



CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

The Global Common Good

International Organizations & The Climate Crisis

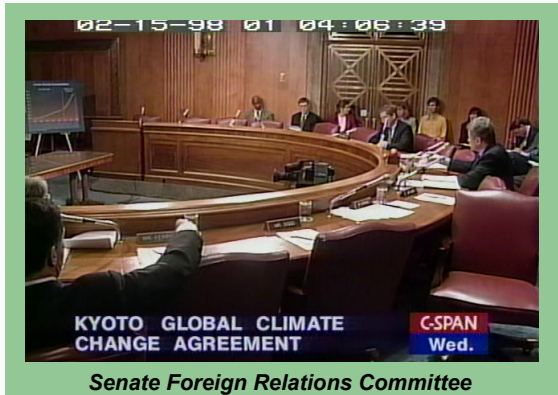
Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how "We the People" interact with the government and each other. Let's help each other expand our civic literacy.

Did you know that there are currently over 68,000 [international organizations](#)? The United States plays a role in numerous international organizations including the [United Nations \(UN\)](#). When it comes to the difficult topics that these groups are confronted with involving worldwide impact, can a global common good be achieved? What are the barriers to these international organizations gaining support from individual governments and citizens? Can these barriers be overcome?



A current example to examine the challenges international organizations face when attempting to address global [common good](#) issues can be seen with the struggles at the United Nations' COP26 summit to resolve [climate crisis concerns](#).

One barrier to addressing global common good issues is getting worldwide buy-in. In the case of the COP26 summit, two of the world's largest nations, China and Russia did not attend. For smaller nations, there is often a lack of trust that promises made at these summits will be kept. It is [tough for them to feel the need to make pledges](#) to commit to combating climate change, at the expense of their economies, especially when there are [large discrepancies](#) in global carbon dioxide emissions.



Even if the nations can agree on solutions, they must convince their individual countries that potential sacrifices are worth it for support of a comprehensive initiative. Historically this has proven difficult. In 1997, President Clinton agreed to the UN Kyoto Protocol but the [Senate failed to ratify it](#). The needs, wants, and priorities of countries change as can be

seen with the U.S. commitment to the [Paris Climate Accords](#), joining under President Obama, leaving under President Trump, and then rejoining under President Biden. The U.S. is not the only nation to follow this pattern.

At the most local level, the difficulty of relatability and tangible impact of global common good issues make it tougher to convince individual citizens to fulfill civic responsibilities. For example, as Britain is trying to phase out coal use, one town, West Cumbria, is [trying to open a new coal mine](#). The opening of the new mine would provide the town an estimated 500 jobs, which they need desperately, and as their mayor put it, "one coal mine won't make any difference to the planet." According to the [Pew Research Center](#), while many citizens in advanced countries are willing to make changes in their own personal lives to help reduce the effects of climate change, most are not willing to make "a lot of changes"

To Think and To Do: Typically citizens can all agree on the importance of civic responsibility, but we often assume it is important for everybody else to do it. Survey your family and friends about an issue affecting your community that has global impact ([examples](#)). How do they feel about the issue? To what extent would they be willing to make changes? What do your results suggest about local concern regarding a global issue? What are the barriers to taking action and how can they be overcome?

LEARN MORE:

- [UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021](#), official website
- [Four Charts Explaining U.N. Climate Summit Stakes](#), from National Public Radio
- [Is Human Activity Primarily Responsible for Global Climate Change?](#), from ProCon



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