

Essay and Discussion Questions

Middle East & North Africa Higher Education Questions

Help students understand the Middle East and North Africa through these essay and discussion questions.

Question 1

To what extent has oil played a role in shaping political and economic development in the region?

- How did oil help fuel the rise of Saudi Arabia?
- In what ways does oil foster regional and international competition?
- Why do resource-rich countries often have authoritarian political structures?

Question 2

Evaluate the role that religion plays in domestic and international politics in the region. How is religion used and abused by both politicians and terrorist groups to advance their goals?

- Why is the Middle East religiously significant for Christians, Muslims, and Jews?
- What is the Sunni-Shia divide and how does it sow tension in the region?
- What are the drivers of terrorism in the region?
- How does religion influence Lebanon's political system?

Question 3

What are the roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? To what extent should the United States involve itself in an attempt to bring peace to the region? Is a peaceful settlement possible?

- How did the 1947 UN Partition Plan lay the groundwork for further conflict in the region?
- Why were the Oslo Accords unsuccessful at achieving peace?
- How do the status of Palestinian refugees complicate peace negotiations between Israel and Palestinians?

Question 4

Evaluate how effective the United States has been at accomplishing its foreign policy goals in the Middle East. Should the United States continue to involve itself in the region?

- To what extent have United States foreign policy goals in the region changed over time?
- Overall, has the United States benefited as a result of its involvement in the region?
- Has United States intervention in the Middle East led to more positive or negative developments in the region?

Question 5

What different political trajectories did Middle Eastern countries take in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings? What factors contributed to these outcomes?

- Why were some countries more successful at moving towards democratic transition in the region than others following the Arab uprisings?
- What explains the outcomes of Egypt's 2011 revolution?

- To what extent did the Arab uprisings spur instability in the region?

Question 6

How can regional governments best respond to the humanitarian crises taking place throughout the region? To what extent should the United States respond to these crises?

- What drives humanitarian crises today in the Middle East?
- How do humanitarian crises sow further instability in the region?