

Essay and Discussion Questions

Sovereignty Higher Education Questions

Help students understand nationalism, self-determination, and sovereignty through these essay and discussion questions.

Question 1

Why is sovereignty the bedrock of international relations? What are the shortcomings of the concept of sovereignty? If a country disapproves of another country's actions, what kinds of responses respect the principle of sovereignty? What kinds of responses challenge or violate sovereignty? What are the most common ways in which sovereignty is threatened or violated? To what extent do recent challenges (such as refugees, cyberspace, diseases, and greenhouse gases), which do not adhere to lines on a map, suggest a rethinking of the concept of sovereignty?

- Why might fires in the Amazon Rainforest require us to rethink the concept of sovereignty?
- What is the major exception to sovereignty recognized by the United Nations?
- Why do countries often intervene when another country's sovereignty is violated?

Question 2

To what extent is self-determination a positive force in shaping the modern world? To what extent is it problematic? What are some common methods of trying to gain independence? What are the benefits and drawbacks of these methods? Is self-determination an outdated concept in a world that no longer has empires and colonies? Citing specific and ongoing examples of independence movements, make an argument in favor of self-determination and an argument against it.

- What is the difference between a nation and a country (also known as a state)?
- Why have so many nations seeking independence been unable to achieve their goals?
- What is the opinion today of the United Nations and most countries regarding self-determination?

Question 3

How has nationalism played a role in shaping the modern world? What role should the international community play in guarding against the sometimes destructive consequences of nationalism? In recent years, what factors have contributed to a rise in nationalism and what has been the result of this rise? Cite specific examples in your response.

- To what extent is nationalism a force for good in the world? When does it become a negative force?

Question 4

How did the world wars incentivize European countries to seek international cooperation? What are some of the key benefits of being a member of the European Union (EU)? What are the disadvantages of ceding sovereignty to regional institutions? The EU refers to its arrangement as a "pool" of sovereignty. To what extent can sovereignty truly exist in a "pool"? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this notion? Is the EU likely to be an outlier in terms of international cooperation or do you envision other groups of countries might follow their example? Defend your answer.

- How do sovereignty-sharing and national identity struggle to coexist?
- What four freedoms does the EU single market offer?

Question 5

Why was the responsibility to protect (R2P) doctrine adopted? Should there be a point at which a nation forfeits its right to sovereignty for the sake of human rights, peace, and security? Why or why not? Support your argument using evidence from recent conflicts.

- Does the R2P doctrine effectively balance sovereignty and human rights?
- Why has applying the R2P doctrine been so difficult? Cite specific examples.

Question 6

What are the causes of statelessness? What are the consequences of statelessness? What steps should countries take to prevent statelessness?