locally grounded climate solutions. One of the leading facilitators of donor collaboration on climate change is ClimateWorks. Founded in 2008, it coordinates funding strategies among philanthropies to support global climate goals, many aligned with the UNFCCC process, such as the Funders Table. Climate Lead is another leading guide, helping donors to deploy over $4 billion in climate donations since 2019.

4.2 - Tropical Deforestation, the Amazon and the Global Water Cycle

Tropical forests are home to the highest concentrations of biodiversity in the world. The Amazon forest itself may be home to an estimated 30% of all species. It also serves as a central pump of the global water cycle. Evapotranspiration from the Amazon forest creates flying rivers that drive water cycles around the world, including its own hydration. The average drop of water falls on the forest five or six times before it is washed out to sea.

On the verge of a deforestation tipping point, the Amazon forest is at risk of drying out and burning away. The scourge of deforestation undermines the water cycle, creates local droughts and accelerates feedback loops which are drying out the forest. According to the Global Safety Net analysis, 85% of the Amazon biome is vital for both biodiversity conservation and the global climate system, given that the region locks away an estimated 150 billion tons of carbon. Moreover, a landmark study from 2024 concluded that reforesting 5% of the Amazon is urgently needed to prevent the forest from collapsing into a dry grassland ecosystem, a process which would release gigatons of carbon, cause new pandemics, drive mass migration, and lead to global food insecurity. Climate models suggest that parts of the Western United States could lose up to 50% of precipitation if we lose the Amazon. The world has a clear interest in securing the ecological integrity of the region. Time is running out.

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As a transnational product of nature, the Amazon suffers from the tragedy of the commons. The region is beset with drug trafficking, illegal deforestation and other issues with the rule of law, which have thwarted protection of the Amazon as a global priority.

Much deforestation is driven by illegal logging, often facilitated by bribery, falsified permits, and willful institutional blindness. According to the World Wildlife Fund, illegal logging accounts for 15%–30% of global timber production and up to 50%–90% in many tropical countries. A joint report by the United Nations Environment Programme and Interpol found that organized crime networks are responsible for up to 90% of logging in key tropical regions, using tactics such as bribery, permit fraud, and even hacking government systems to launder illegal timber.

In Indonesia, Global Witness found that nearly 40% of sampled palm oil mills supplying major international traders were linked to environmental destruction, land rights violations, or attacks on land and environmental defenders. Meanwhile, the Forest Peoples Programme in Indonesia and Amazonia 2030 in Brazil have documented how legal frameworks and political systems often enable land grabs and the issuance of concessions on indigenous territories without consent. These systemic failures not only drive illegal deforestation but also deny forest-dependent communities their rights and livelihoods.

At the global level the Forest and Climate Leaders Partnership helps governments work together to implement solutions that reduce forest loss, increase restoration and support sustainable development, and to ensure accountability for the pledges that have been made. In South America, since 1995, the nine countries of the Amazon have worked together through the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization to promote the welfare of the region. In collaboration with leading donor governments, the Amazon Fund was created in 2018 to channel financial resources to forest allies. The funding, unfortunately, is inadequate to date.

Fortunately, the forest is worth more alive and standing than cut and burned. This suggests that a shift in economic priorities in the region could elevate forest protection-and-regeneration economies over deforestation. Economic projections by groups like the Amazon Investor Coalition suggest that by replacing cattle and soy monocultures with agroforestry, we could increase local earnings by 1000% while sequestering carbon, replenishing water cycles and restoring biodiversity. Fortunately, these numbers have attracted the attention of industry and the Amazon bioeconomy is growing in both scale and prominence, yet the philanthropic footprint in the region continues to lag far behind the need. A 2020 report suggested that private philanthropy in the Amazon, up to that year, amounted to about $100 million per year, or about one ten-thousandth of global philanthropy. This is inadequate considering the global significance of the Amazon region.

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The 30th COP under the UNFCCC will come to Belem, Brazil, in the Amazon this year. A breakthrough in political will is needed to drive approval of proposals like the $125 billion Tropical Forest Forever Facility which could help to secure the ecological integrity of the Amazon and other tropical forests once and for all.

> Founded in 2006, the Climate and Land Use Alliance is a collaborative of 6 foundations and is one of the leading grantmakers providing support for tropical forests. Forests, People, Climate is an important player as well, mobilizing over $700 million to date.

4.3 - The Ocean

The world's oceans act as a carbon "sink", absorbing nearly one third (31%) of the CO2 released into the atmosphere globally and also absorbing 90% of excess heat. They also provide vital food supplies, accounting for 17% of animal protein worldwide. And, they are the main pathway for international trade in physical goods. Oceans are clearly a resource of the global commons we all have a stake in.

Yet the many mechanisms through which we manage and attempt to steward our oceans have a common flaw, which is the absence of a sufficiently global approach, especially for enforcement. While we have a rich patchwork of international treaties and entities, some nations choose not to participate, and others engage in perilous marine practices to evade controls and sanctions, threatening our environment, human rights, and critical global infrastructure.

Fundamental to global ocean governance is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), in force since 1994. Like the UNFCCC, UNCLOS provides a framework for regulation via additional treaties. Sadly, the US has not ratified UNCLOS and thus is not a party to it. The Convention established the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) and the International Seabed Authority (ISA). Active since 1992, ITLOS has jurisdiction over any dispute concerning the interpretation or application of the Convention.

In 2023, we saw encouraging news for ocean conservation, with the adoption of a High Seas Treaty, which Greenpeace called "the biggest conservation victory ever." Ratification by at least 60 countries is required for it to take effect. While 113 countries have signed on, including the US, China, and the EU (but not Russia), just 21 have ratified the treaty so far, with no major powers doing so yet. Although it's not aimed

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directly at reducing climate change, its measures to protect marine ecosystems "created a legal mandate for taking climate change mitigation and adaptation measures," as well as effectively supporting these ecosystems' carbon sink function.

Unfortunately, the global rule of law is currently inadequate in several key areas with respect to ocean life, use and traffic.

Principally, the oceans will experience a mass extinction of an estimated 75% of marine animals if atmospheric CO2 levels reach 870 ppm and seawater acidity drops below a pH of 7.9. At that level, lower trophic levels of ocean life will not be able to calcify their exoskeletons, will die off, and will starve out the food webs that depend on them. If current trends continue, this mass "ocean death" could arrive before 2100.

In addition, uncontrolled plastic pollution in the ocean threatens hundreds of species, including humans, due to ingestion, entanglement, pathogen distribution, and microplastic toxicity.

The high-seas fishing industry is notorious for overfishing and human rights abuses including forced labor and murder, as well as national sovereignty violations such as poaching and territorial expansionism.

There is a growing "dark fleet," currently comprising more than 1,000 dangerously deteriorating ships deployed to evade sanctions such as the price cap on Russian oil (internationally imposed following its 2022 invasion of Ukraine). The fleet operates without insurance under "flags of convenience" from weak countries that are not parties to the sanctions regime. The ships often keep their identification transponders turned off, or on but programmed to send false location signals. This dark fleet not only limits sanction effectiveness, but it also risks grave and lasting damage to regions where these ships inevitably run aground and are typically then abandoned.

The recent severing of undersea cables and pipelines impacts world information and energy infrastructure while also damaging marine environments. Although many recent incidents have occurred in the exclusive economic zones of specific countries, vast areas of the ocean lie beyond any one country's purview. Despite existing treaties, maritime law enforcement is evidently inadequate to prevent these attacks.

A UN Ocean Conference is scheduled for June 2025. Its aims include climate action, joint public and private investment to "reinvent the ocean economy," help for developing countries to "adapt to the new blue economy and to the fight against illegal fishing," and to "help local governments adapt to rising sea levels."

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Established in 2011, Oceans 5 is an international funder collaborative dedicated to protecting the world's five oceans by addressing critical marine conservation challenges.

4.4 - Global Environmental Governance

Beyond issues of climate, oceans and forests, there are many other global level environmental concerns as well as governance mechanisms and proposals to manage them. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was created after the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in June 1972. It provides leadership, delivers science and develops solutions on diverse issues, including climate, ecosystems, and sustainable development.

There are multiple proposals for global environmental governance mechanisms outside the UN system. As judicial bodies such as the ICJ and ITLOS examine the scope of states' responsibilities in relation to climate change, there is a recognized need for a dedicated forum capable of interpreting and applying international climate and environmental law. A key institutional innovation could be an International Court for the Environment (ICE): a transnational judicial body empowered to adjudicate climate and environmental disputes across national borders and issue advisory opinions on complex legal questions.

While models for practical implementation are still evolving, the idea is gaining traction. The International Bar Association, for instance, has proposed the creation of such a court and helped launch the ICE Coalition, which is actively advocating for its establishment. If realized, this court could be a transformative force in global governance, providing the necessary legal forum to enforce environmental commitments, enforce accountability, and protect the global commons.

To complement legal enforcement mechanisms such as a potential ICE, a coordinated executive agency is essential for effective global environmental governance. Among others, the CGC has recommended the establishment of a Global Environment Agency (GEA) to serve as a central node for climate and environmental governance across global, regional, national, and sub-national levels. Building on the existing activities of UNEP, the GEA would be designed to overcome the fragmented and insufficient governance structures currently in place.

The GEA could work closely with other international institutions and programs, helping to overcome fragmentation, develop a comprehensive body of international environmental

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law, and support equitable climate action, especially in low and middle-income countries. Over time, it could evolve into a more authoritative decision-making body to address global environmental challenges collectively, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity - acting when lower levels of governance are unable or unwilling to respond adequately.

Originally developed in 2012, the Escazú Agreement is an international treaty signed by 25 Latin American and Caribbean nations concerning the rights of access to information about the environment, public participation in environmental decision-making, environmental justice, and a healthy and sustainable environment for current and future generations. The treaty is the first in the world to include provisions on the rights of environmental defenders. The agreement strengthens the links between human rights and environmental protection by imposing requirements upon member states concerning the rights of environmental defenders. Related, the Stop Ecocide campaign advocates for making “ecocide” — extensive, severe, or systematic environmental destruction — an international crime, empowering courts to prosecute corporations or governments that damage ecosystems on a massive scale.

4.5 - Preventing International Conflict

The world community has yet to create a global governance authority capable of guaranteeing security and preventing international aggression, despite major attempts following each of the two world wars.

After World War I, the League of Nations was formed, for the purpose of enabling world peace and security through international law. It had many weaknesses, including a requirement for unanimity, the non-ratification by the United States, and the initial exclusion of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, Bulgaria (the defeated side in WWI), and Bolshevik Russia.

The League was established by Part 1 of the Treaty of Versailles; Part 8 of the same treaty required reparation payments from Germany. These reparations were later set at ruinous levels, fueling an ongoing grievance which fueled Hitler’s rise, leading to World War II. Obviously, the League of Nations failed.

After World War II, the United Nations was born when humanity united in calling for mechanisms to prevent the horrors of war from recurring. Yet although the United Nations endures today and has been an important step toward making warfare obsolete for statecraft, current events demonstrate its inadequacy to prevent territorial aggression by nuclear powers or their client states.

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The UN's structure presents challenges to reform. The veto power of the "P5", the five permanent members of the Security Council (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US), has at times constrained peacekeeping efforts and blocked international consensus. This has led many observers to call the system unrepresentative, slow to act and in need of change. While there have been over 200 overt vetoes in UN history, the threat of veto in closed-door negotiations (known as the 'hidden veto') also influences outcomes. The UN Charter has not been substantively amended since 1973, despite growing demands for reform.

Sadly, levels of violent conflict are now among the highest since World War II. 2022 was the deadliest year for armed conflict in 30 years. In 2024, 92 countries were at war, the highest number since the Global Peace Index began measuring in 2008. Moreover, "the likelihood of another major conflict is higher than at any time since the inception of the GPI," according to its authors, the Institute for Economics & Peace.

Preventing the escalation and outbreak of war is cheaper in terms of both money and lives than trying to stop a war that has already started. According to the UN Development Programme, prevention is 10 times more financially efficient than post-conflict recovery.

The extent of warfare today and the risk of escalation, especially compared to the cost-effectiveness of prevention, demonstrate the failures of our current model.

In the absence of a political mechanism for justice, violence is an inevitable result. Academic studies have found that terrorism is often driven by political injustice, and that countries with fewer political rights tend to face a higher risk of terrorist attacks. As President John F. Kennedy famously said, "those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable."

Here are three salient examples that highlight the inadequacy of our current systems:

4.5.1 - Russia's War on Ukraine

According to some scholars of Russian geopolitics, the origins of the Ukraine war began with the eastward expansion of NATO in 2004, in violation of an agreement between Mikhail Gorbachev and George H. W. Bush that NATO would not move "one inch" to the east after the Russians withdrew their forces from Eastern Europe and allowed Germany to reunite. George Kennan, the intellectual architect of US cold war policy, warned that eastward expansion of NATO would lead to war.

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In the absence of an effective system trusted by all to manage long term geopolitical tension between Russia and the West, conflict may have been inevitable.

Still, Russia's war of territorial expansion in Ukraine violates the basic Westphalian premise of nation-based security. The United Nations failed to prevent the invasion. Only Ukraine's own resistance has mounted an effective defense, despite a diplomatic alternative, the Istanbul Communiqué, which may have been available in early 2022.

The failure to prevent or stop the war shows that today's security institutions are toothless when facing aggression by a nuclear power. Intermittent US-led diplomatic efforts to broker a ceasefire have often centered on pressuring Ukraine to concede territory illegally seized by Russia during its 2014 annexation of Crimea and the full-scale invasion launched in 2022. Such approaches risk undermining core international norms meant to uphold global security, and instead of deterring aggression, they may inadvertently reward it, setting a dangerous precedent.

One encouraging development is the ongoing effort to create a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine, supported by the Council of Europe. The successful establishment and operation of such a tribunal — the first established specifically to investigate and prosecute the crime of aggression — could provide an important deterrent effect against future acts of aggression by countries. In this way, the tribunal could be a core element in the construction of a system of global governance that more effectively *prevents*, rather than just *reacts* to cases of aggression and to international conflict writ large.

4.5.2 - Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon

Since the attack by Hamas in October 2023, the Israeli counteroffensive has killed many Palestinians in an assault widely criticized for violating human rights and the laws of war. In 2024, the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion calling Israel's presence in Gaza unlawful and calling for an end to the apparent violations of international law. After a ceasefire, Israel has re-launched its military escalation in Gaza while continuing to block essential humanitarian aid. At the same time, Israel has expanded its physical presence further into southern Syria through ground incursions — an overreach that could create enemies where there currently are not any and further destabilize the region.

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There is currently no global governance mechanism adequate to prevent these actions.

This absence is not only a recent phenomenon. Throughout the modern history of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, which dates back more than a century, there has never been a global authority capable of acting as an impartial arbiter and guarantor of security for both sides. The British Mandate in Palestine at first broadly supported the early 20th century upsurge in Jewish immigration to the area, then later acknowledged the resulting harm to Palestinians before Britain abandoned its role there following World War II. Since 1947, the United Nations has stepped into an oversight role, but it has been neither even-handed nor effective. UN Security Council resolutions critical of Israeli aggression have been vetoed consistently by UN Security Council (UNSC) permanent members since the mid-1950's. Initial vetoes came from Britain, France, and the USSR, but since 1972, the United States alone has vetoed 45 UNSC resolutions critical of Israel. Meanwhile the UN General Assembly has passed more than 180 such resolutions; consequently, Israel advocates have typically viewed the UN as hostile to their interests. The net result is that the UN is not trusted by either side, begetting a justice vacuum that enables impunity.

4.5.3 - China and Taiwan

Conflict between mainland China and Taiwan has simmered for 75 years, with ominous escalations reported recently. China has been making increasingly aggressive claims over Taiwan and its dominance in the region. It has built military outposts on rocky shoals in the South China Sea and conducted alarming military drills around Taiwan, which it officially regards as a renegade province.

Meanwhile the United States has repeatedly promised to defend Taiwan in the event of attack (despite an official policy of strategic ambiguity).

Global governance systems have not yet been adequate to calm the waters, nor to achieve a structurally stable solution. To the contrary, past efforts have contributed to instability. For the first 26 years of the UN's existence, Taiwan's government was recognized as representing China, stoking a long-term grievance with the mainland People's Republic.

Then in 1971, President Nixon intervened to transfer the Chinese permanent seat on the UN Security Council to the People's Republic of China (PRC). For the last

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> 50 years, this has left Taiwan without representation in the UN system except via the PRC's claim to sovereignty over it.
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> Without a mechanism credibly adjudicating between both sides, the conflict simmers, fueling ongoing risk of a potential nuclear war between China and the United States. More robust global governance is needed to guarantee the security of all parties.

The common thread across these three conflict zones is the absence of a system preventing territorial aggression. Instead, we've relied for nearly eight decades on an unstable balance-of-power calculus that too often rewards acts of war rather than deterring them, as long as the perpetrating state is a nuclear power or is backed by one.

Further, ongoing, protracted conflicts in countries like Ethiopia, Sudan, and Yemen have claimed and destroyed countless lives, crippling the development potential of the affected states, and highlighting the limits of international order. Because these so-called "internal" or "regional" conflicts are less entangled with great power politics than crises in Ukraine, Gaza, or Taiwan, they often suffer from a lack of attention from the United Nations and major powers capable of helping to stabilize them. Even in situations where the UN or major powers have engaged, their efforts have largely proved feckless and, in some cases, even exacerbated the situations. This "attention gap" characterizes the current weak architecture for preventing international conflict.

Rather than providing a global peace dividend from reduced military spending, limiting threats of aggressive war, and discouraging nuclear proliferation, today's vacuum in global governance incentivizes hostility.

> Founded in 2002, the Peace and Security Funders Group is a global network of philanthropic organizations and individual donors committed to advancing peace and security worldwide. The organization serves as a convening body, fostering collaboration, learning, and strategic alignment among its members to enhance the effectiveness of peace and security philanthropy.

4.6 - No Safe Haven for War Criminals

Despite having gained significant traction in the last century, the promise of international justice risks being overshadowed by the reality of impunity as global conflicts multiply and respect for international norms erodes.

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Following the Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials for atrocities committed during the Second World War, international justice mechanisms have largely emerged over the past three decades: the creation of international tribunals to prosecute atrocity crimes committed in Rwanda and Yugoslavia in the 1990s; the establishment of a permanent international tribunal, the International Criminal Court (ICC), in 2002; the increasing use of hybrid tribunals for atrocities committed in Cambodia, East Timor, Kosovo, Lebanon, and Sierra Leone; and, more recently, ongoing efforts to establish a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine.

An equally important development in the global architecture for international justice has been the growing embrace of the principle of universal jurisdiction (UJ) by states: a long-established legal tool which allows national courts to investigate and prosecute core international crimes even when those crimes were committed outside of their own borders. There has been an exponential rise in UJ investigations and prosecutions in the last three decades, with successful prosecutions against ISIS members, a Russian mercenary leader, and a former finance minister from The Gambia.

Even with these historic developments, however, impunity for atrocity crimes remains all too prevalent. International institutions tasked with delivering accountability frequently struggle with limited mandates, political deadlock, and inadequate enforcement power. Key governments undermine the ICC through sanctions against prosecutors conducting investigations and even ICC member states refuse to execute its international arrest warrants. There is no unified, coherent global system to track and extradite fugitives to ensure perpetrators are held accountable. Finally, there is inadequate funding for and political commitment to both international and national accountability efforts.

Meanwhile, perpetrators — both state and non-state actors — are leveraging new technologies to tighten control, silence opposition, and commit abuses with alarming efficiency. Survivors of mass atrocities continue to encounter systemic barriers that prevent them from accessing justice, from political resistance to weak legal infrastructure.

Strengthening the global system for international justice is essential to ensure there are no safe havens for perpetrators of atrocity crimes. This requires a dynamic approach in an international justice ecosystem where institutions like the ICC work alongside proceedings under universal jurisdiction and legal efforts are paired with non-judicial measures like transitional justice and reparations. A truly effective justice architecture must prioritize survivors and elevate local and hybrid solutions.

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4.7 - Strengthening Nuclear Governance

Nuclear weapons pose an existential risk not only because of their unparalleled destructive power, but also due to their sheer number, the acceleration of proliferation, and the fragility of global governance mechanisms. Today there are over 12,000 nuclear warheads in the world – nearly 90% held by Russia and the United States – many of which remain ready for deployment. While stockpiles have declined since their Cold War peak in the mid 1980s, the rate of reduction has slowed, and several states continue to modernize or expand their arsenals. The closest humanity has come to nuclear war in living memory was during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, when the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union over missiles in Cuba brought the world to the brink of catastrophe. Though the Cold War has ended, risks are rising today.

Nuclear nonproliferation is one of the most underfunded yet existentially urgent challenges of our time. While governments spend trillions on weapons systems and philanthropy directs over $9 billion annually to climate, the nuclear threat reduction field operates on a mere $40–50 million a year. This funding shortfall has left the field stretched thin — undermining its ability to respond to rising global nuclear dangers and to innovate at the pace today's risks demand.

To confront these challenges, we must treat nuclear nonproliferation not as a siloed technical issue but as a cornerstone of global governance reform. Strengthening this field means investing in intersectional research, supporting leadership from underrepresented communities, and fostering a new generation of thinkers who see nuclear risk in context — with climate change, technology disruption, democratic backsliding, and inequality. In short, nuclear field-building is not just about sustaining existing institutions, but about reimagining the ecosystem of actors, tools, and norms needed to manage 21st-century risks.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), opened for signature in 1968, remains the foundational agreement of the global nuclear order. Based on a "grand bargain," non-nuclear weapon states agree to forgo weapons development in exchange for peaceful nuclear energy use and a commitment by nuclear-armed states (the US, Russia, China, France, and the UK) to pursue disarmament. With 191 countries as parties, it is the most widely adopted arms control treaty in existence. Yet today, the NPT is faltering. Progress on disarmament has stalled, enforcement is limited, and four of the world's nine nuclear-armed states — India, Israel, Pakistan, and North Korea — are not parties. Without more visible progress by the nuclear weapon states, the NPT risks losing credibility with states that have upheld their end of the bargain.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) plays a vital verification and monitoring role, ensuring compliance with safeguards agreements under the NPT. Its work has helped limit proliferation and avert nuclear accidents. Most recently, the IAEA's efforts

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around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in Ukraine demonstrated its role in preventing disaster under conditions of conflict. The IAEA's independence, technical credibility, and neutrality must be preserved — and strengthened — to ensure that civilian nuclear programs are not diverted for weapons purposes and that all states benefit from the peaceful use of nuclear technology.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), opened for signature in 1996, prohibits all nuclear explosions. Though not yet in force — largely due to non-ratification by key states including the US and China — it has created a powerful global norm against nuclear testing. Only North Korea has tested since the 21st century began. But that norm is under threat. The first Trump administration considered resuming US testing. Russia revoked its ratification in 2023. China, Russia, and the US have all invested in upgrading test sites. Without new political commitments and entry into force, the CTBT's normative power may weaken.

Adopted in 2017 and in force since 2021, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is the first legally binding instrument to outlaw nuclear weapons outright. While no nuclear-armed states have joined, the treaty has galvanized a powerful humanitarian discourse, led by non-nuclear states and civil society. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017, spearheaded the TPNW's creation by centering the voices of *hibakusha* (atomic bomb survivors), Indigenous communities affected by testing, and Global South nations. The TPNW has introduced a new moral and political axis into the disarmament debate — one that complements, rather than competes with, the NPT.

Even as global norms fray, regional dynamics are compounding nuclear risk. In the Middle East, the collapse of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) after the US withdrawal in 2018 has brought Iran closer to breakout capability. Before the current Iran-Israel war, there was a narrow window to revive negotiations before October 2025, when the EU was planning to reimpose UN sanctions. Iran warned that such a move could prompt its withdrawal from the NPT — a dangerous escalation that could have spurred Saudi Arabia and others to pursue their own weapons programs.

In Europe and Asia, growing mistrust of the US nuclear umbrella has prompted live debates in Poland, Germany, South Korea, and Japan over whether to pursue independent nuclear deterrents. The second Trump administration's strained ties with NATO and Asia-Pacific allies have deepened these concerns. Meanwhile, China is on track to triple its arsenal by 2035. The US and Russia are spending heavily on nuclear modernization, while bilateral arms control agreements have collapsed. When New START expires in 2026, there may be no legal limits on US or Russian arsenals for the first time since the 1970s.

The most immediate opportunity for advancing nuclear threat reduction lies in supporting initiatives that connect nuclear risk to other global challenges. For example, Open

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Philanthropy recognizes nuclear weapons and rogue AI as part of a broader category of global catastrophic risks, tackling them as systemic threats rather than isolated policy domains. Funders could multiply their impact by co-funding initiatives that convene experts across domains — nuclear, climate, AI, public health, democracy — to design integrated risk reduction strategies.

Legal innovators are drawing on successful precedents from human rights litigation, environmental protections, and corporate accountability to forge new approaches to nuclear governance. The effort to apply these strategies to nuclear weapons — supported by Ploughshares and others — offers a promising model for creating accountability where traditional arms control has stalled. This work builds on a growing recognition that traditional nuclear governance has excluded those most affected by the nuclear weapons lifecycle. The success of the TPNW and ICAN's Nobel Peace Prize-winning campaign demonstrated how centering historically marginalized perspectives — *hibakusha*, Indigenous communities exposed to nuclear testing, and Global South nations — can fundamentally reshape the debate. ICAN reframed nuclear weapons as a humanitarian catastrophe, not just a geopolitical dilemma, and in doing so, created new energy for disarmament.

Medical expertise has proven equally transformative. The International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, founded by American and Soviet doctors at the height of the Cold War, also won the Nobel Peace Prize — underscoring that nuclear war constitutes a global public health emergency, not merely a national security issue. This framing helped shift public consciousness and catalyze new policy thinking.

Philanthropy's greatest strength lies in its ability to convene unlikely allies and experiment with new models. The creation of the Quincy Institute, co-funded by George Soros and Charles Koch, shows how shared concern over nuclear escalation can bridge ideological lines. But deeper change requires investing in leadership from women, Indigenous communities, and the Global South — those whose lived experiences and alternative frameworks challenge outdated security thinking.

Programs like Ploughshares' Nuclear Futures Fellowship help build a more inclusive field equipped for today's interconnected risks. Revitalizing nuclear governance isn't just about policy — it's about rethinking who leads, what counts as expertise, and how we define security. As in climate and tech, inclusive models are proving more resilient. Philanthropy can help bring that same transformation to nuclear risk.

To confront nuclear risks in the 21st century, we need more than more funding — we need better funding: investments that recognize nuclear weapons as inseparable from the broader challenges of climate, technology, equity, and democracy.

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Philanthropy plays a crucial role in advancing nuclear threat reduction by funding civil society engagement, supporting inclusive governance, and elevating underrepresented voices in global security debates. Foundations help broaden the field by investing in organizations led by women, Indigenous communities, and Global South experts, ensuring a more equitable and representative discourse around nuclear policy.

Leading funders support diverse networks of advocates, researchers, and storytellers working to reduce nuclear risks. For example, Ploughshares' flagship Nuclear Futures Fellowship helps train the next generation of strategic thinkers with skills in foresight and intersectional analysis. Philanthropy also underwrites legal innovation in the nuclear space, adapting tools from human rights and environmental law to strengthen accountability and challenge traditional security frameworks.

Initiatives like the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), recipient of the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize, demonstrate the impact of civil society campaigns that reframe nuclear weapons as humanitarian and moral issues rather than geopolitical necessities. As nuclear risks intersect more deeply with climate change, technological disruption, and democratic backsliding, philanthropy's role in fostering collaboration across sectors will be essential to building more resilient and inclusive global governance systems.

4.8 - Inequality and the Need for Global Taxation

Observers on both sides of the political aisle attribute the recent wave of support for authoritarianism to a widespread sense that regular people are being left behind while elites enjoy lives of privilege.

Throughout history, inequality has correlated closely with instability. Inequality has also been a key factor in many revolutions, including those that led to the creation of the USSR and the PRC. More recently in the US, President Trump framed both of his campaigns for President as populist crusades against privileged, out-of-touch elites. Inequality was also a central theme in the left-wing US presidential campaigns of Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. In the UK, dissatisfaction with inequality fed the campaign for Brexit. In Germany, inequality-related resentment has fueled gains by the far right party AfD. In Italy, it carried Georgia Meloni to power and in Brazil it drove Jairo Bolsonaro's campaign.

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Regardless of where one sits on the political spectrum, these data points together illustrate the geopolitical risks of allowing inequality to grow unchecked.

Responsible taxation can be part of the solution, according to respected voices including academic economists from around the world, the UN Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters, the OECD, the European Environment Bureau, Oxfam and Global Citizen. Even noted fiscal conservatives at the Peterson Institute have raised the idea.

Beyond the proposed UN Convention on International Tax Cooperation, only a new layer of global governance, supplementing existing systems, could responsibly limit the flight of capital to tax havens and enable responsible taxation for all. This is the view of key figures ranging from author Thomas Piketty to former German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble. It's also why former US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen helped lead the G20 toward adoption of a global minimum tax on corporations, a move supported by 136 countries, representing more than 90% of the world's economy as recently as 2021. Countries including France and Brazil have pushed for a parallel global minimum tax on individual wealth, with occasional support from the US.

Addressing corruption is critical to tackling inequality and ensuring that public resources are fairly collected and distributed, alongside progressive and responsible taxation. Corruption diverts funds away from essential services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure, deepening poverty and denying marginalized communities access to opportunities. By curbing corruption and strengthening equitable taxation, governments can rebuild trust, uphold the rule of law, and create more just and inclusive societies.

Absent stronger global governance, countries will continue to race to the bottom, siphoning an estimated $20 trillion out of reach of taxation and regulation. Unless there is a significant change in the existing systems, inequality will likely continue to grow, driving popular resentment, fueling autocracy, and undermining stability.

> Two global platforms are important references for donors. Launched in 2024, the Taskforce on Inequality and Social-related Financial Disclosures is a global initiative to develop a standardized framework for financial institutions to disclose their dependencies and risks related to social issues and inequality. Established in 2010, the International Centre for Tax and Development focuses on improving tax policy and administration in lower-income countries.

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4.9 - Grand Corruption, Illicit Trade, Money Laundering, Financial Offshoring, and Corporate Accountability

Cracks in our fragmented global system enable international transactions of many kinds that are illegal in most countries. Examples include human trafficking and black market trades in human organs, weapons, antiquities, gold, endangered species, protected natural resources such as timber, illegal drugs, stolen and counterfeit goods, and pirated intellectual property (e.g. movies, music, software or pharmaceuticals). Multinational corporations often exploit these cracks to violate international sanctions, and, in some cases, play a role in the perpetration of core international crimes in conflict zones.

Money laundering, a financial crime in which money is moved or exchanged to hide its original illicit source, is similarly enabled by global fragmentation. Money laundering enables grand corruption - the abuse of high-level public power for private gain at the expense of the public good - in every global region, and vice versa. Grand corruption distorts markets, undermines public trust in governance, and siphons off vast quantities of assets from public coffers into the pockets of kleptocrats and the transnational money laundering networks that conspire with them.

As detailed by Moisés Naím, a former World Bank director and former minister of trade and industry and central bank director for Venezuela, in his book Illicit, these activities are extensively intertwined with the world's legitimate economy and entail devastating human costs, undermine legitimate businesses, incentivize government corruption, finance organized crime and terrorist networks, and erode nation-based sovereignty and governance.

Global illicit financial flows are difficult to measure given the secret nature of related crimes and the ease with which the proceeds of crime can be obscured by complex legal and financial structures. In 2020, a high-level UN panel credibly estimated that money laundering alone accounts for $1.6 trillion of illicit financial flows per year, or 2.7% of global GDP. The same UN panel report further indicates that $7 trillion in private wealth is hidden in haven countries, with 10% of world GDP held offshore. Estimates by Global Financial Integrity (GFI) that are derived solely from examining international commercial trade data indicate that developing regions lose ten times more to illicit financial flows than they receive in foreign assistance. They found that illicit outflows of trade related funds often total more than $800 billion per year and occasionally top $1 trillion per year. GFI makes its estimates using the magnitude of trade misinvoicing - one of the largest components of measurable illicit financial flows. Discrepancies in bilateral trade reflect both legitimate and illicit factors, but GFI's estimates are still likely to be understated

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rather than overstated, because they do not account for activity related to the service trade or other types of financial flows.

The Panama papers, published in 2016, offered further insight, revealing a “global array of crime and corruption” enabled via a network of more than 200,000 offshore shell companies, including accounts linked to heads of state, Brazil’s largest criminal organization, and “at least 33 people and companies blacklisted by the U.S. government because of evidence that they’d been involved in wrongdoing, such as doing business with Mexican drug lords, terrorist organizations like Hezbollah or rogue nations like North Korea and Iran.” More than $1.3 billion in fines and recovered taxes have been collected following these revelations.

Previously, in 2015, the “Swiss leaks” of account records from just one bank, HSBC, revealed more than $100 billion “in accounts linked to arms dealers, dictators and tax evaders.” More recent leaks, including the 2021 Pandora Papers, show that these dynamics continue unabated and may be growing.

Obviously, these disclosures indicate serious structural gaps in our current global patchwork of regulatory and enforcement mechanisms.

To remedy these flaws, scholars have proposed more robust global governance in a variety of forms, including harmonizing and updating national laws, strengthening transnational institutions, and reducing economic disparities. They have also advocated for public-private partnerships for ethical supply chain tracking, enhanced international law enforcement with intelligence sharing, and improved financial regulations and monitoring to stem illicit cash flows.

Sadly, our current mechanisms fall short of what is needed. Interpol is the closest entity we have to a global police force, comprising 196 member countries which collaborate primarily through information sharing and issuing alerts such as “red notices” calling for the arrest of individuals, rather than fielding its own personnel. Unfortunately, there have been abuses of these alerts to prosecute civil society activists and human rights defenders, contributing to mistrust between member countries. That, along with divergent national policies on data protection, has inhibited the exchange of information, thereby limiting Interpol’s effectiveness. Other initiatives like the International Police Executive Symposium have also been key for researching and publishing strategies for improving law enforcement strategy at a global level.

Another helpful, but limited, measure is Magnitsky legislation, passed first in the US and subsequently in Canada, Australia, and several European countries, plus the EU. The legislation authorizes national governments "to impose visa bans and targeted sanctions on individuals, anywhere in the world, responsible for committing human rights violations

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or acts of significant corruption." Unfortunately, its deterrent and preventive power have so far been limited by shortages in both multilateral coordination and enforcement resources, among other factors.

Criminal prosecution is an emerging tool in corporate accountability, with cases targeting companies like Sweden's Lundin Oil for aiding crimes in Sudan, France's Lafarge for financing ISIS in Syria, and European gold traders linked to abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. While promising, this approach remains costly, time-consuming, and in its early stages — requiring significant scaling to deter corporate complicity in international crimes effectively.

The United Nations has adopted treaties pertaining to various categories of transnational crime. Treaties address Organized Crime (in effect since 2000, ratified by 192 countries), Human Trafficking (2003, 180 countries), the Smuggling of Migrants (2004, 151 countries), Trafficking in Firearms (2005, 122 countries, not including the US, Russia, or China), the Arms Trade (2014, 116 countries, not including the US, Russia, or India), Drugs (1990, 191 countries), the Financing of Terrorism (2002, 189 countries), and Corruption (2005, 186 countries).

Not all international efforts to stem illicit trade and financial flows operate under UN auspices. For example, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was adopted in 1963 at a meeting of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, with 185 countries participating. National laws, such as the Lacey Act in the US, which prohibits illicit trade in wildlife, fish, and plants, often augment such global efforts.

Another example, not treaty-based, is the Financial Transparency Coalition, a civil society organisation that takes "action against illicit financial flows, while advocating for a more transparent financial system."

Unfortunately, all these important efforts are undermined by the gaps between them, which enable enormous illicit trade and financial flows as we've seen above. Responding to this need, the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) is a civil society organization through which law-enforcement, governance and development leaders work together to develop "an inclusive global strategy against organized crime."

The campaign for an International Anti-Corruption Court (IACC) could have an important impact on many global issues generally and grand corruption and organized crime more specifically. The UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) requires the 191 countries that are parties to it to criminalize several major forms of corrupt conduct including money laundering, bribery of public officials, embezzlement and other misappropriations of public resources. The problem is that in too many countries, the corrupt are able to

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abuse the administration of justice to create impunity for their crimes. Led by the NGOs Integrity Initiatives International (III) and Integrity Initiatives International Europe (III Europe), a growing coalition of governments, civil society, and experts is working to create the Court. These groups have made rapid progress since 2024, drafting an IACC treaty that states can use as the basis for multilateral negotiations to create the Court. Doing so would not be the only measure to combat corruption, but the IACC campaign aims to have catalytic, transformative effects across the international system, and the Court would be a key innovation that would complement and augment a range of other solutions, including the work pursued by Transparency International, the Financial Transparency Coalition and the GI-TOC. It would help disrupt, dismantle, and deter grand corruption and its constituent crimes, including money laundering, and it would provide an improved means to recover and return illicit assets to benefit the public good.

More robust global governance will be needed to truly solve these problems.

> While there is no donor affinity group devoted uniquely to all these issues, the GI-TOC manages a Resilience Fund to amplify community responses against organized crime and to promote resilience in regions affected by criminal governance. In addition, Human Rights Funders Network is a global community of funders dedicated to fostering donor dialog and supporting human rights actions around the world.

4.10 - AI Governance

Generative Artificial Intelligence, the harnessing of digital technology to perform human-like tasks, has emerged as an increasingly mainstream toolset and a force broadly disruptive of the status quo since the launch of ChatGPT, alongside competing offerings from all the major technology players.

This active frontier of technological innovation holds great promise and also peril, in a variety of risky scenarios.

Most chilling is the idea of an anti-human rogue AI. Another possibility is that AI "agents" overzealously following seemingly benign instructions without constraints (the canonical example is maximizing paperclip production), could hypothetically lead to an AI bot takeover of social media and precipitate another flash crash, tanking financial markets.

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These two risks are best mitigated by robust global safeguards. A patchwork of laws varying by country will simply lead to offshoring of operations and headquarters, as corporations engage in regulatory arbitrage.

A third risk is the intentional weaponization of AI as an instrument of warfare. In fact this is already occurring, with AI autonomously targeting air strikes. To mitigate this risk, one guidepost is our multinational response to nuclear technology. The nuclear non-proliferation treaty has arguably reduced the risk of nuclear war. Following that line of action, tens of thousands of leading scientists and public figures have called on the UN to ban weaponized AI.

Anne-Marie Slaughter, CEO of the think tank New America, and Fadi Chehadé, former president and CEO of ICANN, have endorsed applying the principles and practices that led to limits on nuclear technology to AI, writing that “leading scientists, technologists, philosophers, ethicists, and humanitarians from every continent must… come together to secure broad agreement on a framework for governing AI that can win support at the local, national, and global levels.”

Ian Bremmer of the Eurasia Group recently echoed the point that any credible response to AI risks must be global, saying, "If you want to govern AI the first thing you need to do is have a global conversation... because you can't fix anything if you're all rowing in different directions... and if we don't we're going to break things that are unacceptable to be broken." This sentiment was repeated recently by Chris Anderson of TED and Sam Altman of OpenAI. When pressed on the need for a global agreement on AI safety standards by Anderson, Altman responded, “Of course… A lot has been decided in small elite summits, but one of the cool things about AI… is that our AI could talk to everyone on Earth… and we can learn the collective value preference of what everybody wants.”

A central challenge is that tech companies leading the development of AI generally prefer to operate free of regulatory constraints: "Large Silicon Valley companies involved in AI software — including Google, Microsoft, Meta, Amazon Web Services, and OpenAI — have mounted pushback to proposals for comprehensive AI regulation in the EU, Canada, and California."

Nonetheless, a variety of governmental and non-governmental organizations are attempting to meet this moment with regulation, agreements, and shared statements of principles.

The EU’s adoption in 2024 of the Artificial Intelligence Act, constitutes the world’s first comprehensive rulemaking on AI. It sets forth a legal framework classifying AI activities into four distinct levels of risk, banning those deemed unacceptable, imposing requirements for the middle tiers, and leaving the lowest-risk tier unregulated.

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In the US, the Biden administration issued an Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence in late 2023, calling for the US government to develop guidelines and principles, acknowledging US leadership while calling for global cooperation. The Trump administration rescinded this policy, replacing it with an order of his own, focused on "enhancing America's global AI dominance."

The Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (launched in 2020), is an intergovernmental partnership between 30 governments encouraging responsible development and use of AI. It released a declaration of principles in July 2024.

A UN High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence sought input from many experts and stakeholders before releasing a report in September 2024, titled "Governing AI for Humanity," which called for a globally inclusive and cooperative approach and highlighted gaps in AI governance.

The AI Action Summit convened in Paris in February 2025 and aimed to establish international cooperation on AI governance, focusing on ethical, inclusive, and sustainable development. To many concerned about AI safety, however, the summit declaration seemed negligent. Over 60 countries participated, but the US and the UK declined to sign the declaration, with US Vice President JD Vance criticizing the regulatory approach, cautioning that such regulations could stifle innovation in the AI sector.

This urgent need to address safety risks stems from the potential impact of Artificial General Intelligence, seen by many as a gateway to Artificial Super Intelligence. This urgency is further exacerbated by the existence of a race between AI developers, both a corporate race and a geo-political one.

A logical first step would be for the U.S. and China to reach an agreement based on mutual recognition of redlines that experts from both countries acknowledge should not be crossed. The issues need to be addressed in whatever forum will facilitate timely agreement. If that forum is not global, then the agreement needs to be followed up by the negotiation of a global agreement. The choice of forum should not, however, be allowed to delay the negotiation of an initial agreement.

Several prominent civil society organizations are also contributing frameworks and recommendations and fostering dialogue toward responsible governance of AI, including the Partnership on AI (founded 2016), the Center for the Governance of AI (2018), the Center for AI Safety (2022), and the World Economic Forum's AI Governance Alliance (2023).

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The AI & Philanthropy Steering Committee unites donors and other leaders to guide initiatives that leverage AI for positive social impact. In addition, the AI4D Funders Collaborative is a global partnership dedicated to bridging gaps in AI access and readiness in the Global South.

4.11 - Pandemic Prevention and Bioweapons

The recent COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the interdependency of the world and the need for swift and effective government intervention at key moments. At least 7 million deaths remind us that we are all at risk, no matter where public health threats originate.

Previously, the Ebola outbreak in 2014 revealed a deficit of global coordination in response.

These two tragedies have underscored the need for stronger global governance in the domain of public health on a variety of axes, including stronger international coordination, more equitable distribution of vaccines, transparent reporting, resilient supply chains, and clear, accurate public health messaging.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, new intergovernmental institutions were created to help meet these needs, including the World Health Organization (WHO)'s COVAX, ACT Accelerator, and mRNA Vaccine Technology Transfer Hub; the G20's Joint Finance-Health Task Force; and the World Bank's Pandemic Fund. Previously, Ending Pandemics launched in 2018 as a non-profit "to predict, prevent, and detect outbreaks faster in the planetary hotspots for disease emergence."

In May of 2025, during the 78th assembly of the World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization, member states adopted a historic Pandemic Agreement to strengthen global collaboration and ensure stronger, more equitable responses to future pandemics. Key next steps include negotiations on a future Pathogen Access and Benefits Sharing system.

Yet recent moves by President Trump highlight the ongoing precarity of our current system. His withdrawal of the US from the WHO and deep cuts to USAID foreign aid contracts "are setting the stage for disease outbreaks."

The recent pandemic can also be viewed as a warning of the devastating potential of bioweapons, exacerbated by the arrival of AI (regardless of the true origins of COVID-19), and the inadequacy of our current system to protect us.

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Our main existing prevention mechanism, the UN Biological Weapons Convention, aims to prohibit such weapons. In effect since 1975 with the participation of 187 countries, it unfortunately lacks a binding means of verifying compliance and is coming under increasing strain as biotechnology advances. Unfortunately, negotiations toward strengthening it have failed so far, but remain underway.

> Among many, three important references for donors include the NTI biosecurity program to prevent bioweapons, the Open Philanthropy program on Global Health and Wellbeing, and the Ending Pandemics approach on early detection.

4.12 - Refugees

There are 43.7 million refugees worldwide at last count (June 2024), according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which defines refugees as "people who have fled their countries to escape conflict, violence, or persecution and have sought safety in another country." Natural disaster is also included among the defining causes by Oxford/Google, and UNHCR acknowledges that such calamities will increasingly force displacement of people.

Another 68.3 million people are classified as "internally displaced persons" (IDPs), who leave their homes for similar reasons but remain within the borders of their home country.

These numbers are rising steadily, and as climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of sudden-onset disasters, such as floods and wildfires, and slow-onset disasters like desertification and sea-level rise, the scale of movement is expected to increase even more. Recent examples include Storm Daniel in Libya, which caused over 11,000 deaths and displaced at least 30,000 people in September 2023, severe floods in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, resulting in over 150 fatalities and displacing around half a million people, and the four-decade long drought in Somalia, which continues to cause massive displacement.

Criminal enterprise also plays a significant and often under-recognized role in forced migration. The illicit arms trade and smuggling networks can profit from desperate conditions that compel mass displacement.

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Most refugees (31.6 million) are served by UNHCR, with support including emergency response, interim protection of rights, and assistance with return, resettlement, or naturalization. Palestinian refugees and displaced persons (6 million) are served instead by the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA). Other IDPs are served by a Special Rapporteur in the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to a degree limited by national sovereignty.

Unfortunately, the world as a whole is poorly served by our current patchwork of piecemeal refugee management policies.

Refugees are generally met with minimal support when reaching a new country, slowing their efforts to get on their feet and contribute to society. Host countries typically invest as little as possible, as politicians treat refugees as a hot potato or a cudgel with which to score points against political rivals. Our current approach also generates political instability, with popular resentment stoked by demagoguery rather than mitigated through proactive, comprehensive policy.

We can be smarter about this. A global investment in language training and workforce development would help refugees become self-sufficient much more quickly, benefiting the economies of host countries while reducing the strain on public budgets from higher cost services such as housing, food, and medical assistance. It would also spread costs more equitably compared to concentrating the burden in a small number of destination countries.

More ambitiously, we could look at global virtual citizenship mechanisms, such as reviving the model of the Nansen Passport, an internationally recognized travel document for stateless people issued by the League of Nations between 1922 and 1938. Even if limited in scope (e.g. conferring less than full citizenship rights), a global ID for refugees could facilitate provision of language training and workforce development services, and perhaps broader protections as well.

Still more ambitiously, a new global governance system could serve to promote human rights everywhere, to help protect people from violence when the integrity of their local legal systems fail to do so. The Eurasia Group has identified ungoverned spaces that lack such protection as a top global risk for 2025. This upstream solution would help people live more safely where they are, reducing the number who become refugees. The recent return of former refugees to Syria and Gaza indicate that people generally prefer to be home when it's a viable option, even following extensive destruction, a preference UNHCR confirms and quantifies as the most widely applicable refugee settlement solution.

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Notably, a conversation is emerging about rethinking social attitudes toward migration, which can boost destination economies and may be required to sustain populations that are increasingly weighted toward retirees.

Examples such as the EU's Schengen Area suggest the possibility of liberalizing migration more generally, which could have dramatically positive impacts on the world economy.

> Though mostly focused on the US, Grantmakers Concerned about Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR) offers resources, hosts convenings, and facilitates donor collaborations to address the needs of refugee and immigrant communities. In addition, the Refugees Fund of Global Impact pools donations to support various programs providing critical services to refugees, including microfinance, entrepreneurship training, and asset recovery

4.13 - Governance of Space Activities

As the sphere of human economic, scientific and cultural activities has expanded off the surface of the Earth, space has emerged as a new global common that borders all nations, a common that a growing number of nations rely upon, yet one that still only a relatively small number of countries can access directly. Each day, thousands of satellites orbit the Earth providing countless benefits to billions of people across the globe. Once the preserve of a few superpowers for military and scientific research, the use of space is now crucial to global development, commerce, economic prosperity, climate action, peace and security. Space systems are an essential component of critical infrastructure of a growing number of countries worldwide, supporting socioeconomic development, human and environmental security.

Alongside the rapid increase in our reliance on space systems, we are also witnessing rapid growth in the global space economy, manifested most clearly by the increasing number of satellites launched each year. The global space economy reached $596 billion in 2024 and is projected to grow to $944 billion by 2033. This rapid expansion is raising concerns about the impact of space activities on the Earth's orbital environment and our ability to conduct these activities in a sustainable manner. Space systems are also vulnerable to a growing number of security threats, placing at risk the continuity of information and services critical for national safety and security applications.

Simply put, the space above our heads is becoming a dangerously congested and contested domain that requires cooperative management and protection, so that future generations will continue to have access to all the benefits of space science and

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technology that we enjoy today. The mounting challenges to space safety, sustainability and security are propelling us towards a tipping point where a catastrophic chain of events in orbit could render space unusable for decades to come. Avoiding this situation requires a coordinated global response that incorporates the best expertise available in governments, industry and academia.

Effective governance and shared responsibility are vital to protect this critical resource for the benefit of all humankind now and for future generations. The key issues that need to be addressed urgently are the need for space traffic coordination, the mitigation and removal of space debris, the governance of activities related to space resources, and the safety and security of space activities threatened by potential war in space or on Earth.

In 2024, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Pact for the Future, which sets out globally agreed commitments on a range of issues, such as peace and security, sustainable development, climate change, governance of digital and other emerging technologies, human rights, and the transformation of global governance. The Space Commons governance issues were articulated in Policy Brief 7 as an input to the Summit of the Future. Space governance is addressed in Action 56 of the Summit's outcome document, the Pact for the Future, which notes the importance of international discussions on the establishment of new frameworks for space traffic, space debris, and space resources. Action 56 of the Pact also calls for greater engagement of relevant private sector, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders, to contribute to intergovernmental processes related to the increased safety and sustainability of outer space activities. The Pact for the Future also encourages member states to consult on holding a global space summit, UNISPACE IV, in 2027. This global summit will provide an opportunity for civil society engagement in space governance conversations envisaged in the Pact of the Future.

Apart from discussions in the UN, civil society organizations have much to contribute to the development of cooperative governance of space activities at a national and global level to ensure that space continues to be a domain of peaceful exploration and use, for the benefit of all nations. However, such organizations need to be adequately resourced to meet the challenges and this is where philanthropy has a huge role to play because stewardship and cooperative governance of space as a global common is still largely virgin territory for philanthropy. On Earth, we have a system of governance based on borders and national governments. Space offers a unique opportunity for philanthropy to utilize its convening power, funding and connections to examine what has not worked here on Earth and to proactively create new systems to better govern a global common that can provide many benefits to all.

Most people do not realize how critically reliant modern society is on space-derived information and services. The continuity of space-based services is largely taken for

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granted by the non-space sectors that rely on those services; however, such continuity is far from assured. Even a momentary disruption of these services could have massive (and not completely predictable) disruptive effects on society, business, the economy, safety of life, and national security.

In part, the challenges outlined above are exacerbated by the fact that space governance has not kept up with the rapid pace of developments in the global space arena. The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 served as the original basis of international space law. The current legal framework for space activities stems from the early days of the Space Age, when the dominant actors in space were a few national governments and their national military and civilian agencies. Today, the situation is completely reversed; commercial operators own most of the satellites in space and they are expanding their activities and developing new capabilities at a rate that outpaces the capacity of regulation to keep up. Moreover, the existing international fora for space governance established in the early days of the Space Age, are still only open to governments; commercial actors do not have a seat at the table. This creates the potential for fragmented / divergent governance and regulation shopping that could lead to a tragedy-of-the-commons-type of situation in space. By the same token, companies should recognize that they cannot have a viable business plan in an unstable environment. As this new frontier of commercial activity expands, having clear "rules of the road" and norms of responsible behavior for all actors will be essential for a viable space economy.

Space governance and space environmental stewardship constitute a new frontier of philanthropy. According to the investment firm Seraphim Space, in 2024 a total of $8.6 billion was invested in 595 space tech start-up companies, all of whom are developing products and services for an increasingly congested and contested domain. In contrast, less than 0.01% of this amount was spent on civil society efforts to protect the space commons. Since the space economy is growing at a rapid pace, this gap is likely to increase unless philanthropy steps up to close the gap and support research and advocacy on the sustainable use of space as a global common.

> Founded in 2005, Secure World Foundation is the world's leading civil society organization dedicated to ensuring the sustainable and peaceful uses of outer space for societal benefit on Earth. The Foundation works with national governments, the United Nations, industry, international organizations, academia, and civil society to develop and promote discussions, ideas and actions to achieve the secure, sustainable, and peaceful uses of outer space, benefiting Earth and all its peoples. No other organization matches SWF's comprehensive approach to space sustainability and its experience on this topic. For the past 20 years, through the support of the Arsenault family, the Foundation has moved dialogue forward across sectors through convenings, policy and subject matter

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research, policy analysis, and nurturing novel partnerships. However, the accelerating pace of development in the space sector and associated governance issues this raises is outpacing the ability of SWF to keep up with all the emerging challenges to the cooperative governance of the space commons. Space governance and space sustainability are new frontiers of philanthropic action. The Arsenault family welcomes partners.

5.0 - Global Governance Success Stories

Global governance works when we invest in it and support it. A few key examples:

The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer is a treaty phasing out chemicals such as chlorofluorocarbons that are known to deplete this layer of Earth's atmosphere that protect us from harmful UV radiation. In effect since 1989, and ultimately ratified by all UN member countries, it has been remarkably successful in leading to consistent reductions in atmospheric concentrations of these chemicals following peaks around the year 2000.

The International Criminal Court (ICC), based in the Hague and operational since 2002, has the jurisdiction to prosecute individuals for crimes against humanity, genocide, war crimes under certain circumstances, and the crime of aggression. Still in its early years, the Court has brought forward 33 cases so far, issued 61 arrest warrants, and started numerous additional investigations and preliminary examinations that are still ongoing. Former Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte was recently arrested under a warrant from the ICC. The ICC has also issued arrest warrants for Russian head of state Vladimir Putin and is seeking warrants for top Taliban leaders. 125 states are parties and subject to the ICC jurisdiction (though certain key players including China, Russia, and the US are not). Regrettably, while the US signed the treaty in 2000, it later withdrew its signature, and while some US administrations have cooperated with the ICC on specific matters, President Trump has ordered sanctions against the Court in both his presidential terms.

Despite these challenges, the creation of the ICC remains a historic milestone for international criminal justice, marking the first time in history that the world established a permanent tribunal to hold individuals accountable for the gravest crimes. Its establishment 25 years ago was made possible in large part due to the efforts of the Coalition for the ICC (CICC), a global civil society network that played a crucial role in lobbying governments and mobilizing public support for the adoption of the Rome Statute in 1998. The Court's continued existence and evolution reflect the power of persistent multilateral effort and civic advocacy to shape a more just international order.

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The International Court of Justice (ICJ), an organ of the UN, adjudicates disputes between countries and gives advisory opinions on international legal matters, with enforcement authorized by the UN charter, but limited by the veto power of the P5. Nearly every country in the world is a party to the ICJ, yet many still have not accepted its jurisdiction, restricting the Court's ability to consistently and effectively resolve international disputes. Like the ICC, it is based in the Hague. Operating since 1947, the ICJ has adjudicated cases covering border disputes (both land and maritime), military insurgencies, genocide allegations, the protection of diplomatic staff, and obligations under treaties such as the ban on commercial whaling, among other matters.

While the ICJ has contributed to shaping core principles of international environmental law through environmental cases, like sustainable development, intergenerational equity, and the precautionary principle, such cases before the Court remain rare. To strengthen the role of the ICJ in this respect, the Climate Governance Commission, and the World Federalist Movement - Institute for Global Policy have put forward several proposals. These include: (1) encouraging more states to accept the Court's compulsory jurisdiction; (2) promoting the use of advisory opinions by UN bodies; (3) urging states involved in environmental disputes to bring their cases before the ICJ; (4) including clauses in future environmental treaties that grant the ICJ authority to settle disputes; and (5) encouraging states to formally accept ICJ jurisdiction where this option already exists in current treaties.

Notably, the UNGA's landmark request in March 2023 for an advisory opinion from the ICJ on states' legal obligations regarding climate change marks a historic opportunity. The advisory opinion is set to clarify the responsibility of states under international law to prevent and redress the harmful impacts of climate change. While advisory opinions are not legally binding, they carry substantial moral and legal authority that can offer clear guidelines for climate action and a strong foundation for scrutinizing state action.

The Sustainable Development Goals from 2015 represent an aspirational agreement among all UN member states, spanning 17 important themes. Sadly, they are non-binding and lack significant funding, so their tangible impact has been limited. Nonetheless, they help encourage prioritization, catalyze funding, and provide a baseline for accountability, especially in developing countries. When national leaders make development pledges at the UN it serves as a visible commitment, enabling grassroots movements to hold their elected officials accountable. Some results achieved by citizen pressure under the SDG's (even if not attributable with certainty) include Bangladesh's installation of 4 million home solar systems, an Ethiopian program providing food and financial aid to people facing extreme poverty, Ghana's "free senior high school" policy, India's *beti bachao beti padhao* program incentivizing girls' education, and more.

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The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an older statement of principles, drafted by Eleanor Roosevelt and adopted by the UN in 1948. Although non-binding, it is useful both as an encapsulation of customary law and a foundational document for further development of global governance.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which manages the Internet's unique identifiers, transitioned in 2016 from operating under contract to the US government to a new model of accountability "to the global multistakeholder community," governed by transparent bylaws and represented by a diverse and geographically dispersed board of directors.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) provides the framework for international cooperation to advance meteorological, climatological, hydrological, and related environmental services, to improve the well-being of all. WMO became a specialized agency of the United Nations in 1951, having originally been established as an NGO in 1873. Through WMO, weather, climate and water measurements collected by ground-based stations, radars, buoys, aircraft, ships and space-based satellites are shared on an operational basis around the world in real-time. This unique international collaboration, coordinated and standardized by the WMO, is the basis for accurate global weather forecasting and climate predictions, which in turn are the basis for protecting people and livelihoods, optimizing sectoral productivity, and facilitating investment everywhere, all the time.

The Cyber Threat Alliance, founded in 2017, is a private-sector collaborative project of more than 30 major tech companies to enable rapid information sharing about emerging cybersecurity threats. To date it has provided timely, early warnings of more than one thousand threats, and it combs through more than 14 million issues per month.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) is a premier example of civil society movements joining forces and pushing global governance proposals to victory. Founded in 1992 as a partnership of 6 advocacy organizations, it now comprises more than 100. It achieved its original goal in 1999 when the Mine Ban Treaty took effect. The treaty has been ratified by 164 countries. ICBL won the Nobel Peace Prize for this work in 1997.

Alongside the CICC, the ICBL has provided a model for effective civil society advocacy in shaping international norms and institutions. These successful campaigns have inspired and informed a new wave of global initiatives, including the IACC, the CGC/ Mobilizing an Earth Governance Alliance (MEGA), the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative, and the World's Youth for Climate Justice—each seeking to tackle urgent global challenges through coordinated, transnational action.

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While there is no philanthropic prize or donor network focused on documenting the leading success stories in global governance reform, this 2016 report from the Democratic Practice-Global Governance program of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund provides reflections on grantmaking approaches that have contributed to meaningful policy changes at the global level.

6.0 - Attempts at Reform

There is a rich history of attempts to reform and democratize global governance.

In the aftermath of World War 2, the World Federalist movement surged to prominence, calling for a federation of countries under a global government in order to prevent future wars. Winston Churchill spoke in favor of it at least twice, and the movement was so widely supported that future US presidents Gerald Ford and John F. Kennedy were among more than 100 members of the US Congress who co-sponsored legislation in 1949 declaring:

> *"It should be a fundamental objective of the foreign policy of the United States to support and strengthen the United Nations and to seek its development into a world federation, open to all nations, with defined and limited powers adequate to preserve peace and prevent aggression through the enactment, interpretation, and enforcement of world law."*

The World Federalist movement was also endorsed by leading public intellectuals and personalities of the day including Albert Einstein, Walter Cronkite, Albert Camus, and Bertrand Russell.

The Campaign for a More Democratic United Nations, active in the 1990s, was part of a broader movement to reform global governance and democratize the United Nations. It brought together activists, scholars, and organizations who believed that the UN should better represent the world's citizens, not just its member states.

In 2007, the ongoing Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly launched to advocate for a UN body, made up of elected representatives, to increase democratic legitimacy of the UN and thus its accountability and efficiency. Advocates suggest that a UN Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA) would be the first step toward developing a world parliament. Since 2021, the campaign for a UNPA has been part of the We The Peoples campaign for inclusive global governance: endorsed by over 300 organizations, the campaign advocates for a UN World

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Citizens' Initiative and a UN Civil Society Envoy. Proponents emphasize that legitimacy of any global governance system is a cross-cutting need, and a way to help overcome institutional, legal and issue-related fragmentation.

The One for Eight Billion campaign, launched in 2014, calls for an inclusive and transparent process for selecting UN Secretaries General. The Earth Charter is an international declaration of fundamental ethical principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society. Launched in 2000 and endorsed by thousands of NGOs, religious groups, and dignitaries, the Earth Charter continues to inspire many to promote its principles and serves as a reference document for the global community to transition toward sustainable development. Launched in 2018, Together First is a global movement to transform global governance structures to be more inclusive and effective in tackling the world's most urgent issues. The initiative aims to make the conversation on global governance more accessible and inclusive, striving for a more democratic, transparent, and accountable international system. The Campaign for an IACC, launched in 2021, led by Integrity Initiatives International and Integrity Initiatives International Europe, is an initiative tackling widespread impunity for grand corruption.

The UN Charter Reform Coalition, founded in 2024, advocates for UN member states to invoke Article 109 of the UN Charter to call a general conference to review and update the Charter. Established in 2020, the Climate Governance Commission (CGC) brings together leading experts from academia, business, politics, science, and civil society to advance global governance solutions for climate action. Its 2023 flagship report, Governing Our Planetary Emergency presents a set of ambitious, equitable, and practical near- and medium-term proposals to reform the global environmental governance system in response to the planetary emergency. The CGC, Citizens for Global Solutions, and the World Federalist Movement launched the Mobilizing an Earth Governance Alliance (MEGA) in 2024. MEGA is a global coalition of civil society organizations and allies committed to strengthening existing environmental governance mechanisms and establishing new ones.

Many of these campaigns highlight a critical flaw in our current structures: there are no channels today through which individuals or civil society groups can directly express their values and concerns with real voting power at the global level. The UN is an association of member states, no one else has a vote.

As part of the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly in 2024, the UN convened the Summit of the Future to strengthen multilateralism and improve global cooperation in addressing current and future challenges. It was meant to be a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine how global cooperation works—and make it more inclusive, effective, and future-ready.

As high-level and ambitious as all these efforts are, these proposals for structural reform continue to remain proposals. A reluctance by less powerful countries to champion some of the proposed reforms largely stems from an understanding that they might require ratification by the

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P5, which are unlikely to support changes that diminish their privileges. Other proposals, such as the UN Parliamentary Assembly, do not initially require P5 approval.

New structural change proposals are not needed so much as proposals for systemic innovation and constituency-building to drive the necessary progress forward.

7.0 - Global Citizenship and Pluralism

7.1 - Global Citizenship

Citizenship is membership in and allegiance to a sovereign state.

The victory of democracies at the end of the Cold War encouraged people everywhere to embrace democratic ideals and explore allegiances greater than singular nations. Democratic expansion inspired a search for broader affiliations - across borders, across difference. This momentum gave rise to a modern articulation of global citizenship: the idea that a person's identity can transcend national borders and have loyalties to the wider world. Cosmopolitanism is the idea that we're all part of a global community and that our actions — social, economic, environmental, or political — can affect people far beyond our immediate surroundings. In his 1995 essay, Cosmopolitan Democracy and the World Order, David Held argued that democracy must extend beyond the nation-state to respond to globalization. He also built upon Immanuel Kant's 1795 work Towards Perpetual Peace, to promote transnational institutions, a global rule of law, and a concept of global citizenship where citizens influence and participate in supranational governance structures. George Monbiot argues in The Age of Consent that current institutions, primarily the nation state, often contribute to injustice, inequality and environmental destruction, and he calls for the creation of global democratic institutions to represent humanity as a whole.

At the end of World War II, governments, nonprofits, and individuals created new initiatives to counteract tribalism, nationalism and the root causes of the war. One outcome was a multi-decade effort to invest in pan-European and ultimately global youth identity development processes via student exchange programs to promote greater intercultural and international understanding. Many institutions continue to promote global citizenship today. Children's International Summit Villages create structured village-style residencies that encourage cooperation through daily relationship-building. United World Colleges pair rigorous academics with immersive, cross-cultural living to cultivate peace and understanding. Camp Rising Sun emphasizes shared responsibility and introspection as pathways to leadership. These programs laid the groundwork for

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what is now known as Peace Education: the process of cultivating the knowledge, values, and skills needed to live in harmony with oneself, others, and the natural environment. With support from the Global Campaign for Peace Education, the elements of the idea have now been integrated into school systems in dozens of countries.

Today, more and more people see themselves as global citizens, but there's not yet a mechanism to channel this widely shared set of values into policy.

7.2 - Pluralism

We live in a moment marked by polycrisis: the compounding instability of climate change, forced migration, institutional distrust, and rising authoritarianism, and information ecosystems are fragmented and compound polarization. These overlapping crises destabilize the very conditions for collective action. Climate change raises disputes over responsibility, worldview, and time horizon. Migration and displacement provoke questions of identity, belonging, and inclusion. Authoritarianism feeds on institutional distrust and fractured civic narratives. And, information fragmentation produces disagreement over what is real and what is moral. Together, these forces expose the limits of governance models built on assumed consensus, and call for a deeper capacity to govern across plural and contested realities.

In this context, global governance must do more than administer or aggregate - it must be capable of holding complexity, repairing trust, and constructing shared authority across lines of deep difference. Many legacy programs were rooted in Euro-American ideals of modernist progress - assuming that exposure would lead to empathy, and empathy to peace. Today, global citizenship requires not just empathy and connection, but discernment and shared authorship across epistemic difference.

Pluralism offers a framework for this reimagining. It describes the civic and institutional capacity to live, decide, and govern across deep difference. Pluralism provides the structural capacities - relational, epistemic, and participatory - that legitimacy increasingly demands in fractured societies. It is a design logic for coherence without homogeneity.

As a worldview, pluralism rests on the belief that diversity is beneficial to society. It holds that the coexistence of diverse opinions, ways of life, and value systems, enriches the collective. As a practice, pluralism enables groups to manage disagreement without splintering. It brings people together to learn, share power, negotiate, and self-govern - creating communities where individuals feel safe, free, and fully alive. These ideas echo the Global Centre for Pluralism's emphasis on inclusive policy and institutional design,

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and legal scholar John Inazu's call for a "confident pluralism" rooted in civic trust without uniformity.

A new generation of initiatives is building pluralist mindsets, practices, and civic structures. Over Zero uses narrative and psychology to interrupt identity-based violence and build civic resilience across lines of division. Facing History and Ourselves equips students to examine historical context and moral complexity, helping them become thoughtful civic actors in a pluralistic society. Citizen University builds local civic rituals and culture, such as Civic Saturdays, to nurture relational belonging and collective civic responsibility across difference. Each represents a modern experiment in pluralism-as-practice: shaping worldviews, supporting relational identity development, and cultivating habits of shared civic life.

A pluralist orientation reshapes not only who participates in global governance, but how decisions are made, knowledge is validated, and belonging is constructed. Below are three key shifts that illustrate this evolution.

7.2.1 - From Identity to Worldview

Global governance structures often default to procedural liberalism: consultation, consensus, and technical expertise. These approaches typically focus on who is at the table - but less often ask how different knowledge systems are understood, honored, or granted authority. This shift calls attention to the epistemic foundations of governance - how institutions define what counts as knowledge, whose cosmologies are legible, and which worldviews shape the terms of legitimacy.

Whose logic is the system built on?

In many Indigenous and African traditions, governance is shaped through elder wisdom and intergenerational dialogue. In New Zealand, the Whanganui River was granted legal personhood following years of Māori advocacy, honoring a worldview in which rivers are kin, not resources. Because the governance framework draws from multiple ontologies, it's more likely to be perceived as legitimate by both Māori and state institutions. This is the relational trust and epistemic humility pluralism fosters.

Governance must be able to hold divergent truths and cosmologies and to reckon with foundational questions of legitimacy and meaning-making, rooted in epistemic recognition and relational trust.

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7.2.2 - From Representation to Shared Authorship

Shared authorship requires rethinking how wisdom is surfaced, how disagreement is engaged, and how legitimacy is co-created across difference. Even well-meaning forms of inclusion can reinforce hierarchies: who is heard but not followed, consulted but not co-creating. This shift focuses on the practices of governance: how decisions are made, how disagreement is engaged, and how people participate not only in consultation but in the construction of collective meaning and authority.

How are decisions actually made, and by whom?

In Colombia's peace process, community memory circles and artistic dialogues were integrated alongside legal mechanisms during the transitional justice and reconciliation efforts post-conflict - enabling institutions to contend with complexity that formal negotiations alone could not resolve. Memory circles allowed victims and communities to express harm and grief that didn't fit neatly into judicial language or evidence-based frameworks. Artistic practices enabled emotional and moral repair, opening space for shared mourning, symbolic reckoning, and narrative recognition — things the legal system alone cannot provide. The inclusion of these pluralistic formats increased trust in the peace process among communities who had been systematically excluded or harmed by state institutions. Without this approach, formal negotiations may have reached a technical agreement, but lasting peace would have been fragile, as lived experiences would have remained unacknowledged, and narrative wounds unhealed. These pluralistic practices allow conflict to be metabolized - a form of structural intelligence critical to durable governance.

Citizens' assemblies, such as those pioneered in Ireland, offer another glimpse of shared authorship in practice. Ireland convened national citizens' assemblies composed of randomly selected, demographically representative citizens to deliberate on issues like abortion and climate change. Without this approach, contentious issues likely would have stalled in Parliament, polarized the electorate further, or been resolved through elite-driven or technocratic processes, risking public backlash or legitimacy collapse. The citizen assemblies shifted the frame from polarization to deliberation, where participants engaged with complexity, not binary choices. The process bridged expert and lay knowledge, where citizens were not just consulted but actively shaped the recommendations put to national referenda or government action. This increased public trust and democratic legitimacy. Because the process was transparent, representative, and grounded in dialogue, even controversial decisions gained

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broader support. Assemblies balanced expert input with personal and communal experience — creating more legitimate and socially grounded outcomes.

7.2.3 - From Global Citizenship to Rooted Belonging

Many people today do not experience belonging in singular terms. Instead, they hold layered forms of identity: deeply rooted in place, lineage, or tradition, while also connected to global challenges and solidarities. This kind of belonging does not muddle or compromise experiences of identity. Rather, it is a multidimensional stance that enables people to act with both moral grounding and transnational relevance.

How do we design systems that are both accountable to specific communities and responsive to transnational interdependence?

When governance systems recognize only formal citizenship or assume a unified global "we," they risk alienating the very actors most capable of bridging complexity. But when systems are designed to reflect and support layered belonging, they can become more legitimate, more trusted, and more capable of navigating plural realities. Some of the most effective global actors live in this both/and space.

Movements like Fridays for Future and the Indigenous Women's Treaty Alliance embody layered belonging in practice. Though often described as global, their effectiveness stems from being grounded in specific histories, responsibilities, and ecologies. Fridays for Future includes figures like Ugandan activist Vanessa Nakate, whose climate leadership is not just about emissions targets, but about food insecurity, deforestation, and economic justice in her own region. Her authority derives not only from data or global networks, but from lived experience — what she has called the "intersection of climate and daily survival." Similarly, the Indigenous Women's Treaty Alliance unites Native women across tribal nations to oppose extractive industry projects. Their moral stance is rooted not in ideology, but in ancestral obligations to land and community, expressed through ceremony, intergenerational memory, and treaty-based sovereignty.

In both cases, legitimacy arises not from abstract ideals or global positioning alone, but from the ability to speak from rooted commitments that resonate across scales. This dual orientation - grounded and global - enables these actors to challenge dominant institutions while simultaneously engaging them. It allows them to articulate alternative visions of sustainability, justice, and governance that feel real to those excluded by conventional forums. Without recognizing or designing for layered belonging, governance systems risk building engagement

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infrastructures that are legible to elites but alien to those with the deepest civic and moral stake.

In a global context marked by multiple truths, pluralism enables institutions to navigate conflict, construct shared meaning, and co-create authority with those they serve. Without this capacity, governance efforts risk eroding trust, hardening polarization, or failing outright in moments of collective stress. But where pluralism is embedded - through civic infrastructure, narrative practice, and participatory design - governance becomes more adaptive, more legitimate, and more capable of navigating a future that will only grow more interdependent and contested.

While there is no donor affinity group focused on global citizenship or cosmopolitanism, two networks offer insight. The Global Centre for Pluralism advances pluralism in governance, education, and peacebuilding worldwide. Similarly, the New Pluralists works to foster pluralism in the US. Both offer practical pathways for translating identity into durable civic infrastructure.

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8.0 - Global Governance Innovations and the 21st Century

According to the thinker and change catalyst Buckminster Fuller, “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, you can build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”

The combination of global urgency and revolutionary technology make this vision possible today and the transformation of global governance possible tomorrow.

In this section we explore innovations facilitated by creative finance and new technology across political systems, monetary systems, philanthropy, ecosystem markets, and new approaches to both economics and trade.

8.1 - Inclusive Global Governance and Modern Technologies

The heart of governance is our set of processes for making decisions as a world community.

To review, in our current system, only countries have formal agency at the global level. Countries cooperate to varying degrees through the UN and related treaties, as we’ve seen. Civil society groups attempt to fill some gaps but their voices have little real power. Individuals have zero power at the global level.

This status quo is not working. Here are a few examples of new approaches to global governance that are made possible by innovations in technology.

8.1.1 - The E-Parliament

The E-Parliament, proposed in 2002 by Nicholas Dunlop, Robert Johansen and others, envisioned an global advisory network of 25,000 individuals, already elected and serving in representative roles in democratic countries, collaborating via the internet to identify areas of international consensus. Upon reaching consensus they would then encourage their national governments to adopt corresponding new policies. Only elected officials were to be included, at least initially, although these officials “might” poll regular citizens and leading NGOs for their views to inform the elected officials’ deliberations. The E-Parliament as

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envisioned would have had only advisory power rather than direct lawmaking authority.

8.1.2 - P2P Foundation

Collaborative problem-solving is conceptually upstream from policymaking. Since its launch in 2005, the P2P Foundation has facilitated peer-to-peer collaboration to address issues of the commons through open, participatory processes and decentralized networks. Its principles likely influenced the central concepts in the design of Bitcoin. Satoshi Nakamoto participated actively in the P2P Foundation's online forum while honing the concept of blockchains - decentralized, digital ledgers that exist across a network and record information in linked blocks, making it nearly impossible to alter. He posted to the site announcing Bitcoin in early 2009 (soon after the Bitcoin whitepaper was released in late 2008) and then discussed its subtleties with other forum participants.

8.1.3 - Somalia, One Earth Future and Oceans Beyond Piracy

In the face of lawlessness and economic collapse, piracy off the coast of Somalia surged in 2010. In response, the One Earth Future organization launched an Oceans Beyond Piracy program. Through the use of leading edge technologies including GPS, satellite links, remote sensing technologies and online coordination, they cultivated relationships with stakeholders including "international navies, maritime nations, industry, advocacy groups and academia", which worked together and successfully reduced pirate attacks to zero in a six-month period in 2012. Their track record demonstrated the ability of private actors and modern day technologies to step in and resolve transnational issues in situations beyond the reach of the traditional multilateral system of international law. Their success extended through 2017, with "no recorded hijackings of ships off Somalia in 2014, 2015 or 2016."

8.1.4 - Kleros

Kleros is a startup, launched in 2018, which offers blockchain-based arbitration and notary-like services, for various use cases including decentralized autonomous organizations ("DAO"s). Although not about policymaking, it is a leading civic application of distributed ledger technology that could be relevant for

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developing new international legal jurisdictions, beyond the current boundaries of nation-states.

8.1.5 - Voting on a Blockchain

Technology has come a long way since the horse-and-carriage days when the representative model of democracy was the best we could do to include the views of a populace in public decision-making.

Internet voting, though commonplace, is not suitable for this purpose, because it's insecure and not reliable. For example, voting identities can be easily spoofed in a "sybil" attack, individual votes can be altered, the vote count can be hacked, and ballot secrecy, meaning voter anonymity, can't be assured.

Paper ballots are considered the gold standard to address these vulnerabilities, but scaling their use presents logistical challenges, particularly as we contemplate global participation. Paper ballots are also vulnerable to theft or destruction, e.g. by fire.

The virtues of blockchain present a compelling alternative. A blockchain is an effectively immutable ledger, so a vote tally recorded on it can't be easily manipulated without universal visibility. The ledger is distributed, making it virtually indestructible. By design, blockchain's public-private key system provides a high level of anonymity for individual votes, similar to paper ballots. Unlike paper ballots, however, it also allows voters to verify that their vote was properly counted.

Unique voting accounts depend on a complementary set of records, analogous to voter registration rolls. Many organizations, notably including World (formerly Worldcoin) are developing this "proof of human" base layer for all kinds of civic applications, on a blockchain. Once adopted at scale, these verified unique accounts could support voting.

Critics argue that hardware devices on which votes could be cast, such as phones, are insecure and could be compromised. But author and tech investor Bradley Tusk argues that these concerns can be addressed through end-to-end encryption, multi-factor authentication, biometric screening, verifiable tracking numbers, and open-source software.

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Critics also argue that a voter's privacy can be compromised, e.g. by someone else nearby when they vote, risking coercion, but this is also true of mail-in ballots, which are in wide use today.

8.1.6 - Liquid Democracy: Making the Most of Blockchain Voting

Blockchain voting can scale reliably, without the limitations of conventional voting systems such as geography and administrative overhead.

This opens a world of new possibilities.

At the most basic level, people could vote as we do now: at regular intervals, for candidates who vie to represent us with actual decision-making power. This could happen worldwide, supporting proposed reforms such as a UN Parliamentary Assembly.

But if the world transitions to voting on a blockchain, we can reimagine much of the logical architecture we've become accustomed to. The representative model may no longer be necessary if people can vote directly on issues, reliably, at scale. Voting can be de-linked from geography: people could vote directly on global decisions, not just indirectly for a national (or state or local) intermediary. Voting could happen much more frequently than once every few years, potentially enabling governance that's far more responsive to emerging issues.

How might we account for differences in civic interest between people? Many people choose not to vote today, while others are highly engaged in civic life. How might we provide a channel for expertise?

One promising, emerging model is called Liquid Democracy. In essence it's a system of proxies that are both transferable and instantly revocable. Under Liquid Democracy, any voter may vote directly on any policy question, but they don't have to. Alternatively, they may delegate their proxy, either across-the-board or on a single issue, to any other person they choose. That person may cast the vote, or may delegate it further. A voter might grant their proxy to a spouse, friend, neighbor, co-worker, or classmate, or to an expert whom they may not know personally but whose views they follow and trust. The spouse, friend, etc. might delegate the proxy further, perhaps to a widely recognized expert. Anybody can cast their own vote, plus those of any proxies delegated to them, on policy questions. Importantly, whenever a voter loses confidence in their delegated proxy holder, they can revoke it and instantly reclaim their voting power for

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themselves or delegate it to someone else. All of this can happen in a matter of seconds or minutes, in contrast to the multi-year cycles needed today for a polity to change its mind. Advocates of the system developed a short instructional video illustrating how it works as well as a more comprehensive discussion of how it works on blockchain.

With Liquid Democracy, one can realistically envision the population of the world voting on diverse issues such as climate policy or budget allocations. Populations could also use it to vote on national, regional, or even local matters as appropriate, always preserving the principle of subsidiarity.

A global constitution would be needed, articulating such specifics as how the subsidiarity principle applies, how voting questions are determined and posed, and what fundamental human rights are guaranteed by a global system of courts. The constitution itself could be ratified in a global vote.

> While there is no donor network focused on inclusive global governance or the use cases named above, there are some reports that may be of interest to grantmakers. The study Westminster Meets Digital examines digital-era parliaments and the report The Future of Self-Governing, Thriving Democracies advocates for inclusive democratic innovations. In addition, the new field of study on calibrated democratic systems proposes using hybrid democratic frameworks. Broadly, this scholarship explores evolving models of collective governance.

8.2 - A Global Commons Fund

Many international issues could be addressed effectively if there was a permanent source of revenue adequate to fund solutions.

Several examples of global funds merit attention. Founded in 2002, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS has helped to slow the HIV epidemic, saving an estimated 60 million lives since 2002. The Green Climate Fund, formed in 2010 under the auspices of the UNFCCC, helps developing countries pay for climate change adaptation and mitigation; sadly, governments have committed only $10 billion so far, an amount falling far short of the need. The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, initiated by the British Government in 2015, is a pool of over £1 billion per year devoted to addressing international conflict and instability. The Resilience Fund of the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized

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Crime, supported by Norway and other governments, funds civil society actors to identify, empower and protect communities in regions most affected by criminal governance. The Global Fund for Coral Reefs, founded in 2020, aims to mobilize $500 million in grants and investment for coral reef conservation and investment.

These are laudable examples, but to date relatively few comparable funds have been created at scale to address the myriad challenges discussed above.

There is value in having governmental or government-adjacent funding systems. Although some government-managed financing has historically been ineffective, the use of blockchain technology can enable transparency and accountability, encouraging efficiency. At the same time, governmental institutions are key because once a new innovation is identified, it can be quickly scaled to continuously benefit the whole system, with people's consent..

The Expert Working Group on Global Public Investment convened a multi-stakeholder process looking at these public financing questions and offered recommendations for how funds are raised, managed and spent. They asserted that all countries must contribute, benefit, and participate in decision-making, to enable more effective, inclusive, and accountable funding for global challenges.

Could a Global Commons Fund be a solution? Such a fund could have a system of conditional cash transfers, like the successful Bolsa Floresta program in Brazil which incentivizes locally-led forest protection in the Amazon forest. Funds could be structured to pay out increased dividends in low income countries as recognition of carbon debt, a measure of historic emissions. A council of celebrity humanitarians could help with credibility and fundraising.

A Commons Fund could be financed in several ways. It could operate with an endowment with interest and investment returns paying out to beneficiaries in perpetuity, similar to the proposed TFFF model. Some have proposed a patent commons with a system of licensing nature-inspired inventions to pay for conservation. Other sources could include a tax on carbon or routine financial transaction fees.

Consider the transformational potential of a fund that continuously supports innovation in refugee resettlement, international conflict prevention, or ecosystem restoration, with new proposals reviewed each year and embracing new technologies. Innovations in these sectors, and many others, are long overdue.

A permanent, self-sustaining fund to address transnational issues and protect the global commons is essential for global ecological integrity and future geopolitical harmony. While there are some grantmakers focused on parts of this vision, the authors of this

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paper are not aware of any funder that is operating at scale and explicitly focused on this mission. The needs are clear.

> Relevant for donors, a 2024 report from the G20 highlights challenges in the current climate finance architecture, noting that funds like the Green Climate Fund, the Climate Investment Funds, and the Global Environment Facility commit $4–5 billion annually but disburse only $1.4 billion per year. The report recommends streamlining accreditation processes, harmonizing procedures, and supporting country-driven strategies to enhance efficiency. While not focused on the global commons, several recent analyses, including Participatory Grantmaking by the Ford Foundation and Letting the Movement Decide by the FRIDA Fund, showcase how digital tools and community decision-making can reshape philanthropic practices toward more democratic and inclusive models.

8.3 - Payments for Ecosystem Services

Due to the interconnected nature of environmental change processes, the impacts of climate change in one locality are often linked — through an aggregation effect — to regional and global dynamics. Ecosystems, ecological processes, and environmental services do not respect national borders. Therefore, the challenge of managing common or collectively used natural resources is recurrent across different territories and demands urgent, coordinated global action.

In this context, negative environmental externalities disproportionately affect territories across various spatial, temporal, and political scales, with global consequences. Conversely, the aggregated role of forests in providing ecosystem services, especially carbon sequestration and storage, is essential for regulating the global atmosphere. This makes forests fluid ecological assets, common in nature, whose effective governance is crucial to addressing climate change.

Although governance strategies based on state-led command-and-control or market-based mechanisms have been widely applied, there is still no consensus on how to effectively manage these commons. However, several studies — most notably those by Elinor Ostrom — have demonstrated that collective and community-based governance arrangements can be more sustainable and efficient for the protection of shared natural resources.

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Indeed, recent evidence, including from the UN, highlights the crucial role of Indigenous peoples and local communities in managing and protecting ecologically significant areas, thereby generating ecosystem services with global benefits. These actors often engage — voluntarily and routinely — in activities that support the provision of ecosystem services, such as safeguarding springs, practicing sustainable agriculture, preserving biodiversity, managing forests, and protecting natural areas.

However, the socioecological costs of these practices are borne solely by these groups, who generally receive no financial compensation for the benefits they generate for the broader society. In this context, economic instruments for environmental governance, such as Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), become particularly relevant.

PES schemes involve voluntary incentives paid to farmers, landowners, Indigenous peoples, and local communities in exchange for the provision of clearly defined ecosystem services — including carbon sequestration, water conservation, and biodiversity protection. By financially recognizing these contributions, PES can play a vital role in advancing climate and socioecological justice, enabling cross-border financial flows toward those who maintain ecological processes essential to life — and thereby promoting tangible recognition and valuation of positive environmental action.

Similar to the International Panel on Climate Change, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services is an intergovernmental organization established to improve communication between science and policy on issues of biodiversity and ecosystem services. As a policy body it influences groups like the UN's Biodiversity Credit Alliance and PES programs like the Bolsa Floresta program of Brazil. As of 2019 there were an estimated 550 PES programs around the world facilitating approximately $36 to $42 billion in annual transactions.

As effective as PES programs are, they, together with biodiversity financing budgets, fall short by an estimated $700 billion if we are to reverse biodiversity decline by 2030.

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Global Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes targeting specific Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) activities have enabled direct efforts to combat deforestation through financial incentives to local actors. These mechanisms have also supported the development of initiatives led by community groups, Indigenous Peoples, and traditional communities, serving as a strategy to redistribute environmental benefits based on the "provider-gets" principle. In doing so, they help compensate those who preserve forests and generate positive externalities for society as a whole. Notable examples include projects supported by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the REDD Early Movers (REM) program in the Brazilian Amazon.

8.4 - Carbon Markets and Carbon Rewards

One of the most critical ecosystem services today is carbon sequestration and storage, which involves the protection, management, and support of ecosystems capable of capturing atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO_2) and storing it in a stable form. This service plays a direct role in climate change mitigation by reducing the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Controlling greenhouse gas emissions — particularly carbon dioxide, often referred to simply as "carbon" — has become a key concern for the international community, which has increasingly turned to market-based mechanisms and economic instruments as strategies to limit pollution and foster the transition to low-carbon economies.

In the early 2000's the most promising approach appeared to be a cap and trade model, aiming both to restrict carbon emissions and to generate income for climate solutions. Cap and share is a variant on this model wherein revenue from permits, required of fossil fuel suppliers, is socially distributed. Unfortunately, due to market instability, inadequate political will, and the intrinsic challenge of addressing the global commons without a truly global administration, the cap-and-trade and cap-and-share models have so far failed to scale.

In addition to such practical limitations, carbon trading has also been criticized for perpetuating a "business as usual" approach that fails to achieve meaningful emissions reductions. Complex trading systems often contain loopholes that allow emitters to avoid reducing emissions, especially when oversight is weak.

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A nation-state level carbon tax has also been proposed, with strong support from economists, but has failed so far to catch on politically, partly due to the complexities of managing unequal taxes between different countries. A global carbon tax has also been proposed.

A common thread in these past attempts has been reliance on limits and added costs, which function economically as a penalty, leading to resistance from the private sector. Thus, although mechanisms such as cap and trade, cap and share, and carbon taxation form the core of carbon pricing policies, these structures share a significant limitation: they overlook the compensatory dimension of the ecosystem service of carbon sequestration and storage. In other words, they fail to adequately recognize and reward the actors — often Indigenous peoples and traditional communities — who ensure the continued provision of this service, which is vital to maintaining global climate stability.

An emerging alternative proposal seeks to break this dynamic by emphasizing carrots rather than sticks. The Global Carbon Reward is an innovative financial mechanism, conceived by Dr. Delton Chen, that would generate financial rewards for voluntary greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions and avoidance and atmospheric carbon removal. The carbon reward would be linked to long-term contracts between mitigators and an authority for the policy, called a Carbon Exchange Authority. Recipient projects would be rigorously vetted based on milestones achieved and the mass of GHGs that are mitigated. The rewards would be issued as a carbon-linked financial asset that would then be traded in the foreign exchange markets and would be assigned a price guarantee by a consortium of the world's central banks. This guarantee would be implemented through international monetary policy called Carbon Quantitative Easing.

It is important to note that the carbon reward is not a carbon credit, and it is not a medium of exchange (i.e. it is not a currency). It is a new type of carbon-linked sovereign-backed asset that can be issued at speed and scale to span the multi-trillion dollar climate finance gap, and without imposing direct costs on stakeholders or governments.

The Global Carbon Reward concept is highly developed, yet requires stakeholder consultations, feasibility studies and piloting by a club of nations. After piloting, the policy may then be implemented under the auspices of the UN with support from sponsoring countries and their central banks.

In light of the structural challenges posed by the climate crisis and the limitations of current carbon pricing instruments, it is urgent to acknowledge that the provision of ecosystem services essential to climate regulation — such as carbon sequestration and

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storage — transcends political borders and depends on coordinated collective action at the global level.

In this context, proposals such as the Global Carbon Reward offer a new paradigm for climate governance by establishing a results-based, transnational reward architecture capable of aligning the interests of multiple actors around a common good: the stability of the Earth's climate system.

However, for such a proposal to become scalable and practically applicable, innovative financial mechanisms are essential. The creation of a Global Commons Fund, for instance, could provide the international financing for the piloting of the Global Carbon Reward and to support an emerging conservation economy.

This discussion highlights the urgent need to build a global governance framework for the commons, capable of integrating financial, legal, and political instruments that recognize, value, and safeguard the ecological systems that sustain life on the planet.

> While there is no donor affinity group specifically focused on Payments for Ecosystem Services, a 2023 report from the Netherlands Enterprise Agency and a 2024 report from the UNDP makes recommendations for how to scale such programs. While some grantmakers have retreated from carbon markets due to problems with the sector, a 2023 statement from a consortium of climate funders working through ClimateWorks recognized the significance of high integrity carbon markets and offered recommendations to donors.

8.5 - Global Currencies, Payment Networks, and Transaction Fees

The 2009 invention of the Bitcoin demonstrated the possibility to decouple currencies from nation states, thereby unleashing the financial imagination and inevitability of global currencies. This change, together with citizen-level payment innovation, updated bank charters, and democratized transaction fee structures, all point to new opportunities for global commons management.

8.5.1 - Global Currencies

Proposals to create a single global currency date back at least to 1944, when John Maynard Keynes proposed the Bancor (a supranational unit of account for

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settling trade imbalances) during the Bretton Woods conference, the same conference that created the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The global currency idea has seen renewed interest in recent years. As the United States' geopolitical primacy grows less clear, and as other countries tire of bearing the downstream costs of periodic US financial market volatility with limited strategic recourse under the currently prevailing US dollar hegemony, a wide variety of multilateral, state, and non-state actors have floated new proposals.

Special Drawing Rights (SDR's) were created at the International Monetary Fund in 1969, as a step toward addressing imbalances in the world financial system. The IMF acknowledged in 2011 that further steps are needed, and suggested a larger role for SDR's.

Mark Carney, Canada's new Prime Minister and a former governor of the Banks of England and Canada, proposed "a new Synthetic Hegemonic Currency... provided by the public sector, perhaps through a network of central bank digital currencies," in a speech in 2019, opining that "any unipolar system is unsuited to a multi-polar world."

China has made a bid to create an alternative reserve currency known as mBridge. It launched in 2021 with key support from the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) as well as the central banks of China, Hong Kong, Thailand, and the United Arab Emirates. Although the Saudi Arabian central bank joined the project earlier in 2024, the BIS ended its participation in October the same year.

Russia has proposed a similar scheme called BRICS Bridge, focused on the needs of BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), including a desire to evade international sanctions. BRICS Bridge is modeled in part on the Chinese effort to develop a common BRICS currency. However, with the withdrawal of India both elements of Russia's plan have so far failed to gain traction.

Digital technology plays a central role in all the recent global currency proposals. Carney suggested a basket of central bank digital currencies. China's mBridge (and so implicitly also BRICS Bridge) is based on a blockchain, the distributed ledger technology that powers Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies.

Blockchain and distributed ledgers are also at the core of two other prominent plays in this space, led by non-state actors.

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Facebook (now Meta) proposed the Libra (later named Diem) project in 2019 to serve as a global electronic currency. The project failed, having no obvious constituency beyond its corporate backers, a consortium of “elite members (Facebook plus an accompanying constellation of firms like Booking, Mastercard, PayPal, Spotify, Uber, Visa and Vodafone)”. Both the US and developing countries saw Libra as a threat, for divergent reasons. Critics derided its board as an "oligarchical plutocracy... out to enrich themselves at the expense of the public." Facebook’s reputation was also impacted by the Cambridge Analytica scandal. Nonetheless, Libra advanced the conversation about alternatives to the US dollar, cited by Carney (above) among others.

Worldcoin, later renamed World, was proposed in 2018 with more populist positioning, as "a new cryptocurrency to establish the transparency and equal right for every citizen to be part of a global system through the collaboration between people and government." It’s best known for its work building a cryptographically secured database of human identities, with finance as another “potential application”.

The above examples indicate substantial, ongoing worldwide pressure to reduce reliance on the US dollar as the sole hegemonic reserve currency. Based on our review, the most viable global currency proposals may involve central bank or non-governmental digital currencies, usually based on blockchain technology.

The potential for blockchain to play this role remains unfulfilled so far. As envisioned by many people, such as Gary Jacobs in a 2018 paper, "a basket of cryptocurrencies could emerge as the first prototype of a world currency whose value is backed by the total productive capacity of the entire human community.” He goes on to say, “autonomous global cryptocurrencies could dramatically reduce the control and effectiveness of existing regulatory mechanisms at the national level and generate considerable pressure for the evolution of more effective institutions for global governance.”

Citing work by Don Tapscott, Jacobs also notes that “governance need not be synonymous with centralized governmental control. The Internet is the best example of a complex global social organization that has evolved and transformed itself largely by means of decentralized multi-stakeholder networks operating as governance structures.”

Bitcoin itself is unfit to serve as a global currency. Transaction speeds are inadequate for mass consumer adoption, and the lack of know-your-customer

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compliance enables anonymous criminal transactions. Ethereum or other cryptocurrency platforms, however, may offer a solution.

The fact that no single digital currency has yet achieved mass adoption for financial and global governance invites the question: why or why not? The needs and their potential solutions are many. Is it just a matter of time?

> For more on global currencies, a study from the Mises Institute compares various historic proposals. For grantmakers, it should be noted that many major blockchain and cryptocurrency projects have their own foundations - nonprofit entities created to govern, fund, and support the long-term development and ecosystem growth of their respective blockchain protocols. Some well known groups and NGOs in the sector include the Ethereum Foundation, the Web3 Foundation and the Climate Collective which seeks to put investors, entrepreneurs and "digital tech to work to support climate and nature."

8.5.2 - Payment Networks

While developers iterate and reformers wait for a global currency solution, networks of payment processors could serve as a stepping stone to develop solutions in an incremental manner.

Payment networks are already global. Created in 1973, the SWIFT network hosts a messaging platform through which international payments are made, across currencies. Daily volume averages $5 trillion. The credit card networks such as Visa and Mastercard facilitate an estimated 1.98 billion transactions per day.

Restrictions on payment networks are already used to enforce international policy priorities. Russian banks were cut off from major credit cards, Apple Pay and the SWIFT network at the start of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war as a key mechanism of international punishment. The US Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control maintains a Specially Designated and Blocked Persons List as a mechanism to issue sanctions against terrorists and other parties that the US government wants

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to block from international travel or prevent from participating in the global financial system.

These payment and finance networks are governed by a patchwork of national legislation, international treaties and oversight bodies including the EU, the UN, the Financial Action Task Force, the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, national level banks and other parties. Could new payment processors and policies be created, if the goal is to transcend the restrictions of nation-state politics? Could a global agreement among payment processors serve as a new layer of global governance that supplements existing structures? Transaction fees of payments already go up and down according to the type of merchant account and the perceived risks of the vendors and users involved. Extrapolating on that risk calculus to develop regulatory oversight mechanisms is not a far stretch, especially given that such mechanisms are already in place. Payment processors manage vendors according to Merchant Category Codes, taking guidance from ISO standard 18245. Vendors that are categorized as "high risk," like online gambling providers, are required to pay higher transaction fees and often see their transactions blocked. New Merchant Category Codes could be developed and charged according to compliance with global commons directives that are issued by a global commons fund or a new global citizen body. Technical Committee 68 of the International Standards Organization oversees the design and allocation of these codes, and could serve as an enforcement mechanism for policy recommendations of global citizen deliberation processes. New paytech and fintech entrepreneurs could promote compliance with such mechanisms to differentiate themselves with merchants and consumers. The Paytech Book, published by Wiley in 2020, gives an industry overview of how innovations are made in the payment sector, with one contributor declaring that "payments are political." One historic example includes the decision by payment processors to block donations to Wikileaks in 2010 after the organization released documents that were embarrassing to the US government. If payment processors enforce mandates from governments already, then why not from a new global citizen group?

Philanthropists and grantmakers who seek to learn more about the payments sector should study the work of the Better than Cash Alliance, the Center for Payments, the Electronic Transactions Association and the 2022 book Driverless Finance, by Hillary J. Allen, which explores the

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risks that the fintech industry poses to the payments sector and the global financial system.

8.5.3 - Bank Charters and Transaction Fees

A bank charter is a legal authorization that allows an entity to operate as a bank. Alternative bank charters have been used for years to promote new kinds of financial inclusion, business cooperatives and community benefit sharing. The Global Alliance for Banking on Values (GABV) manages a global membership of these humanitarian and development-friendly financial institutions. If the GABV network embraced a new international charter dedicated to responsible management of the global commons, could they seed a process that consumers could opt into in order to support global commons compliance? Market surveys report that 67% of consumers prefer to purchase products that promote sustainability and that broadly they are willing to pay 9.7% more as a sustainability premium. These numbers could drive bankers to compete for environmentally friendly governance bragging rights.

In addition to opting in for green branded banks, consumers have also shown a willingness to opt in for transaction fees that advance humanitarian goals. The American Express Red credit card, created in 2006 as part of Product Red with U2 frontman Bono, donated a small portion of its transaction fees to fighting poverty. The Red campaign has mobilized over $785 million to date.

In debates about financing international public goods and global governance, transaction fees have a long history. In 1972, economist James Tobin proposed a tax on international currency transactions. By the late 1990s, the Tobin tax concept was promoted as a solution for many different kinds of international development financing. Many other transaction fee solutions have been proposed since, such as a Robin Hood tax and a Financial Transaction Tax. Some countries already have them. Since 2011, France has had a financial transaction tax to fund international development, and since 2023 has supported the Global Solidarity Levies Task Force to advocate for such efforts globally. Until 2007, Brazil managed a Provisional Contribution on Financial Transactions or CPMF tax on electronic transactions to generate revenue for diverse programs. The experiences from Brazil, France and elsewhere show that it is possible for minuscule transaction fees to function in a national-scale financial system without creating market disruptions. Even the US government maintains a small transaction fee on most stock trades.

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Transaction fees are also a proven solution in the private sector. Such fees are prevalent in the cryptocurrency market. Known as “gas” fees, most cryptocurrencies charge a small fee for each transaction to reward the validator nodes that manage the currency electronically. Credit card transaction fees are ubiquitous as well, averaging between 1.5% and 3.5% around the world. The debit card transactions of large banks are regulated with an interchange fee that cannot exceed 0.05% + $0.21, with a $0.01 fraud-prevention adjustment. Considering that customer acquisition costs range from $80 to $1000, credit card providers could profitably attract and retain new globally minded clients by offering global-commons-compliant credit cards that charge lower fees than competitors, while still supporting a global commons fund.

The inevitability of global currencies, the current regulatory power of payment networks, and the prevalence of transaction fees suggest a possible multi-step pathway for addressing global governance issues. Consumers demand socially branded credit cards and bank accounts. Banks update their charters with transaction fees to pay into a global commons fund and showcase it to differentiate themselves. Payment networks follow suit and adopt global commons policy recommendations to punish and reward vendors according to the risk levels assigned by their new ISO 18245 Merchant Category Codes that are informed by global citizen deliberation processes.

What are the possibilities? It’s time to begin this conversation as a global community to find out.

> The authors of this paper are not aware of any grantmakers that are explicitly focused on bank charters and transaction fees. However, a 2019 article from the William and Mary Law Review offers guidance on modernizing bank charters. In addition, related to transactions, a 2021 report from the Haslam School of Business highlights the trends of point-of-sale donation campaigns that are made at the checkout counter. Such campaigns mobilized nearly $750 million for charities in 2022.

8.6 - Technology-Innovated States and Global Opportunity

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The concept of new virtual nations has circulated for decades. In 1997, Nation.1 was proposed as an online nation to be owned, populated and governed by young people.

More recently, various innovators in the cryptocurrency space have sketched proposals to deploy blockchain technology to enable virtual citizenship and governance on a global scale. Founded in 2014, Bitnation was one such proposal in which becoming a citizen involved recording vital records, identity, and other legal events through the use of smart contracts. While the project closed in 2022, some of the ideas have been realized by other crypto startups.

World, formerly known as Worldcoin and cited above, is among the platforms building a foundational record of individual identities on a blockchain. Verifiable and unique identity is, of course, fundamental to civic participation. A great deal of unrealized potential remains in this space.

Estonia has built a highly advanced digital society by integrating technology into governance, the economy, and everyday life. At the core is a national digital ID system that allows citizens to securely access public services, sign documents, and vote online. Estonia's e-Residency program allows global entrepreneurs to start and manage EU-based businesses entirely online. The country has also implemented digital education and strong cybersecurity measures, including hosting NATO's Cyber Defence Centre. As a result, Estonia has become a global leader in digital governance, transparency, and citizen empowerment.

In his book In The Network State: How to Start a New Country, Balaji Srinivasan introduces the concept of a "network state," defined as a highly aligned online community with the capacity for collective action, which eventually acquires physical territory and gains diplomatic recognition from existing states. Srinivasan critiques the traditional nation-state model, arguing that it has failed to uphold foundational principles and protect basic rights. He suggests that building new, digitally native societies from the ground up can more effectively embody and safeguard the values that their members cherish. Technological advancements, particularly in blockchain, would play a pivotal role in enabling such network states to scale.

In the technological sphere, big tech has supported the development of several global NGOs that address international affairs. Major tech companies such as Alphabet (Google (DeepMind), Amazon, Apple, Meta (Facebook), and Microsoft participate in the Partnership on AI, the Internet Corporation of Assigned Names and Numbers, and the Cyber Threat Alliance, all discussed above. Many of these firms also participate in the Internet & Jurisdiction Policy Network, which supports legal interoperability in cross-border internet issues including content takedowns, data localization, and domain

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seizures. Others participate in the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, which works to prevent terrorists and violent extremists from exploiting digital platforms.

Today, the leading technology companies have become some of the most powerful geopolitical actors in the world, often surpassing governments in influence. Following the January 6 2021 US Capitol riot, tech companies like Facebook, Twitter, and Amazon acted swiftly to deplatform Trump and his supporters, demonstrating their unilateral power in digital governance. These firms operate across borders and control digital spaces that have become central to global communication, commerce, and even politics, with platforms like Facebook and Google exceeding many nation-states in reach. Unlike past private power brokers like Big Oil or the East India Company, today's tech giants shape both physical and digital realms, creating a new dimension of influence. Their infrastructure underpins not only business and education but also social and political life worldwide. Governments are attempting to push back - through regulation, antitrust actions, and data laws - but often lack the speed, knowledge, and leverage to do so effectively. As digital life becomes inseparable from everyday life, the power of Big Tech will likely grow, creating both new risks and new opportunities for global governance. Ultimately, these companies are not just reacting to geopolitical changes; they are actively shaping the future of the international order.

Leading up to and following the re-election of Trump in 2024, some tech leaders have sought reconciliation through lending support to his administration. In response, some public thinkers have begun to express concern about the close relationships between tech leaders and the Trump administration. They mention how these ties are under scrutiny, especially as the administration imposes policies that significantly impact the tech industry, such as sweeping tariffs affecting companies like Apple and Nvidia. They also speculate about the power of the companies to facilitate dictatorship-like surveillance of the populace.

Where some see the rise of autocracy and the risk of a new surveillance state, global governance innovators point out that this is already the default trajectory, whereas inclusive global governance presents alternative, even transformative opportunities.

There has been some scholarship on the subject of big tech and global governance. In her 2024 article Big Tech: Making Rules and Making Realities as Global Governors, Wendy Wong argues that major tech companies have become powerful global authorities by creating the rules and digital spaces through which people live, work, and communicate. These companies don't just influence policy like traditional non-state actors, they directly shape behavior and norms through their platforms. Wong cites examples like the Apple-Google contact tracing collaboration during COVID-19 and Meta's oversight board to show how tech firms govern in ways once reserved for states.

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The article promotes the concept of a "platform society," where digital infrastructure is deeply embedded in daily life.

Meta's oversight board governs the content that is viewed by billions. Some staff at Meta understand the complicated relationship they have with power. In 2018, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg famously quipped that he wasn't sure the company shouldn't be regulated.

If the influence of big tech in geopolitics is inevitable, and some at the top are willing to relinquish power and invite oversight, then why not invite all big tech companies to join a wider conversation about upgrading global governance and responsibly managing the global commons?

All companies need a level playing field to compete fairly, whether they are big tech or big oil. The time to formalize the conversation about our inevitable future has come.

> While the authors of this study are not aware of any donor consortium that focuses specifically on tech-innovated states or the intersection of big tech and geopolitical reform, there are some important references. The NetGain Partnership is a network of foundations working at the intersection of technology, democracy, and public interest - touching on global citizenship. In addition, a new article in Policy and Society analyzes the growing influence of Big Tech and how they leverage philanthropy to shape policy agendas and public perception. Finally, a few relevant funds focus on global digital rights, digital governance and digital identity including Luminate, the Internet Society Foundation, and Digital Rights for All, among others.

8.7 - A New Approach to Global Economic Cooperation

International trade provides important current benefits and also presents vital and dramatic opportunities.

The benefits are widely understood yet worth restating. First, it's a means of allocating resources nonviolently across borders, based on economics rather than warfare and conquest. Second, as the populations of different countries forge trade relationships, their interdependent interests grow stronger and more salient, enhancing stability and reducing the likelihood of armed international conflict.

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Trade agreements are also among the strongest vectors for implementing international governance. We can see this clearly in the history of the EU, which began in 1951 as the European Coal and Steel Community, a trade agreement limited in scope to a few commodities, and has since evolved into the continental governance bloc we see today, with shared policymaking and defense along with free movement of goods, services, and people. The EU stands today as perhaps our strongest proof point showing the feasibility of adding international governance as an umbrella while maintaining existing national and local governments.

Of course, trade agreements are rooted in economic interests, presenting an opportunity to maximize wealth. In the EU, member countries enjoy an upside worth nearly 1 trillion Euros per year. Corporations also benefit, especially from "the creation of a more predictable and transparent trading and investment environment."

Yet these benefits are often threatened by parochial interests. US President Trump is embracing new tariffs today. At many points in the past, the stability and predictability goals of trade agreements have ironically been undermined when the players advancing them, such as certain industries or national governments, pursue self-interest too narrowly. For example, the US declined to join the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership nearly a decade ago, amid bipartisan opposition following a secretive, closed-door negotiation process favoring big pharmaceutical companies rather than a wider set of interests. Earlier, the Seattle protests in 1999 and Mexico's Zapatista rebellion beginning in 1994 both grew out of opposition to trade agreements favoring corporations while neglecting human needs. These examples illustrate how overreach by narrow interests can scuttle the stability, predictability, and economic growth opportunities that are the core drivers of international trade agreements.

But this pattern of failure also points to a transformative opportunity. With today's collaborative tools, it's not difficult to envision a process that could include whole populations in crowdsourcing potential text of future agreements. Such text would almost certainly include robust environmental, health, safety, and labor standards, and thereby gain the support of civic groups that have historically opposed prior agreements due to the lack of these provisions. With civil society on board, the stability and predictability benefits, as well as the economic upside, become far more achievable.

Truly balanced trade agreements could result, unlocking new economic gains that could be equitably taxed to distribute social investment where it's most needed, as well as making new philanthropy possible.

This "grand bargain" scenario would also powerfully demonstrate the potential of democratically crowdsourced international governance.

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Ensuring that trade agreements also include cooperation on law enforcement and asset recovery also presents powerful and mutually beneficial market opportunities for states. Strengthening international asset recovery frameworks can help repatriate stolen funds, restoring them to their rightful owners, and funding vital development priorities such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Countries that assist in asset recovery also benefit from more transparent financial systems, reduced reputational risk, and improved trust in their institutions. Just as open trade can create shared economic gains, so too can robust cross-border collaboration in tracing, freezing, and returning stolen assets generate win-win outcomes for global governance and economic justice.

New approaches to economic cooperation also touch on how we define economic progress. It is increasingly clear that GDP and corporate profits alone are no longer adequate measures of successful economic cooperation. Growing calls to complement and move beyond GDP - highlighted for example in Action 53 in the UN's 2024 Pact for the Future - emphasize the importance of incorporating the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development into our metrics of progress. To meet the pressing challenges of our time, international economic governance must evolve accordingly.

> Relevant for donors, the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) is a global development program aimed at assisting Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in integrating into the global trading system. It represents a partnership between various stakeholders, including donor countries, international organizations, and LDCs themselves. The EIF is supported by a multi-donor trust fund and focuses on providing trade-related technical assistance to LDCs.

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9.0 - Legitimacy, Celebrity and the Voices of Indigenous People in Global Governance

In an increasingly interconnected world, the legitimacy of global decision-making has never been more vital. As climate change, pandemics, armed conflict, and economic inequality transcend national borders, decisions made at the global level affect billions of people, often without their direct participation or consent. As Lisa Dellmuth and her colleagues discuss in the book Citizens, Elites and the Legitimacy of Global Governance, our current global governance structures, primarily composed of state representatives and elite stakeholders, frequently lack the moral, democratic, and inclusive foundations required to justify decisions on behalf of all humanity. Moreover, global governance remains inaccessible to most, as information and policy decisions are largely shaped by English-language research and made by English speakers — despite 80% of the world not speaking English and fewer than half speaking the other UN languages. This communication and legitimacy gap undermines public trust, weakens the effectiveness of global policies, and increases the risk of backlash or noncompliance. To address global challenges with lasting solutions, it is essential to broaden the base of legitimate authority in global governance by including moral leaders, future-oriented thinkers, and historically marginalized communities.

Institutions like The Elders, the World Future Council, and the Planetary Guardians were created to help address this gap. The Elders, founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007, is a group of respected global statesmen and human rights advocates who use their collective influence to promote peace, justice, and ethical leadership. They provide independent guidance on global issues with a moral perspective that transcends politics. Similarly, the World Future Council brings together fifty prominent individuals from around the world to advocate for policies that safeguard the rights of future generations. By identifying and promoting exemplary laws and governance models, they aim to ensure long-term sustainability and intergenerational justice. The Planetary Guardians are an independent collective uniting leaders from across the globe and across generations to elevate and advance the science of planetary boundaries, essential for a future of human thriving. All three groups exemplify how legitimacy can emerge not just from institutional power, but from moral authority, wisdom, and service to the common good.

Legitimacy can also go viral. People often form deep emotional attachments to celebrities and social media influencers, seeing them not just as entertainers but as trusted figures whose voices carry moral and cultural weight. When celebrities speak out on global issues, their words can bypass traditional political gatekeepers and resonate directly with the public's sense of justice and urgency. When balanced with a strong focus on substantive policy solutions, a celebrity endorsement of a new system of global governance - such as one designed to address planetary interdependency - could therefore go viral, catalyzing global conversations and lending fresh legitimacy to proposals that might otherwise seem abstract or elite-driven.

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Angelina Jolie's sustained advocacy for refugees through the UNHCR reframed displacement as a humanitarian crisis deserving political will, not just sympathy. Emma Watson's leadership in the HeForShe campaign showed how a culturally resonant figure could mobilize millions in support of gender equity and influence global institutions like the United Nations. Malala Yousafzai's global stature as a youth icon for education and peace elevated girls' education from a development goal to a matter of global moral urgency. If such figures were to champion a new framework for global governance - one built on cooperation, fairness, and shared planetary responsibility - they could help shift public opinion, pressure policymakers, and inject emotional resonance into an issue often seen as distant or technocratic.

Indigenous peoples also bring a unique and deeply rooted legitimacy to global decision-making, particularly in the context of environmental governance. Their traditional knowledge systems, longstanding stewardship of ecosystems, and moral claims to ancestral territories provide essential insights for addressing climate change and biodiversity loss. As discussed in the 2019 study Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change: Emerging Research on Traditional Knowledge and Governance, indigenous communities are increasingly asserting their roles in international climate negotiations, advocating for rights-based and sustainable approaches. Another study emphasized how Indigenous sovereignties in the Amazon can inform global governance through a plurinational lens. The Arctic Council exemplifies this wisdom, as it uniquely institutionalizes the partnership between Indigenous Permanent Participants and non-Indigenous member states, ensuring that ancestral knowledge and state interests co-shape decisions on the governance of a fragile global commons. Additionally, various institutions and declarations underscore both the right and the responsibility of Indigenous communities to influence decisions that affect the global commons. Incorporating their voices is not only a matter of justice — it enhances the legitimacy, equity, and efficacy of global governance itself.

A few foundations focus on improving global governance such as the One World Trust, the Global Challenges Foundation and the Kofi Annan Foundation. On celebrities, a 2024 article by Mary Beth Collins outlines strategies for developing higher standards for impact in celebrity philanthropy. While there is no donor network expressly focused on global governance legitimacy, there are several groups focused on indigenous participation at the global level. International Funders for Indigenous Peoples supports Indigenous Peoples' rights, leadership, and participation in global governance processes such as the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

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10.0 - The Leading Edge

While the global issues examined in this study pose extraordinary risk, solutions do exist. Even if the global commons is under-managed today, it doesn't have to be that way tomorrow. For each pitfall in the current multilateral system that is called out by skeptics, innovators have illustrated a way forward. These trends demonstrate that the future state of the planet is no longer only in the hands of nation states. Individuals can participate too. The time has come for all generations to work together and unite as a movement for global citizenship and responsible management of the global commons.

This paper is the start of something new, and an invitation for philanthropy to lead the way.

10.1 - Philanthropy is Stepping Up

Recently, a handful of leading philanthropists and grantmakers have made important moves to support global governance reform. Some have focused on the structural elements of governance, while others have focused on specific issues.

To help grapple with the structural challenges of globalization, in the 1990s and early 2000s, the Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation for Human Progress of Switzerland supported the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World "to invent, to share, and to practice new forms of collective action, from the local to the global scales, so that together we can exercise more control, together and with Nature, over the future of an increasingly complex and interdependent world." The process included a 2001 World Citizen's Assembly. Now 20 years later, a few funders are working through the Iswe Foundation to support a new coalition for a Global Citizens Assembly as part of the UNFCCC process. In addition, Missions Publiques manages a fellows program to strengthen the participation of ordinary citizens in transnational decision-making.

In 1997, Ted Turner, founder of CNN, pledged $1 billion to support the United Nations through the United Nations Foundation. Originally a grantmaking body focused on direct aid for key UN issues, the organization evolved to become a strategic partner for the UN, mobilizing private resources from others to support many UN efforts.

The Rockefeller Brothers Fund's president, Stephen Heintz, has pointed out the obsolescence of the nation-state system. Correspondingly, the foundation created a Democratic Practice - Global Challenges program in 2003 to "advance transborder democratic practices for social and environmental justice."

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The Global Challenges Foundation, based in Sweden, is dedicated to strengthening global governance to address catastrophic risks. Founded in 2012 and endowed by the Hungarian-Swedish investor Laszlo Szombatfalvy, the Foundation launched the New Shape Prize in 2017 offering $5 million in support for the best ideas for global governance.

A few other philanthropists of note have also focused on the structural elements of global governance. In 1956, the industrialist and entrepreneur C. Maxwell Stanley and his wife endowed the Stanley Foundation to address "global challenges that present a profound threat to human survival and well-being." In 2001, Jim Balsillie, the former CEO of Research in Motion (makers of the BlackBerry) co-founded the Center for International Governance Innovation to support research, form networks, advance policy debates and generate ideas for multilateral governance improvements. In 2010, the investor Nicholas Berggruen founded the Berggruen Institute to help transform social and political institutions. Its program The Planetary explores new forms of global governance to address interconnected planetary challenges — such as climate, technology, and migration — beyond the limitations of nation-state politics. In 2016, the family of former President and Chairman of Honeywell, James Binger, endowed the Chair in Global Governance at the Council on Foreign Relations through the Robina Foundation to promote independent scholarship on issues of global governance.

Perhaps more than any other philanthropist, financier George Soros has supported efforts to improve governance globally. Through the Open Society Foundations (OSF), the Soros family has invested over $32 billion to promote justice, human rights, and democratic governance around the world. These efforts have aimed to create more transparent and accountable societies, often supporting watchdog and anti-corruption efforts that serve as deterrents to organized crime. One significant OSF partner is the Paris Peace Forum, a key convener in the world of multilateral gatherings, with a specific focus on global governance issues, complementing the exploration of economic and financial issues at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and the focus on security issues at the Munich Security Conference in Germany.

In 2019, oil industry tycoon Charles Koch joined his ideological opposite, George Soros, to support the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. The institute advocates for diplomacy, realism and restraint in foreign affairs, promoting a "less militarized and more cooperative foreign policy." The institute operates as a think tank that hosts scholars, participates in debates, and publishes analysis pieces by journalists and academics.

More donors have focused directly on the issues of the global commons and other select global governance concerns.

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Former New York City Mayor and founder of Bloomberg LP, Michael Bloomberg has supported several key issues of the global commons. In January of 2025, after US President Trump withdrew support for the UN climate work, Bloomberg stepped in to provide funding for UNFCCC operations. Other related efforts include the Bloomberg Ocean Initiative to support ocean sustainability and the C40 global network of cities and mayors to promote climate action. The founder of the yogurt brand Chobani, Hamdi Ulukaya, created the Tent Partnership for Refugees and became one of the largest donors to the UN High Commission on Refugees. Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos created the Bezos Earth Fund in 2020 as the largest philanthropic commitment to date dedicated to fighting climate change and protecting nature. The Moore Foundation, founded in 2000 by Intel co-founder Gordon Moore and his wife Betty, has been one of the largest historic contributors to tropical forest conservation. Jeff Skoll of eBay created the Skoll Global Threats Fund in 2009 to address climate change, pandemics, water security, nuclear proliferation, and conflict in the Middle East. While back in 2015 Tesla CEO Elon Musk donated $10 million to support work on responsible AI, the co-founder of Facebook, Dustin Moskovitz, and his wife Cari Tuna created Open Philanthropy to take on global catastrophic risks such as rogue AI and asteroids. Giving Pledge signers Marcel and Cynda Arsenault have also tackled governance issues related to outer space and other global commons. Cynda co-founded the Secure World Foundation to promote peace in outer space and the sustainable uses of space for the benefit of all nations, and together with Marcel she created the One Earth Future Foundation to create ecosystems of support in select fragile states, bringing together local wisdom with national authority and international expertise to support local-level economic development.

Collectively these donors have done a great deal to advance global governance and address the issues of the global commons, but much more philanthropy is needed.

As we've seen, the deficit of global governance holds back human progress and stewardship across numerous vital domains. So addressing it offers extraordinary leverage, especially relative to more established and crowded verticals. Think of it as a high-reward contrarian social investment.

There are a handful of donor groups operating at the global level that are worth mentioning here. The Foundations Platform F20 is a global alliance of philanthropic foundations working to align G20 policies with the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals by advocating for sustainable finance, climate action, and just transitions. The Global Commons Alliance unites donors, scientists, civil society, and business leaders to protect Earth's life-support systems by setting science-based boundaries and promoting accountability for nature and climate. The Worldwide Initiative for Grantmaker Support (WINGS) is a global network

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that strengthens the capacity and collaboration of philanthropy support organizations to improve the effectiveness of giving worldwide. The Global Governance Philanthropy Network is an emerging affinity group of donors interested in advancing more inclusive, transparent, and accountable systems of global governance. Together, these four institutions represent a growing convergence between philanthropy, planetary stewardship, and systems change - advancing a more equitable and sustainable global order.

10.2 - Rapid Scaling is Possible

Of course, achieving more robust global governance will require more than just articles like this one.

You are invited to join us on this world-changing mission, beginning with two critical next steps.

We can and must: (1) generate a new dialogue across society about the needs and opportunities in global governance reform, and (2) build a grassroots constituency committed to this goal and big enough to drive it forward.

These tasks are not trivial, but both can happen quickly when the conditions are right, as recent history has shown. For example, a strategic investment enabled a new movement in the US that brought marriage equality from a fringe issue to law-of-the-land in just 15 years (roughly 2000 to 2015). And more broadly, the pace of social change is accelerating.

Adoption of new technology can change social paradigms seemingly overnight. Witness the arrival of Facebook in 2004, or the iPhone in 2007. Of course, new technologies alone don't guarantee social progress.

But the origins of major organizations such as MoveOn and Avaaz demonstrate that large grassroots organizations with a social change agenda can reach influential scale quickly. MoveOn was born in 1998 with the first breakout online petition, quickly reaching 500,000 supporters, a number which grew to millions as the organization surged to prominence leading the opposition to the second US war on Iraq, beginning in 2003. Avaaz originated in 2001 with a similar viral petition following 9-11 with a call for restraint rather than violent reprisal, which attracted hundreds of thousands of supporters

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worldwide. Avaaz has grown dramatically in the years since then by addressing critical international issues at key moments; its membership now stands at 70 million.

Successes like these are possible when a new initiative steps into a vacuum, wherein a widely and strongly felt need is otherwise unmet, and when emerging technology can be leveraged.

These conditions are true in the global governance space today. As we have laid out, the need is clear. The urgency is obvious.

Polls show popular support for global governance reform:

- Majorities in 10 major countries support the creation of “a new global supranational organization… to make binding global decisions on how to manage global risks.” (2020)
- Majorities in 6 major countries support “global democracy, including a world parliament and government.” (2020)
- Majorities in 12 out of 15 countries surveyed support "the creation of a new global parliament that represents every country in the world, where every country would be represented based on how many citizens it has, rather than its own national government representation to the UN." (2023)
- People in 6 major countries strongly prefer adding a UN assembly directly elected by the people over the status quo in which only countries are represented. They also support the UN making binding decisions on environmental and economic issues as well as security issues. (2022)
- Substantial majorities in all twelve G7 and BRICS countries favor the creation of an International Anti-Corruption Court. (2023)

Can the world come together again in shared purpose? Both history and today’s *zeitgeist* say it can. People are ready and we have the means today to bring people together as never before.

A new generation of philanthropists and civic innovators is laying the groundwork for humanity to reimagine global governance. Join us.

The authors of this paper are not aware of any singular group that is working to synthesize the ideas presented in this paper. They are currently seeking partners to make it happen.

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11.0 - Further Reading

There are many books that have sketched some of this potential. George Monbiot's The Age of Consent is a stirring manifesto for a more egalitarian and participatory global future. A World Parliament, by Jo Leinen and Andreas Bummel, emphasizes the history of cosmopolitan thought and the UN Parliamentary Assembly proposal noted above. Balaji Srinivasan's The Network State envisions virtual nationalities de-linked from geography. Hassan Damluji's The Responsible Globalist makes the case that we should extend our traditional national allegiances to encompass a single "global nation." Ian Bremmer's The Power of Crisis examines pandemics, climate change, disruptive technologies, and how they are reshaping the global order.

The book Global Governance and International Cooperation discusses the UN Charter and the contemporary infrastructure for international cooperation, while Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century sets out a comprehensive blueprint for UN Charter and international system reform to manage our pressing and shared global risks. A pair of policy briefs from the German thinktank SEF (Development and Peace Foundation) and the Stimson Center in Washington DC, promotes a strategic "international rule of law" package to upgrade and revitalize the integrity and governance efficacy of the whole international system. The Governing our Planetary Emergency report by the Climate Governance Commission explores the boundaries of planetary risks and recommends both near and medium-term global governance reforms to address them. Finally, the edited volume Just Security in an Undergoverned World elaborates on the reform proposals introduced in the commission report of the Madeleine Albright-Ibrahim Gambari Commission on Global Security, Justice & Governance.

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