

A Review: Oded Gilad and Dena Freeman, Global Democracy and Justice Lecture Series

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To access the video series which is reviewed in this essay, please visit
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-T9ARgZNGjF31LhpmFFoTw>

The last time such resolute and polished advocacy of global democracy—that is, of world federal government—was produced came with the founding of United World Federalists and the World Federalist Movement in the aftermath of the Second World War (1947). Or perhaps with Grenville Clark and Louis B. Sohn’s *World Peace through World Law*, when the Cold War seemed to have closed down any historic opportunity for such an innovation in world affairs (1958). This series of 25 illustrated lectures, each of about 10–25 minutes, is organized into four themes:

Developing a Global Framework,
Problems of Current International System,
Key World Federalist Thinkers, and
Ways Forward.

The first lecture, on Federalism, is a fine introduction, and I found the 3rd, on the History and Future of Democracy, the 10th, on Economic Inequality, and the 19th, on Debunking the Objections to Global Democracy, particularly informative and moving. Since I am a historian of the movement, I really perked up when I heard, “History is the story of diverse people recognizing their unity and coming together.” The 25th lecture, on Pathways to World Federation, is full of practical next steps for activists. Another video (in effect a 26th) records the [launch](#) of the lectures, providing a comprehensive introduction. There is not a word of the old world federalist rhetoric of “one world or none,” or “world government, the only solution to the threat of atomic holocaust.” The arguments are fresh and contemporary. These lectures will be of particular value to teachers of young people, who relate better to videos than to reading,

and they will make the scholars of international relations squirm, particularly Thomas G. Weiss of the global governance school.

But we must be on guard against disappointment. The young people who flock to this revived world federalist movement must be prepared for the resistance of the defenders of the sovereign state system and of national patriots who cannot see the need for a more perfect union of humanity. The response of the current president of the U.N. General Assembly, Abdulla Shahid (Maldives, a sovereign state, population 540,000), to the UN75 proposals casts a warning. After consultations with member states, he rejected almost all of them. (One that he accepted was “Taking into account the Multidimensional Variability Index for small island developing states.”) Even the Stimson Center, in its “[Road to 2023](#),” has watered down the proposed U.N. Parliamentary Assembly—a second chamber of the General Assembly elected by the people, the most fundamental reform of the U.N.—to a U.N. Parliamentary Network.

If global public opinion grows to the point of alarming the guardians of the status quo, world federalists and budding world citizens must expect the most vicious and ultimately violent resistance. Hence, I propose in the remainder of this review to draw attention to other substantial studies of the global crises with proposals for popular solutions, including world federation. Many others have been thinking of ways forward:

Farsan Ghassim, Mathias Koenig-Archibugi, and Luis Cabrera, “Public Opinion on Institutional Designs for the United Nations: An International Survey Experiment,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (September 2022), 1-9.

Stimson Center, *Beyond UN75: A Roadmap for Inclusive, Networked and Effective Global Governance*, June 2021.

Augusto Lopez-Claros et al., *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

Jo Leinen and Andreas Bummel, *A World Parliament: Governance and Democracy in the 21st Century* (Berlin: Democracy without Borders, 2018).

Joseph Schwartzberg, *Transforming the United Nations System: Designs for a Workable World* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2013).

Farsan Ghassim and colleagues [sampled](#) surveys of populations (n not reported) in Argentina, China, India, Russia, Spain, and the United States on issues of U.N. design, including decision making, bindingness of decisions, enforcement, and sources of revenue. Their social scientific method complemented a U.N. survey in 2020 of some 50,000 people in 82 countries for its 75th anniversary report, “UN75: The Future We Want, the United Nations We Need.” Generally, they found that public opinion leans toward “supra-nationalist and cosmopolitan ideals,” while national policymakers and commentators “resonate less with aggregate public preferences.” In brief, they found empirically that the public desires democratizing the U.N., just as Freeman and Gilad showed it contentiously. They predict ideological struggle in the domestic politics of key countries.

The Stimson Center's [report](#) very ably set out some twelve goals for public action, such as “We will protect our planet.” Great efforts were described to influence the General Assembly on the road to a “2023 World Summit on Inclusive Global Governance,” which as we have seen seems not on track. A Stimson follow-up urges the NGO (civil society) community to get to work, lest the “Pact for the Future” suffer the same disappointment of the 2005 summit on U.N. reform.

Augusto Lopez Claros, winner of the \$600,000 prize of Sweden's Global Challenges Foundation, has masterfully laid out a [program](#) of action toward quite radical U.N reforms, ultimately to give the General Assembly primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. In short, world democracy, exactly like that of Freeman and Gilad. The book is virtually a primer on the massive problem of U.N. reform, notably chapter 21, “Some Immediate Steps Forward—Getting ‘from Here to There.’”

Leinen and Bummel, proponents of a U.N. Parliamentary Assembly alongside the General Assembly, similarly lay out the practical next steps to global democracy. Their publicly funded organization, [Democracy Without Borders](#), is leading citizen action.

Lastly, Joseph Schwartzberg, in a book now becoming dated in a crowded field, is full of guidance to activists, as in chapter 15, “Getting There.”

One practical next step would be to send the lectures to the World Social Forum, which has never endorsed world federation as a goal for action. The authors suggest that the videos be used to watch alone or in a group, in discussions and debate, in book clubs, seminars, and classrooms, mixed with other sites like those on climate change, and in short on all social media.