



World thinkers 2014: The results

Prospect asked readers to select their favourites from a list of the world's leading thinkers. The results are in.

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With nearly 7,000 votes cast, the results of *Prospect's* world thinkers 2014 poll are in. Voters came to the *Prospect* website in large numbers through Twitter and Facebook, and from many countries around the world.

Running a poll like this is not a science, of course; one should be wary of drawing conclusions from the data especially given that intense media interest in India clearly had some influence on the outcome. Nevertheless, the presence in the top 10 of five thinkers—Amartya Sen, Raghuram Rajan, Arundhati Roy, Mao Yushi and Kaushik Basu—whose work focuses in different ways on the challenges of economic development is surely significant. The future of China's distinctive combination of political authoritarianism and breakneck economic expansion, for example, or the struggles of India to share its newly acquired wealth as widely as possible are issues that should concern those of us who live in the developed world—as well as the billions who are experiencing the growing pains of development at first hand.

The after-effects of the financial crisis on what used to be called the “first world” is felt in the thinking of two of the new entrants in the top 10: Pope Francis, who has regularly criticised the capitalist system, and Ha-Joon Chang, the Cambridge economist who chastises his colleagues for their obsession with abstract mathematical models and has tried instead to revive the older tradition of political economy.

Chang has an ally in the shape of Thomas Piketty, the French economist whose book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* has been an unlikely bestseller. Piketty's rise up our rankings to 27th—he came near the bottom of last year's poll—is also a reminder of how quickly intellectual fashion can change.

One other notable change this year is the presence of two women—Arundhati Roy and Mary Beard—in the top 10. Last year there were none.

Many thanks to all those who voted. Do let us know what you make of the results in the comments or on Twitter at [@Prospect_UK](https://twitter.com/Prospect_UK).

1 Amartya Sen

The Indian economist and philosopher turned 80 last year, but remains an intellectual force. The global impact of his latest book *An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions* is highlighted by his triumph in this year's vote (last year he was seventh). Currently a professor at Harvard, he won a Nobel Prize in 1998 for his work in welfare economics.

He has been awarded over 100 honorary degrees and is known in his native India as the "Mother Theresa of economics." The author of *Prospect's* first cover story in 1995, Sen continues to write influential essays, including this month's lead essay, and has dedicated his life to combatting poverty with analysis rather than activism.

Further reading

[Illusions of identity](#): Sen talks to **Kenan Malik** about multiculturalism and freedom.

[Amartya Sen](#): Sen has redefined development policy, says **Meghnad Desai**.

[Sen and Sensibility](#): **James Purnell** on what politicians could learn from Sen.

[Listen to a podcast of Amartya Sen's lecture on "Poverty and the Tolerance of the Intolerable."](#)

2 Raghuram Rajan

As the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Rajan has one of the hardest jobs in global economics. He took charge of his country's central bank last September, as India faced its worst economic crisis for over two decades. The former chief economist of the International Monetary Fund, he is a distinguished academic and the author of the prize-winning book *Fault Lines: How Hidden Fractures Still Threaten the World Economy*. Rajan gained fame after predicting the 2008 financial crisis in a paper delivered to a meeting of central bankers in the US in 2005. From the outset he has made his strategy clear, introducing a series of emergency interest rate rises to rescue the rupee and boost economic growth.

Further reading

[The Social Policy Roots of the Financial Crisis](#): Rajan has a timely warning to offer policymakers about education and the financial crisis, says **Mark Hannam**.

3 Arundhati Roy

One of India's most famous authors—and fiercest critics—Arundhati Roy won the Man Booker Prize in 1997 with her debut novel, *The God of Small Things*. Since then, she has focused on non-fiction writing and radical political activism, covering subjects such as climate change, gender equality, the perils of free-market development in India and poverty. Her latest work, *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*, examines the dark side of democracy in contemporary India, arguing that globalised capitalism has intensified the wealth divide, racism and environmental degradation. "This new election is going to be [about] who the corporates choose," Roy says, "[about] who is not going to blink about deploying the Indian army against the poorest people in this country, and pushing them out to give over those lands, those rivers, those mountains, to the major mining corporations."

4 Mao Yushi

Hailed as a “national treasure” by his fans, Mao Yushi, 85, is one of China’s leading economists and an outspoken advocate of wide-ranging policy reform. Highly critical of the neo-Maoist left, he angered some in China with his 2011 essay, “Returning Mao Zedong to Human Form,” which enumerates the human cost of the Communist Party leader’s brutal policies from 1949 to 1976. The article led to popular clamour for his imprisonment and execution, with tens of thousands signing a petition demanding his imprisonment on charges of treason. However, the global impact of his work was recognised when he was awarded the Cato Institute’s 2012 Milton Friedman Prize. He is also the author of 18 non-fiction works including the bestselling *Economics in Everyday Life*, which aims to provide an accessible explanation of market economics for the Chinese people.

Further reading

[Interview](#): **Mao Yushi** discusses China’s property bubble.

[Traitor vs national treasure](#): A short biography of **Mao Yushi**.

5 Pope Francis

Since Pope Francis succeeded Benedict XVI as the 266th head of the Roman Catholic Church in March 2013, he has shown himself to be an unusually bold leader. His achievements so far include reorientating the Church’s concerns towards economic inequality, working to “intensify dialogues” with other faiths and encouraging less punitive attitudes towards sexual morality.

He has just published his first book, *The Church of Mercy: My Vision for the Church*, a collection of essays and speeches. For many, the most striking evidence of his commitment to inclusivity came during an impromptu press conference on a flight back from Brazil in July 2013. “If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has goodwill, who am I to judge?” he asked.

Further reading

[Pope Francis goes back to the future](#): The origins of Liberation Theology.

[Should we forgive the Pope?](#) **Hugh O’Shaughnessy** examines the Pope’s past.

[The Pope on Twitter](#): Pope Francis has over 3.8m followers.

6 Kaushik Basu

This Indian economist is currently serving as the Senior Vice President and Chief Economist at the World Bank. A respected academic, he has published widely on development economics, game theory and welfare economics. His most significant work, *Beyond the Invisible Hand: Groundwork for a New Economics*, argues that by ignoring the role of culture and custom, traditional economics promotes the view that the current system is the only viable option. “The free market proposition is a powerful intellectual achievement and one of great aesthetic appeal,”

Basu writes. “But its rampant misuse has had huge implications for the world—in particular, in the way we craft policy, think about globalisation, and dismiss dissent.”

Further reading

[Reason and the end of poverty](#): **Kaushik Basu** explains the logical flaw that keeps people poor. [The fear of “L”](#): Why are economists and policymakers resistant to innovative thinking, asks **Kaushik Basu**.

7 Mary Beard

Mary Beard is a professor of classics at the University of Cambridge and one of Britain’s best-known broadcasters. Beard writes widely on historical and political issues, and over recent months has lectured at the British Museum on the public voice of women, written about the future of the Parthenon and the philosopher Bernard Williams. Her latest essay collection, *Confronting the Classics*, aims to answer that age-old question: why do we study the works of Greek and Roman antiquity? A strong advocate of the discursive power of social media, she is a prolific blogger and has racked up over 62,000 Twitter followers.

Further reading

[The public voice of women](#): On language and misogyny. [A Don’s life](#): **Mary Beard**’s blog.

8 Peter Higgs

The predictor of the Higgs Boson (the particle that gives mass to other fundamental particles), this pioneering physicist was the winner, in 2013, of the Nobel Prize in physics. Higgs first floated the idea that subatomic particles gained mass by way of an as-yet-undiscovered particle (or field) in 1964. Five decades later, in 2012, researchers proved the existence of the boson at Cern, the European research facility. Famously publicity-shy, Higgs caused an unprecedented delay in the announcement of his Nobel Prize, as the committee struggled to contact the scientist to inform him of his win.

Further reading

[The Higgs universe](#): **Frank Close** describes how Higgs waited 48 years for the confirmation of his theory, but in some ways grew to dread the moment of discovery. [The missing piece](#): Prospect’s deputy editor **Jay Elwes** meets with Peter Higgs on the eve of the discovery of the Higgs boson particle.

9 Ha-Joon Chang

Ha-Joon Chang is a South Korean economist. He teaches development economics at Cambridge and is known for his criticism of free-market fundamentalism and western development policy. His new book, *Economics: The User’s Guide*, is an introduction to economics which explains

how the global economy works and why anyone can understand it. It is also a rejection of the view, held by many of his colleagues, that economics could ever be a science in the way that physics or chemistry are.

His previous work was the bestselling *23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism* (2010), which Michael Lind reviewed in *Prospect*: “While the guild of academic economists may continue to ignore maverick thinkers like Chang, the future of the world economy may depend on whether the rest of us pay attention.”

Further reading

[Jobs, not shopping](#): **Ha-Joon Chang** makes the case for protectionism.

[Protecting the global poor](#): Rich countries should not force free trade on the poor, argues **Ha-Joon Chang**.

[Capitalism in question](#): Chang is a true exponent of the art of political economy, says **Michael Lind**.

10 Daniel Kahneman

Although he is not an economist, Kahneman is often credited, along with the cognitive psychologist Amos Tversky, with inventing the discipline of behavioural economics, which challenges the idea, central to much economic theory, that “people are generally rational.” His 2011 book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, in which he argued that human cognitive processes consist of two distinct systems (one “fast” and one “slow”), was a bestseller and was met with critical acclaim. Nassim Nicholas Taleb described it as “a landmark book in social thought, in the same league as *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith and *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Sigmund Freud.” Kahneman won the Nobel Prize in economics in 2002.

Further reading

[Decisions, Decisions](#): Kahneman remains an indispensable thinker, says **Emmanuel Roman**.

Biographies by Serena Kutchinsky and Jonathan Derbyshire

World Thinkers 2014, rankings 11 to 50

11. Elon Musk, businessman

12. Jürgen Habermas, philosopher

13. Naomi Klein, writer/activist

14. Slavoj Žižek, philosopher

15 = Nick Bostrom, philosopher

- 15 = Thant Myint-U, historian
17. Daniel Dennett, philosopher
18. Rae Langton, philosopher
19. Elizabeth Anderson, philosopher
20. Martha Nussbaum, philosopher
21. Judith Butler, gender theorist
22. Partha Dasgupta, economist
23. Janet Yellen, economist
24. Christine Lagarde, economist
25. Derek Parfit, philosopher
26. Thomas Nagel, philosopher
27. Thomas Piketty, economist
28. Perry Anderson, historian
29. Kishore Mahubani, academic/diplomat
30. Robert Unger, philosopher
31. David Graeber, anthropologist/activist
32. Wendy Carlin, economist
33. Fabiola Gianotti, physicist
34. Patricia Churchland, philosopher
35. Esther Duflo, economist
36. Saskia Sassen, sociologist
37. Anne-Marie Slaughter, political scientist
38. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, economist

39. Pascal Lamy, economist
40. Sherry Turkle, technology theorist
41. Lawrence Summers, economist
42. Samantha Power, diplomat/writer
43. Rebecca Solnit, writer/activist
44. Jennifer Doudna, biochemist
45. Jaron Lanier, technology theorist
45. Marilynne Robinson, novelist/essayist
47. Janet Radcliffe-Richards, philosopher
48. E Brynjolfsson & A McAfee, economists
49. Robert Gordon, economist
50. Emmanuel Saez, economist