

Content

Topic	Polarity
Politics	C – Is it acceptable for the government to intervene? J – What should the government prioritise? R – Responsibility of politicians I – Impact on democracy J – Is crime and punishment justified? R/J – International relations and global politics
Media	I – Is the media reliable? Traditional media vs social media C – Restrictions on freedom of speech, regulation of press I – Benefits and costs of social media
Science & Tech	J – Ethics related to scientific research E – Effectiveness of science in solving problems e.g. food insecurity, climate change I – Benefits and costs of technological advancements, AI V – Value of religion
Environment	R – Who is (more) responsible for the environment? V – Balance priorities e.g. envt vs economy / political E/P – Effectiveness of environmental efforts / possibility of tackling climate change

Grabs

Politics	<p>Control:</p> <p>In the wake of the revolution about the United States National Security Agency's (NSA) sweeping mass surveillance programmes, there has been much discourse regarding the need for such intrusions into personal privacy to uphold national security. Some have argued that the protection of national security necessarily compromises personal privacy. However, their view fails to take into account information gathering methods, which are far more nuanced than blunt mass surveillance programmes and which can indeed successfully uphold both principles essential to any democratic state.</p> <p>Global politics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roman author Vegetius's statement, "<i>si vis pacem, para bellum</i>" (if you want peace, prepare for war), suggests that the conditions of peace are often preserved by a readiness to make war to defend said peace when the need arises. • Thucydides' statement, "<i>the strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must</i>," suggests that power dominates in international relations, leaving weaker nations with little influence ... • Morgenthau's observation that "<i>international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power</i>" highlights how states compete for influence in a world without a higher authority ... • Kenneth Waltz's assertion that "<i>in the absence of an international sovereign</i>,
----------	---

	<p><i>states act like individuals in a state of nature</i>” reflects the chaotic nature of international relations, where self-interest drives state actions ...</p> <p>(a)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But in a system of increasing interdependence, can countries put aside their narrow self-interests in service of the greater good? (helping less developed/more vulnerable countries, tackling transboundary problems like climate change and terrorism) • In a time when the world’s most pressing problems are transboundary and require collective action to solve, it is more important than ever for countries to put aside their narrow self-interests and short-term goals in service of the greater good. <p>(b)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This raises the critical question: do only powerful nations shape global affairs, or can weaker states carve out influence through diplomacy and alliances?
Media	<p>“Freedom of the news is freedom of journalists to advance their own agenda.” A statement that was consistently asserted by Singapore’s founding father, Lee Kuan Yew, has ostensibly become the truth in the eyes of many. Many governments and authorities around the world have begun to subscribe to this belief, and thus view journalists and the potential power of their articles to create unfavourable outcomes for society as a ticking time bomb. Consequently, policymakers have put in place a slew of measures to regulate their reporting.</p>
Science & Tech	<p>Profit-incentive: In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1995, Joseph Rotblat urged the scientific community to “remember your humanity”. In today’s world where technological and scientific developments are becoming increasingly lucrative, the main goal of scientific and technological developments should be consistently kept in view—to benefit society and drive positive change.</p> <p>Ethics: The Nuremberg Code, created at the Nuremberg trials in response to the Nazi’s misadventures in human experimentation, was an unprecedented code outlining the ethical limits of research methods, and a nod to the necessity of paying heed to the ethical implications of scientific research. However, in the medical realm especially, where greater accuracy and expediency in the research process has the potential to bring about huge gains for the preservation of human health, ethical considerations may often be viewed as an unwanted hindrance, standing in the way of us being able to reap the benefits of medical research most effectively.</p>
Environment	<p>In 2015, more than 196 states came together to sign the Paris Agreement and committed to taking action to halt global warming in a range between 1.5°C to 2°C by 2030. However, a further report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2018 revealed that even within that 0.5°C spectrum, we are likely to face extreme weather conditions and natural disasters such as flooding, and will experience the extinction of numerous species of plants and animals crucial to global ecosystems. This grim outlook, coupled with the blatant refusal of some governments to acknowledge the existence of, much less take action on, climate change has led to a general perception that climate change is impossible to solve.</p>

Politics

Overarching Issues

- Responsibilities, priorities, power (control) of government
- Democracy
- Global politics – small vs large countries, soft vs hard power, international relations (war and conflict, diplomacy)
- Global issues – migration, humanitarian assistance

(C) Government intervention

Consider the argument that there should be no censorship of the arts in modern society.	2023
'What an individual eats or drinks should not be the concern of the state.' What is your view?	2021
'In a free society, there should be no restrictions on freedom of speech.' Discuss.	2020
Consider the view that we do not take enough responsibility for our own well-being.	2018
Is regulation of the press desirable?	2017
How far, in your society, should unpopular views be open to discussion?	2013
'Only the educated people should have the right to vote in elections.' What is your view?	2009
How far should a state have a right to monitor the actions of people within its borders?	2007
To what extent should the State involve itself in the world of business?	2005
'People, not the government, should decide how to organise their lives.' Is this a fair comment?	2004

Key terms

Freedom/Liberty: There are two kinds of freedom:

- Freedom to do an action you desire: being able and allowed and empowered to do that desired action (eg. freedom to express oneself, freedom to marry); this is sometimes called 'positive liberty'.
- Freedom from something undesirable: being safe and protected against that undesirable thing, not having it threaten or constrain or interfere with one's life (eg. freedom from oppression, freedom from harm, freedom from discrimination); this is sometimes called 'negative liberty'.

Government regulation:

- The government's use of laws or rules to constrain and/or direct actions of people or organisations.
- Those laws or rules are called 'regulations' (plural). There are different kinds of regulations:
 - (i) banning ("you must not do this")
 - (ii) mandating ("you must do this")
 - (iii) drawing boundaries ("you can do this, but only within these limits")
 - (iv) setting conditions ("you can do this, but only after meeting these requirements")
 - (v) imposing costs ("you can do this, but must pay more for it")
 - (vi) offering incentives ("you don't have to do this, but if you do, you'll be rewarded")

The first two are stricter, whereas the latter four options may offer more flexibility.

FREEDOM

Basic, fundamental human right

- Governments in free societies should not intervene in the most basic and private aspects of citizens' lives. While these paternalistic state approaches prioritise the public interest and welfare, and bring social benefits to the populace, the public of some states have opposed these stifling and restrictive policies.
- **EG New York City:** in 2015, required restaurant chains with more than 15 locations nationwide to label any food with over 2,300 milligrams of sodium → public backlash, National Restaurant Association challenged sued New York City, claiming that regulation was "arbitrary and capricious".
- **EG** High school in Utah: fined \$15,000 for operating a vending machine that dispensed soda during lunch hour.
- **EG India:** planned to frame draft rules requiring manufacturers to display the fat, sugar and salt content of products on packaging, as well as introduce a nation-wide "fat tax" to tackle these health problems

Giving individuals freedom is a way of respecting them as mentally capable adults.

- When individuals **mature into adults** → presumed to become **mentally capable** of rationally discerning the best course of action for themselves, and thus capable of being **responsible** for their own well-being → authorities ought to **respect** this capability.
- When a paternalistic government (or a nanny state) micromanages adult individuals' lives and treats them like children → individuals feel disrespected.
- **EG Film classifications** according to age-suitability: restrict younger audiences from watching films depicting strong violence and sexual content, to protect impressionable, vulnerable young minds from being morally corrupted. But media authorities grant adults the freedom to watch such films, respecting their mature and responsible ability to separate fiction from reality

CONTROL

Individuals sometimes act irrationally and against their own self-interest.

- Citizens make poor decisions due to lack of accurate, reliable information (e.g. advertising, digital marketing) to make ideal choices + the state has the pertinent social responsibility to ensure the well-being of its populace, and be concerned about the its citizens' choices
- **EG Smoking regulations:** indiv addicted to smoking are not rationally, responsibly choosing the best action for their well-being, even though they know harms to health → govt duty to protect individuals from self-damaging actions. E.g. In 2022 New Zealand become the first country to implement a 'generational ban' on smoking for anyone born after January 2009 (though recently reversed)

Govt government has greater knowledge of indirect, intangible, long-term harm.

- Some private actions **do not appear** to harm others because the harm is **not immediately observable**. Yet **in reality** they can result in **indirect** harm, **long-term** harm, **intangible** harm, and/or **increased risk** for others. As individuals we **often focus on immediate and personal context of our lives** and our loved ones, and may not think about this larger and long-term societal context.
- The government is better equipped to see the **big picture**. Unlike individuals, the government is **better informed** due to extensive **expert data** from researchers and analysts whom it hires, giving it a **bird's-eye view** of society, enabling it to look at the long chain of effects in a large-scale context, take into account the many possible effects of people's actions, do a **cost-benefit analysis** of what is best for society overall, and regulate accordingly.
- **EG Social distancing and masking:** during COVID-19 pandemic – based on expert advice from epidemiologists to mitigate spread of virus

(J) Governance, priorities

Consider the view that spending money on space travel cannot be justified in today's world.	2023
In your society, to what extent is it acceptable for public money to be used for the acquisition of works of art?	2017
When a government's finances for social welfare are limited, should they be directed towards the young or the old?	2015
'The key criterion for good government is how well the economy is managed.' Is this a fair assessment?	2012
Consider the view that efficient government is more important than democracy.	2011
'No politician's reputation can survive the judgement of time.' How true is this?	2010
As long as people in the public eye do their job well, does it matter what they do in private?	2009

Is it justifiable for govt to spend money on some areas?

- Value – is the policy relevant to a certain context
- Impact – weigh pros and cons
- Effectiveness – is this the best approach to achieve some goal
- Responsibility – allows the state to do its job of investing in society's well-being

Trust in government

Benefits

1. Trust in govt assists the government in **countering populist and nationalistic waves** that could harm a country
 - Distrust in govt fuels populists and nationalistic sentiments to spread and turn into massive waves and movements
 - As people start to lose trust that their governments are doing what is best for them and for their countries, they become more susceptible and vulnerable to populist sentiments which are extremely emotionally exploitative - believe that extreme policies are better for individuals and the country
 - **EG EU countries:** politicians lost the trust of their people because they seem out of touch with their needs. From citizens' perspective, politicians seem to be obsessed with the EU and not the country itself or its citizens – lose trust that govt is truly serving their needs → large populist wave
2. Trust in govt helps government to **plan beyond the horizon** for the country
 - Long-term planning allows govt to anticipate and cope with changes in the world & ensure bright future for the nation
 - Politicians can forgo short-term benefits for the people and instead opt to invest for the future of the nation - not pressured to serve short-term needs of people, knowing that voters at the ballot box have their backs in planning for the future
 - **EG Singapore:**

Drawbacks

1. People's distrust is the root of accountability for governments
 - Check and balance are required to ensure govt does what is truly best for the nation and people
 - Principal foundation of democracy: well-informed electorate willing to uphold the social contract b/w govt and voters → responsible to hold the govt accountable to the country on the electorate
 - **EG US**: highly polarised electorate has distrust for the government of the other party which creates a divided country. However, this distrust forces politicians to keep govt in check, ensuring plutocracy does not prevail, ensuring justice is not obstructed, ensuring the independence of the nation from external threats
 - Curbs corruption

(R) Role of politicians

'Power these days lies more with the people than the politicians.' To what extent is this true?	2021
Should politicians pursue the popular viewpoint or their own convictions, if they conflict?	2020
'A leader's responsibility should always be to his or her own country, not other nations.' Discuss.	2019
Consider the view that social media has more influence than politicians.	2019
Do events, rather than politicians, shape the future?	2017
'The world would be a better place if more political leaders were women.' What is your view?	2013

Politician: individuals professionally involved in running the nation and who hold public office (position of authority and power)

- Duty to country: protect country's international interests
- Duty to people: protect well-being of all citizens (doing what is right), represent the will of the people (doing what is popular, esp since their career is entirely contingent on people's voting power)

Quote from Martin Luther King Jr.: "*A genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus, but a moulder of consensus.*"

(I) Democracy

Is modern technology a benefit or threat to democracy?

2020

Intro

Government of the people, by the people, for the people

In principle (ideal)	In practice (reality)
Political / decision-making power <u>in the hands of the masses</u>	<u>Effective participation</u> → maximise political power of individuals <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equality in voting• Inclusion of adults• Freedom of speech and assembly• Gaining enlightened understanding <u>Decentralisation of power</u> → prevent consolidation of political power by govt <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Separation of powers• Freedom of the press

Desirable outcomes of democracy

1. **Conferring essential rights**

- suffrage (right to vote in political elections)
- freedom of speech
- freedom of assembly

2. **Self-determination**

- individuals have power to self-govern & decide their political destiny - have the right to determine the rules and laws they are subject to
- Voting → enable system of checks and balances and all political offices are properly assigned. In particular, a legally binding public referendum resolves many sensitive national affairs through citizens' direct expression, enhancing accountability of major decisions

Causes of democratic decline

- Fail to deliver on promise
 - Short electoral cycle → to win elections, politicians opt for quick fixes instead of long-term policies (which do not result in immediate political rewards)
 - Govt fail to deliver + facing increasing challenges → voter apathy and dissatisfaction, waning trust in public institutions
- Rise of nationalism e.g. Europe
 - Extreme right parties play on nationalist feelings and target "non-indigenous" members of population (asylum seekers, refugees, members of religious minorities) sometimes in violent ways → fail to respect the human rights of every member of the population, little right to appeal to democratic principles
- Rise of populism: appeal to ordinary people who feel their concerns are disregarded by established elite groups
 - Present "the elite" as establishment, accuse them of placing own interests above interests of "the people"
 - Claim to express the will of the people, present themselves as the solution

- Shift in global power and prestige
 - Rise of BRICS → signals that liberal democracy is not a necessary condition for economic growth

Effective participation

Equality in voting

- Every individual possesses equal political power (votes of equal weight) regardless of background
- Gerrymandering: redraw lines of electoral districts to create unfair advantage by packing / cracking voters of opposing parties
 - Packing: concentrate opposing party's voters into a few districts → win fewer seats with very high majorities
 - Cracking: disperse opposing party's voters across many districts → form a minority in each, win fewer seats
 - These lead to unequal representation of votes
 - ⇒ Disproportionate influence: some votes carry more weight than others
 - ⇒ Wasted votes: surplus votes in packed districts & lost votes in cracked districts do not contribute to winning a seat → electoral system inefficient in translating votes into representation
- Barriers that discourage certain citizens from exercising right to vote (low voter turnout) → some groups disproportionately affected

Inclusion of adults

- Include all groups in society - representative
- Lower minimum voting age → counteract political apathy among youth, foster more robust civic engagement
- **EG** **Felon disenfranchisement in US**: denial or suspension of voting rights due to conviction of criminal offence → minority groups e.g. African Americans are disproportionately affected

Freedom of speech and assembly

- Marketplace of ideas: anyone put forth an idea → rational, fair-minded citizens evaluate ideas, discard morally wrong / untruthful ideas
- Social media
 - Expectation: allow for freer exchange of ideas
 - Reality: fringe political ideas & conspiracy theories can find sympathy somewhere on the internet → bad ideas are self-perpetuating, become more deeply entrenched
 - **EG** **Polarisation in US**: in 2019 survey by Pew Research Centre, 73% of respondents said that Democrats and Republicans not only disagree over plans and policies, but also cannot agree on basic facts

Gaining enlightened understanding

- Citizens have equal and effective opportunities to learn about the consequences and alternatives of their political choices → base political decisions on complete / accurate info → outcome is an expression of the will of the people
- Opportunities to gaining enlightened understanding
 - Internet made info readily available: voters can access campaign materials shared by political candidates → clearer understanding of what a political candidate stands for
- Threats to gaining enlightened understanding
 - Information overload: large volume of info → hard for voters to make sense of in a way that can inform political decision-making
 - Echo chambers: reaffirm existing beliefs

- AI misinformation: acquire biases during training / fine-tuning → LLMs are more believable because of human-like responses → increase likelihood of indiv being misled
- AI disinformation: produce deepfakes of politicians – fake information

*Need to explain why these are necessary in a democracy

Decentralisation of power

Separation of powers

- Branches of govt
 1. Legislative: make laws
 2. Executive: carry out laws
 3. Judiciary: interpret laws
- Branches have some independence to check and balance each other → prevent any one branch from becoming too powerful (prevent abuse of power), ensures that decisions are made carefully with input from diff perspectives

Authoritarians consolidate power

- Influence agencies that possess authority to investigate and punish wrongdoing → shield govt from investigation and prosecutions that may result in its removal from power
 - Court packing: manipulate number / composition of judges on a court for political or ideological ends
 - **EG Hungary**: government led by Viktor Orban increased number of judges in the Constitutional Court & modified process to appoint judges to ensure a pro-govt majority
 - **EG US**: Trump pressured FBI director to drop investigations into Michael Flynn
- Target the opposition
 - Media outlets: Fourth Estate, make govt's wrongdoing known to public → ensure govt does not err with impunity
 - **EG Serbia**: govt loyalists run main TV channels including the allegedly neutral public broadcaster RTS
 - **EG Hungary**: 80% of the media is owned by govt officials or their allies
 - **EG Hong Kong**: Article 23 adopts mainland China's broad definition of state secrets → used to target press freedom, suppress internal opposition
 - Opposition politicians: robust opposition provides alternative visions – challenge authority of govt should they appeal to majority
 - **EG India**: Modi used financial crime-fighting agency, the Enforcement Directorate to investigate and arrest opposition politicians
 - **EG Russia**: Alexei Navalny arrested multiple times, allegedly killed in 2024
- Reform the constitution / institutions
 - **EG Israel judiciary reform**: weaken the power of the Supreme Court to review or throw out laws & have a decisive say over who becomes a judge, including in the Supreme Court, by increasing its representation on the committee which appoints them → weaken judicial system, which keeps govt's use of powers in check → shield govt
 - **EG Donald Trump's case for absolute immunity**: argued that presidents are entitled to absolute immunity for official acts

(J) Crime and punishment, justice

The idea of **justice** is concerned with

1. determining what is due to each person i.e., what each person deserves
2. ensuring that (1) is determined according to what is legal and morally right
3. what can be done if (2) is transgressed

Distributive justice

To what extent should income equality be a goal in your society?	2019
Evaluate the claim that equality of opportunity for females is a desirable, but unrealistic goal.	2016
When a government's finances for social welfare are limited, should they be directed towards the young or the old?	2015
Consider the view that some careers are better suited to one gender than the other.	2014
How far is increased prosperity for all a realistic goal in your society?	2013
"The world would be a better place if more political leaders were women.' What is your view?	2013
Many developed countries are paying increasing attention to the needs of the disadvantaged. How far is this true in Singapore?	2008

Distributive justice is concerned with who in what society gets what + how to decide what is fair

- **Equality**: everyone should get the same amount
While ideal, may not be practical; ignoring contributions can lead to feelings of discontentment, and can serve to drain motivation from more productive members in society
- **Equity**: one's rewards should be commensurate to their contributions
Meritocracy: assuming the playing field is as even as possible, those who earn/possess more are morally justified in keeping what they earn. In other words, in a world where inequality is inevitable, it is better that these inequalities result from differences in ability and effort rather than arbitrary factors outside of one's control, like race and gender.

However, shortcomings of meritocracy

Recall the striking down of affirmative action in Higher Education in the U.S. - many claimed that discrimination for benevolent purposes is still discrimination. Furthermore, considering a minority group's race as the basis for conferring more resources/opportunities can easily be construed as taking resources/opportunities away from other races

- **Need**: those who need more will get more / those who need less get less
Equity & Need - while both consider an individual's specific circumstances, it is extremely difficult to measure and subsequently reward one's contributions and needs.

Relevant topics

- Prejudice & discrimination, inequality
- Social: gender and race-based inequalities
- Political: political representation and representative policies
- Economic: income inequality and unequal pay, work and hiring inequalities
- Environmental: responsibility for climate change

Retributive justice

A-Level

Consider the view that people imprisoned for crimes should lose all their rights.	2022
'Rehabilitation, not punishment, should be the purpose of the justice system.' Discuss.	2017
To what extent is it possible to make the punishment fit the crime?	2013

Retributive justice is concerned with what the appropriate consequences are for a stakeholder's actions
Often contrasted with restorative/rehabilitative justice

- Retributive justice: focuses on establishing guilt and corresponding punishment
- Rehabilitative justice: focuses on obligations, and who transgressors can fulfil their obligations

Effectiveness of retributive vs. rehabilitative

FOR retributive

Durability: deterrence

- Discourage recidivation (re-offending) & dissuade would-be offenders
- Rehabilitation lacks coercive force needed against proven criminals / potential criminals
- **EG** SG: people generally support death penalty and harsh punishments against drug trafficking, substance abuse

Fairness: harsh treatment appeases victims and their kin ⇔ leniency only perpetuates a sense of injustice

- Deliver emotional catharsis for the victim → seeing authorities view their plight seriously enough to hold their perpetrator accountable is a necessary first step for their healing process to begin
- **EG** Brock Allen Turner: convicted of three counts of sexual assault, but sentenced to mere six months in jail as the judge saw in him not a sinister felon but a Stanford star athlete → many threatened Turner post-prison release
- **EG** George Floyd's killer, Derek Chauvin charged for second-degree murder, sentenced to 22½ years in prison

FOR rehabilitative

Root cause: rehabilitation improves the criminal, address structural causes of crime ⇔ retribution incapacitates the convict

- Root cause: absent parents, broken homes, economic displacement, lack of education opportunities
EG Eurostat: found in 2019 that 13.4% of people at risk of poverty faced crime in their neighbourhood, compared to 10.6% of those not at risk of poverty → link b/w poverty and crime
- Address root cause: equip offenders with tools to find proper place in society → inhibit repeat offences → improve public safety
EG Studies by RAND Corporation: correctional education programmes cut recidivism rates by 43%

Cost: rehab converts convicts into productive members ⇔ punishment does little to reform

- Cost-effective: expend minimal resources to maintain social order
- Retribution: executioners, guards, probation officers, wardens need to be paid, prison facilities need to be upkept + process repeats whenever reoffenders return to the system
- Rehabilitation: integrate criminals back into society → contribute + criminals leave system for good
- **EG** US: 2m indiv incarcerated across 4k federal, state, local prisons → cost \$182b per year
- **EG** Finland: rehabilitation programmes → saved \$20m over two decades

Rights of people imprisoned for crimes

- Value: morally wrong to strip prisoners of their civil, human, or natural rights
- Impact: consider benefits and costs
- Effectiveness: does doing so successfully bring about the expected benefits to begin with
- Responsibility: whether doing so is a task the state is obliged

Possible to make punishment proportional / commensurate to crime?

(R/J) International relations & global politics

(a) Obligation and responsibility	(b) Conflict and cooperation
<p>Essential Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What obligations does one state have to another? <p>Responsibility in solving global issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What factors <u>inform</u> this obligation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability Morality Legality What factors <u>abrogate</u> this obligation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competing interests and priorities (domestic affairs, strategic alliances with other states) Wider conditions (state of the economy and geopolitics) <p>Lens: Self-interest vs the collective good</p>	<p>Essential Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What factors contribute to conflict or cooperation in global politics? Why do states choose conflict over cooperation and vice versa? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is this a product of a state's inherent traits, i.e., peace-seeking vs. warlike? Or is it a product of circumstances, i.e., the danger and relative lawlessness in the international system? What are the limits of cooperation? <p>Lens: Realism vs. liberalism (reality vs. ideal)</p>

Global issues – Obligation and responsibility

A leader's responsibility should always be to his or her own country, not other nations. Discuss.	2019
How far should countries have relations with others whose human rights record is poor?	2019
'Works of art which have been removed from their country of origin should be returned.' Discuss.	2018
Discuss the view that all countries have an equal responsibility to counter terrorism.	2018
'Countries experiencing conflict should be left to sort out their own problems.' How far do you agree?	2016

Tension between **self-interest** & **collective good**

What obligations does one state have to another, particularly in global issues?

Factors informing obligation

- Ability:** capacity of a state to address global challenges
- Morality:** ethical considerations, uphold rights, esp if they caused the problem
 - Moral imperative to alleviate or pre-empt human suffering
 - Peter Singer: "If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out. This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant – while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing."
- Legality:** international treaties, agreements, legal frameworks establish formal obligations between states [although enforcement remains challenging]

Factors that abrogate obligation

- Competing interests:** states have a duty towards citizens so prioritise domestic affairs & need to maintain key alliances with other states
 - If giving engenders more suffering at home than it eliminates abroad, then should not help
 - Too generous in extending foreign aid constitutes a failure of duty towards citizens

- Economic and geopolitical conditions: recession, inflation, and political instability reduce a state's ability or willingness to focus on external responsibilities

Conceptual understanding: different contexts and circumstances across countries

Effectiveness of humanitarian assistance (foreign aid)

[+] Usually able to solve long term problems related to health

- **EG** The eradication of smallpox (the last death from the disease was in 1978) was partly thanks to foreign aid. Calculations estimate that between 60 and 120 million premature deaths were averted due to its eradication. Today, foreign aid continues to work to eradicate diseases like malaria, saving up to 10 million lives a year. With the end goal being eradication of these diseases which are infectious and often caused by poor living environments and sanitation, they are tackling long-term problems which affect the people's quality of life and ability to be productive.
- Develop countries' economies
- **EG Taiwan, South Korea**: received economic and military aid from US → economic growth

[-] Misused, mismanaged → foreign aid not only fails to solve problems, but often causes more problems to development.

- whether foreign aid works thus lies in whether they are funding a country with strong institutions with potential for growth, or feeding one that is corrupted. David Cameron said that it is not really about the quantity of aid but rather what he terms as the "golden thread", which is whether the country has stable govt, lack of corruption, human rights, the rule of law and transparent information. It is when these institutions are in place, that the dollars can make sense.
- **EG** Prop up dictator – Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi: selectively withheld aid-financed famine relief from everyone except those within his party
- **EG** World Bank financed forestry project in Uganda ended up with a forest fire and over 20,000 farmers losing their homes, and soldiers threatening those who retaliated with violence

[-] Pattern of giving aid is fragmented

- Donor countries want to seem as generous as possible, so they give to many countries, but in small amounts. This leads to aid coming from more directions but in smaller amounts. → fragmentation reduces the efficiency of aid, because they require civil servants to manage and oversee, increasing the amount of bureaucracy while having less economies of scale in terms of impact.
- **EG Mozambique**: 27 donors in the field of health alone, but some countries each give less than \$1 million.

[-] Aid is often conditional – donor countries may threaten to withdraw if their demands are not met

- Developed countries use aid to promote their interests and political ideologies
- **EG** UK gives more aid to Pakistan, Syria, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Afghanistan, countries which are not the poorest → wishes to influence politically because they have a dictator or where radical Islam is taking root
- Developed countries also use aid to benefit themselves economically in the form of tied aid, where aid is used to purchase items from the giving country itself
- **EG** 80% of US Agency for International Development's contracts and grants go directly to American firms
- Sometimes aid is given as loans → debt accumulation

Conflict and cooperation

Given greater levels of international cooperation, how necessary is it for countries to engage in the arms trade?	2020
How far should countries have relations with others whose human rights record is poor?	2019
Is globalisation to be welcomed or feared today?	2019
'In the global village we inhabit, there is no justification for national boundaries.' How far do you agree?	2018
Discuss the view that all countries have an equal responsibility to counter terrorism.	2018
'Foreign aid does not solve long-term problems.' To what extent is this a fair viewpoint?	2018
'Countries experiencing conflict should be left to sort out their own problems.' How far do you agree?	2016
How far is it possible for one country to forgive another for its past actions?	2015
Examine the extent to which expenditure on arms and the armed forces is justifiable in the modern world.	2014

Anarchy in international relations: lack of a common and objective authority to compel states to behave responsibly

While all states accept that anarchy is a feature of the international system, they significantly differ (and often conflict) on *how to deal with and manage anarchy*. International relations theory:

1. **Realism**
2. **Liberalism**

Comparison between realism and liberalism

	Realism – the world as it is	Liberalism – the world as it can/ought to be
Key Actor(s)	States	States, international organisations
View of human nature	Insecure, power-seeking	Basically good, willing and able to cooperate
Characteristics of states	Unitary actors	States are rational; states have relationships (both friendships and rivalries)
View of the international system	Anarchic	Anarchic but manageable through the establishment of an international order and interdependence among states
Beliefs about change	Perpetual peace is implausible, emphasises managing the frequency and intensity of war	Self-interest can be managed by institutions, leading to the possibility of cooperation and peace

Realism

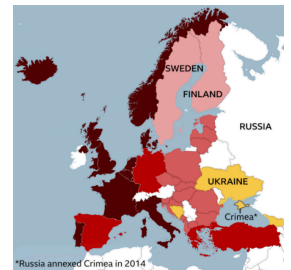
Characterised by permanent insecurity (always feel under threat, because international system does not guarantee security), which manifests in two key ways:

- Internally: compulsion to become as powerful as possible → believe that might makes right, have the power to assert themselves for deterrence
 - Military: expand military forces, spend on and developing arms, posturing (show willingness to engage in war)
 - Economic: (threat of) trade policies e.g. tariffs and sanctions, breed vulnerability and reliance of other countries
- Externally: shapes foreign policy – how they perceive other states

Criticism of realism (Detractors argue...):

Security dilemma leads to more conflicts

- Security dilemma: when one country increases its military for self-protection, realist countries (that are strong – military and economic power) feel insecure → misinterpret as threat, heighten perceived threat level → respond to protect themselves by doing the same → arms race
- **EG** **NATO Expansion**: after collapse of Soviet Union, eastward expansion of NATO threaten Russia's core interests → could not accept prospect of Ukraine aligning with the West and integrating with NATO, as this could enable deployment of offensive weaponry close to Russia
- **EG** Arms race between nuclear-powered India and Pakistan



Evaluation of realism:

- As long as there are countries that feel insecure or threatened, it is imperative (and prudent) for governments to understand realism and how to deal with it.
 - This entails good faith attempts to understand sources of insecurity and how foreign policy decisions contribute to them (intentionally or not).
- Like individuals, constantly reassuring insecure people or countries can be tedious and challenging, but the alternative is worse. As with individuals, simply telling countries not to be insecure is not especially helpful, esp when it involves rivals or countries with contentious historical relationships.

Liberalism

How it works

- Liberalism **emphasises the role of norms and institutions** in shaping state behaviour and promoting cooperation and peace among countries.
- When goods, services, culture, laws and people are seen to be moving freely back and forth between and among states [Interconnectedness (complex interdependence) → higher cost of starting a war], liberals feel confident that the incentives for conflict are shrinking.
- For liberals, war and conflict are recurring 'bugs' (rather than permanent features) that can be addressed by the growing preponderance of democracy and the spread of institutions (international organisations)

Successes of liberalism (Proponents argue...):

- Globalisation, interconnectedness → (mostly) free flow of information, culture, people, goods, and services and norms and rules understood by (most) countries
- Establishment of international organisations EG UN with its principal deliberative and peacekeeping organs: United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and Security Council (UNSC), agencies incl World Health Organisation (WHO), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF). International Criminal Court (ICC), International Court of Justice (ICJ)
 - Platform to resolve disputes diplomatically, reducing military conflicts



Confer legitimacy to decisions through recognised bodies and instruments - resolutions passed by intl bodies tend to carry more weight and authority than the unilateral decisions of individual states
Esp valuable for smaller countries that would otherwise have little influence over international developments.

- Small countries can rally their strength to overcome big countries
EG Forums of Small States (FOSS): consists of 108 small states, advocate for upholding international law, esp borders and sovereignty
- Allow for greater state cooperation through formation of multilateral ties in tackling global issues
EG Iran nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA): powerful countries that are often at odds (US, Russia, China) put aside differences to achieve common goal – unwinding Iran’s nuclear programme → Iran agreed to dismantle much of its nuclear programme and submitted to international inspections in exchange for billions of dollars worth of sanctions relief
EG Paris Climate Agreement – climate change

Criticism of liberalism (Detractors argue...): → nothing to compel anyone to do anything

Ineffectiveness of international organisations

- Depend on consensus, countries predictably prioritise self-interest, often at the expense of the common good [tragedy of the commons]
 - E.g., Permanent 5’s veto power
 - Failing to meet inadequate climate commitments
- Operate on a voluntary basis, lack mechanisms to help countries (particularly powerful ones) overcome commitment problems (if one country pull out of cooperation, the whole effort fails)
 - **EG** JCPOA collapsed when US unilaterally withdrew in 2018
 - **EG** US withdrew from Paris Climate Agreement, WHO
- Lack the means to enforce international law
 - **EG** UN has a Department of Peace Operations, but forces deployed to prevent reignition of conflict and reduce civilian deaths → not equipped to stop conflicts and invading forces
 - **EG** ICC warrant for Putin for invasion of Ukraine
 - **EG** China’s militaristic advances in disputed region in South China Sea → dismiss UN Convention on the Law of the Sea

Gatekeeping

- Despite liberalism’s lofty ideals, cooperation (and who is allowed to cooperate) is often conditional [cooperation requires both countries to have same values]. Critics argue that cooperation entails the acceptance of ‘Western’ values and ways of living, including the emphasis on individual freedom, market-based economies, and democratic governance. [contradicts with countries w different values → require them to abandon certain values to adopt values]
- These values are taken as objectively good because they are assumed to foster peace,¹ cooperation, and prosperity. In this sense, liberalism can sometimes be seen as normatively prescriptive, insisting on how international relations “should” operate through an exclusively Western lens.
 - American hegemony, established following the conclusion of the Cold War, led many countries to see adopting democracy as a necessary condition for participating in international affairs and the globalising economy.
 - Because democracy was adopted for pragmatic rather than ideological reasons, several countries today have concluded that if democracy fails to deliver economic results, there’s no reason to continue as a democracy → global retreat of democracy

¹ See democratic peace theory

- Economic prosperity of non-democratic countries (particularly China) signals that prosperity and democracy are not necessarily intertwined → an alternative non-Western, non-liberal world order is possible
- However, doing so inevitably alienates and excludes countries with different traditions and values, and countries that do not adopt Western values are viewed as uncooperative or unreliable partners. Political leaders from Global South have been more vocal in challenging these assumptions, advocating for multipolarity, and pushing back against the West for lecturing them on how to govern e.g. BRICS

Evaluation of liberalism:

- Cooperation is more important than ever, but it cannot be idealistic to the point of naivety (i.e., assume that everyone wants to cooperate and has the same values).
- Liberal international organisations should become more inclusive by formally including other stakeholders like NGOs and corporations.
- It is necessary to move from a very absolutist and fixed position on norms, especially if they exclude or alienate some countries. Norms evolve over time, and negotiating new norms should involve different perspectives and values.

Marginal cases:

- To summarise, the two conventional ways for countries to deal with the lawless, anarchical international system are to either become conventionally powerful (politically, economically, militarily) or to form partnerships with other countries [realism vs. liberalism].
 - However, realism is typically only possible for large countries with large populations and access to resources, while liberalism assumes countries are willing to conform in order to cooperate.
 - What about marginal cases that aren't conventionally powerful (politically, economically, militarily) and refuse to conform to international norms, e.g., North Korea and Iran? [insecure but not too powerful]
- Countries that find themselves alienated from the mainstream international community and its norms will logically seek to band together [form their own networks] (e.g., the expansion of organisations like BRICS)
 - In Iran's case, it also developed an informal network known as the Axis of Resistance, which includes terrorist organisations like Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis.
- Additionally, both Iran and North Korea have reached the same conclusion: the only way to overcome the huge power asymmetry and ensure security is by developing nuclear weapons.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Anarchy** (in international relations): The absence of a central, overarching authority to govern and enforce rules in the international system, leading to a state of self-help and potential for conflict.
- **Realism**: A school of thought in international relations that emphasises the pursuit of self-interest and power by states in an anarchic world, prioritising security and viewing conflict as inevitable.
- **Liberalism**: A school of thought in international relations that believes in the potential for cooperation, the importance of global institutions, and the possibility of achieving peace through interdependence and shared norms.
- **Security Dilemma**: A situation in which one state's efforts to enhance its security leads other states to feel threatened and respond in kind, creating a cycle of escalation that can lead to conflict, even if neither side intended it.
- **NATO Expansion**: The eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) after the Cold War, a key point of contention between Russia and the West.
- **Democratic Peace Theory**: The theory that democracies are less likely to go to war with each other, a key tenet of liberal thought.
- **Democratic Recession**: A global trend of declining democracy and democratic backsliding in recent years.
- **BRICS**: An acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, a group of emerging economies seeking greater influence in global affairs.
- **Axis of Resistance**: An informal network of countries and groups opposed to the West and its allies, including Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas.

An aside: Constructivism

- Identities and norms are the basis of international policies, not hard power
- Identities
 - Tell us who we are
 - Tells others who you are
 - Tell you who others are
 - Inform your interests
- Violence, warfare and self-interest might be prevalent in global politics because of prior histories of interaction, and identities countries created for themselves (e.g. break up of Soviet Union, NATO and western values as threats shape Russia's identity)
- Creating new modes of interaction and new norms can break up such cycles of conflict; otherwise perpetuate identity, leading to cycle of negative interactions

Effectiveness of soft vs hard power

Soft power: economic clout, cultural influence – persuade and sway countries in their favour

Hard power: military or economic strength – coercive tools to make demands

[+] Change minds over time, encourage people across the globe to adopt their values, ideas and practices

- US military-entertainment complex: Hollywood entangled with US govt and military - churn out realistic epic war movie thanks to the use of DoDs resources e.g. Top Gun aimed at rebranding US Navy after Vietnam War → shape narrative of a strong and morally upright military force

[-] Inadequate in resolving severe crises or diplomatic tensions

- Unable to effect fast and decisive change
- EG EU / NATO states trust soft power, winded down military research and expenditure to below 2% GDP → unable to respond to Russia's invasion of Ukraine
- Realpolitik: world relations governed by power and might
- Lack of repercussions for global superpowers who are able to neglect soft power based on substantial military and economic clout

Synthesis: soft power needs hard power to back up, otherwise it is useless (complementary)

Nations have to be willing and able to wield both in dealing with challenges (false dichotomy)

Effectiveness of strong threats vs gentle persuasion

[+] Reliable in ensuring immediate compliance

Repercussions are dire and risks are dicy ⇔ appeal to goodwill

- Esp in high tension situations where there is lack of time, little margin for error
- EG Cuban missile crisis
- EG Gaza conflict: international response has been tepid and timid, no strong stance against Israel
- Works against intransigent / uncooperative / belligerent actors who are unlikely to be cajoled or coaxed out of them
- Corporations abide only by the law of profit, answer only to their shareholders → no reason to abandon profit motive, cannot be easily talked out → NGOs cannot convince them, need coercive measures by consumer boycott, govts regulations, worker strikes that affect their bottom line
- EG McD in Malaysia, Tesla in Norway

[-] Short vs long term

Combative and coercive, undermine standing in long run ⇔ compromise and conciliation cultivates healthy relations crucial for future interactions in long run

- Weaponise fear and wield it to bully others into submission → alienate those on receiving end → does not sow seeds of future reconciliation, or set up platforms for peace-making
- Compromise and consensus-building → create common ground, cultivate mutual trust → diplomacy
- EG COVID-19 in SG: stiff rules and regulation e.g. fines, but public faith in govt fell from 70% in July to 53% in Nov 2021 when cases resurged, SGreens resented strict measures
- EG China's zero-COVID policy: protest triggered by fatal fire in Xinjiang factory linked to stringent lockdown
- EG Sweden: educated public by making transparent all data it had on the virus → win the people over to its side, 71% believed authorities were managing crisis well

Media

Intro

What is the media?

Media: the collective communication tools used to store and deliver information and data

Mass media: a means of communication designed to reach a wide audience, through advertising campaigns, television, Internet

- **Traditional media:** television, books, newspapers, magazines, film, radio, advertisements
- **New media:** platforms provide content that can be accessed anytime and anywhere, usually on a digital platform that utilises the Internet
- **Social media:** a subset of new media, enables content creation and distribution by the user (higher degree of interaction among people) e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

Why is the media so powerful?

- **Reach:** The media has the potential to reach millions of people around the world in a matter of seconds through digital platforms, television, and radio.
- **Influence:** The media can shape public opinion and influence people's decisions, beliefs, and attitudes through the messages they convey and how they present them.
- **Gatekeeping:** The media has the power to decide what information is presented to the public and what is not. This can have a significant impact on the way people perceive events and issues.
- **Agenda-setting:** The media has the ability to set the agenda by deciding which stories to cover and how to cover them, influencing the public's understanding and prioritisation of different issues.
- **Persuasion:** The media can use persuasive techniques such as emotional appeals, expert opinions, and social proof to convince people to adopt a particular viewpoint or take a particular action.

Stakeholders involved

- Traditionally, individuals trust media to provide them with information
 - Media consolidates and disseminates info that is reliable and factual, so that people can have a perspective of the situation in an unbiased tone → media serves to inform, educate
- Media companies mostly owned by corporations
 - Profit-driven: sensationalisation, consumerist-driven nature
 - Ethical journalism, code of ethics: truth and accuracy, independence, fairness and impartiality, humanity, accountability
 - Watchdog / investigative journalism: inform public of govt wrongdoings, publicise information from whistleblowers and investigative journalists → acts as 4th estate to carry out balance and check → monitor govt, allowing for functioning democracy

EG Spotlight team, group of investigative journalists from Boston Globe: won Pulitzer Gold Medal in 2003 for their research into cases of widespread and systemic child sex abuse in the Boston area by Catholic priests

EG Snowden leaks: Ex-CIA contractor Edward Snowden leaked top secret documents to The Guardian newspaper, reveal US govt's extensive phone and internet surveillance
- Some media companies are state-owned
 - Obligated to maintain an editorial slant towards the State, so may be biased in their reporting
Singapore
China
 - Used for propaganda → promote a particular policy, demonise a particular group, persuade people to support a particular political ideology

EG Nazi Germany: convince people of superiority of German race, spread lies and negative stereotypes about Jews → anti-Semitic sentiment → persecution, extermination of Jews

EG Personality cult of Mao: portrayed as a hero, elevated to a near-divine status → his thoughts and teachings were considered the ultimate truth → many Chinese people blindly follow his teachings and directives → led to some of Mao's most disastrous policies e.g. Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution

- Democratisation of media on individuals e.g. social media
 - More channels to receive information
 - Empower indiv to create and disseminate information
 - Fake news: low barrier to entry, little verification of information, use clickbait to catch attention of public for views

Reliability

- Credibility: authenticity of information
- Frequency
- Professional quality
- Objectivity: two sides of the story / multiple perspectives are presented

Conceptual understanding: media landscape varies across countries e.g. US vs China



(I) Role of media

Is news today reliable?	2021
Does violence in the visual media portray reality or encourage the unacceptable?	2019

Challenges in the media

Lack of trustworthiness and reliability

- Media workers may compromise their objectivity and integrity, succumb to motives such as greed for profit, fame, power of influence, or their personal biases
- → favour one side of politics, and so downplay or omit the other side's perspective. It may also portray one group more favourably than the other, entrenching stereotypes and allowing subtle prejudice to be disseminated among the masses.
- **EG** In 2020, **The Straits Times** ran a news series on home-based learning experiences of three different students. The three profiles were categorised according to housing types (private housing, owner-occupied public housing, rental housing). Incidentally, the ethnicities of the profiles chosen came under spotlight because it appeared to follow archaic and problematic stereotypes of minorities, while reinforcing positive portrayals of the majority.
- **EG Western traditional news media outlets** have come under flak for their problematic portrayals of the destruction and deaths of innocent civilians in Gaza. Non-profit online news organisation The Intercept analysed over 1,000 articles during the first six weeks of Israel's siege on Gaza and the ways in which this siege was reported. It found that Israeli deaths were reported an average of 16 times more often than Palestinian deaths.
- Tabloid and 'Yellow Journalism' focus on exaggeration, scandal-mongering, or poorly-researched news. They sell well with their mix of lowbrow content and use of slang.
- **EG UK's 'The Sun'** publishes scandals and rumours about celebrities, sport stars and other public figures. It has a tendency to highlight only the less savoury aspects of a situation to achieve higher readership. This could be seen by the consistent attacks launched on Meghan, Duchess of Sussex.

- News companies may broadcast news that suits their political slant.
EG **Fox News** is conservative-leaning (Republican); **MSNBC** favours the liberal front (Democrat).
EG  Close ties between the directors of **Singapore Press Holdings**, which runs The Strait Times, and the ruling People's Action Party (PAP). Many opposition parties and readers have voiced unhappiness at the consistently unfair coverage of election campaigns, where PAP candidates commanded full pages as compared to the columns afforded to their opposition counterparts.
- Difficult to differentiate between credible, accurate information & false fabrications or hoaxes
EG  In 2016, a hoax was widely shared about the alleged collapse of a roof at **Punggol Waterway Terraces**. This false news caused anxiety among residents, and led to the wastage of substantial resources, as grassroots leaders, police and SCDF personnel rushed down to the scene over fears of mass casualties.
EG A video showing **Nancy Pelosi**, speaker of US House of Representative, was slowed down by 25% and the pitch altered, to make it seem like she was slurring her words, leading to many criticising her for her slurred speech and 'drunk' behaviour.
Rise of deep fakes, where a person in an existing image or video is replaced with someone else's likeness using artificial neural networks, widely used in celebrity pornographic videos, revenge porn, fake news, hoaxes and financial fraud.

Declining moral standards

- Promote sexual promiscuity and make it appear socially acceptable.
EG **Desperate Housewives** and **Gossip Girl**: drama scenes inundated with sexually licentious behaviour
EG Academic studies suggest that rising cohabitation rates can be attributed to the airing of sitcoms such as Friends, which give the impression that cohabitation is normal and fun.
- Predominance of violence and gore → increased exposure to gruesome images → numbs the mind to violence → deem such acts as normal and acceptable
EG **Eminem's song "Kill You"**: depicts him killing his mother in disturbingly lucid detail. His popularity suggests that his audience thinks that such lyrics are amusing, and perhaps such actions are acceptable.

Promotion of unhealthy lifestyles

- Beauty is portrayed and typified by flawless skin, small and dainty features on females & strong and hard features on males → influence the way impressionable teenagers perceive beauty → pursue distorted and unrealistic notions of beauty via unhealthy ways e.g. eating habits (resulting in anorexia), cosmetic surgery, paying exorbitant amounts for treatments
EG **South Korea**: obsessed with plastic surgery due to unrealistic standards set by idols glorified in the media, many of whom have gone under the knife. About one in five women between 19 and 49 y/o has undergone plastic surgery.
- However, in some cases, media is used to confront such preconceived notions of beauty.
EG **Celebrity supermodel Tyra Banks**: constantly features plus-sized models on her hit reality show America's Next Top Model. Many of these plus-sized models eventually go on to have successful careers.

(C) Regulation



Consider the argument that there should be no censorship of the arts in modern society.	2023
In a free society, there should be no restrictions on the freedom of speech. Discuss.	2020
Is regulation of the press desirable?	2017

Intro



Censorship

- Suppress public communication, which may be considered objectionable, harmful, sensitive or inconvenient e.g. glorify violence, sexually explicit content, self-radicalisation materials
 - delete offending materials
 - restrictions on circulation e.g. NC-16
 - outright bans
- Carried out by govts, to control what people are exposed to, prevent spread of certain ideas/opinions considered undesirable or dangerous
- Carried out by media companies
- Carried out by indiv (self-censorship)



[+] Protect public morality and societal values

- Protect audiences (especially the young) from material that is inappropriate or morally objectionable (e.g. pornography, violence) → exposure to such content could cause psychological harm, especially for children who are unable to fully process what they are seeing → lead to normalisation of deviant behaviour in society
-   **National Library Board:** in 2015, withdrew three children's books from its shelves after a public member's complaint. The books' theme of homosexuality conflicted with the govt's idea of conventional family values.

[+] Maintain social stability and order

- (Political) Information that may lead to fear mongering, rebellion, embarrassment for govts or political leaders should be censored in order to protect their control over the country.
- (Social) Prevent fake news
- (Religious/Racial) Materials that are offensive to religious or racial groups should be censored in order to prevent harm and infringement on rights.
-   **Sex.Violence.FamilyValues** (2012): banned for racially insensitive and sexual content. Later rereleased in 2013 with heavy edits.
-   **Saint Jack** (1979): one of the first movies to set in Singapore – banned for nudity, later reclassified with M18 rating in 2018


[+] National security

- (Military) Information that is vital for the security of the country should be censored. If leaked, it could constitute a national risk
- E.g. Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning
-   **To Singapore with Love** (2014): documentary banned as political content 'undermined national security'

[–] Restrict freedom

- Censorship infringes on individual's rights to choose what they want to read/watch/hear or believe.
- For older audiences (e.g. adults), this is a common argument because there is an assumption that people are mature enough to handle offensive material and not be influenced by it to commit crimes.
- Censorship violates individuals' freedom of speech or expression. In the US, this right is enshrined in the US Constitution as the First Amendment.
- UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights

[–] Stifle creativity and intellectual activity

- Censoring artists and intellectuals can lead to a limited range of ideas and expertise in the public sphere. The existence of an open, vibrant and thinking climate is important for society's progress.
- **EG**  **Josef Ng** performance: trimmed pubic hair to protest media coverage of an anti-gay operation → govt ceased funding of forum theatre and performance art from 1994 to 2004 → loss of a decade's worth of art that could have stimulated critical thought amongst the public
- **EG** **China Communist Party**: to prevent any entity or individual from wielding power comparable to the party over Chinese society, Beijing has targeted major tech companies and prominent tech entrepreneurs – obtained minority stakes and board seats in companies, granting it effective control → curb industry's ambition, reduce innovative edge

[–] Abused to preserve status quo

- Suppress dissent
 - EG** **National Network Identity Authentication Public Service Management Measures**: In 2024, China's Ministry of Public Security and the Cyberspace Administration proposed national identification system that would authenticate netizens on all internet platforms → although intended to prevent internet platforms from abusing use of personal data, could create a single source for the state to turn off a person's access to all internet services → self-censorship
 - EG** **Great Firewall of China**: locks Chinese citizen out of apps and websites available to the rest of the world, and has allowed Chinese alternatives like Baidu (search engine), Wechat (IM), Weibo (Twitter). Chinese police their internet and there are numerous stories of rapid quelling and censorship on web forums.
- Internet shutdowns: intentional disruptions to internet access and digital communications (cut off power grid / dismantle internet service infrastructure / restrict access to specific websites or communication platforms by blocking specific URLs or IP addresses) → suppress dissent
- **EG** **Iran**: protesters calling for reform → communications stifled, with popular messaging apps e.g. WhatsApp and Signal failing to connect & internet completely taken offline in many areas

[–] Ineffective as it is self-defeating

- Only serves to heighten curiosity, impetus for people to circumvent censorship to look for alternative sources of information
- **EG** **"To Singapore, With Love"**: documentary by director Tan Pin Pin on Singapore's political exiles → banned locally in 2014 because it was said to 'undermine national security' → did not deter locals from watching, as SGreans travelled abroad to watch
- EG** Chinese netizens use VPNs to circumvent Great Firewall of China

(I) Social media

To what extent has social media devalued true friendship in your society?	2021
Consider the view that social media has more influence than politicians.	2019
'The quality of written language is being destroyed by social media.' What is your view?	2017

Social media: interactive technologies facilitate creation, sharing, exchanging of information and ideas via virtual communities and networks

Comparing traditional media vs social media

Criterion	Traditional media	Social media
Power of content creation	Not open	Open
Participation (from audience or reader)	Very low (not none – radio listeners could call in to give feedback, readers can write to their forum segments, TV have audience participation)	High
Vetting of content	Employ a team of experts, trained	No vetting, sensationalisation to gain view
Access to information	Easier access to source material for hard news, released by govt / corporations / celebrities e.g. during press release	Harder
	Thrive in business news, political news, opinion pieces, tech news, sports news, entertainment news	Thrive in social happenings, local interests and other soft news (such as where to eat, what to buy)

Characteristics of social media:

- Wide reach: reach a large audience quickly and efficiently, making it an effective tool for disseminating information and influencing public opinion.
- Viral nature: Social media content can go viral quickly, spreading rapidly across platforms and reaching millions of users in a short amount of time → powerful tool for creating awareness and mobilising people around a particular cause or issue.
- Personalisation: Social media platforms use algorithms to personalise users' feeds based on their interests, behaviour, and interactions. This can create a highly personalised experience for users, making it more engaging and compelling.

Political Impact

[–] Disruptor: ubiquity and unsupervised nature

Δ status quo: political actors able to effectively manipulate public sentiments and skew voter choice on a larger scale than possible before

- Unregulated, spread messages to much wider audience, at much lower cost → many can receive misleading campaign promise at little to no cost or ramification

EG 2018 **Brazil Presidential elections**: false and misleading messages broadcasted largely on WhatsApp in support of (then) right-wing candidate Jair Bolsonaro & highly skewed interpretations of statements by rivals

EG **Russian interference** in 2016 US Presidential elections via social media – attempt to divide Americans by race and extreme ideology. Russian troll farm tried to encourage US “secessionist movements” in California and Texas, cyberattacks to denigrate Hilary Clinton and support Trump

- Used for censorship and oppression: control media outlets, disseminate propaganda → control the narrative → shape their beliefs and attitudes to align with govt’s interests, prevent challenges to authority → maintain political power

EG **China’s Golden Shield Project**: use keyword filtering technology to trawl the Internet and block objectionable material. A list obtained by the China Internet Project at the University of California found that more than 1000 words were automatically banned on China’s online forums e.g. “dictatorship”, “truth”, “riot police” → curb citizens’ freedom of expression

[+] Disruptor: information shared and accessed freely and openly

Δ status quo: indiv able to participate in political discourse

- Open and free platform → look beyond state-sanctioned narratives to receive information from presumably objective sources

EG Singapore: in 2022, 58% received news from social media platforms, in comparison to 48% from traditional TV, 23% from print media

- **Fifth Estate**: empower average citizens / netizens to call out injustice or corruption in govt, and be heard globally → platform to voice opinions, engage members of society in constructive debate → serve as check-and-balance of govt

EG 2019 HK Extradition Bill protests: protestors shared incidents of police brutality on Instagram, such as the image of a female protestor who was injured in the eye by police

EG Thailand: to avoid lese-majeste law, Thais posed as K-pop stars to criticise monarchy on Twitter

EG **#StopWillow**: In March 2023, US govt implemented ConocoPhillips Willow Project in Alaska → oil drilling project generate pollution → TikTok users in different states coalesced around halting the project, with many people watching and posting on the topic

EG Wuhan health authorities silenced Dr Li Wenliang after he alerted them to COVID-19 disease → criticism against CCP after his death

- Political tool for political parties
 - put forth policy proposals → allow political viewpoints to gain greater traction amongst populace
 - create online personae: express personal voices, showcase personal lives of politicians → showcase softer and more authentic version → connect with electorate esp young people

EG SG political parties create TikTok accounts. **Progress Singapore Party** created account @progresssingaporeparty in 2020, **Workers’ Party** created account @thehammertok in 2022.

[+] Disruptor: information shared and accessed freely and openly

Δ status quo: empower the masses by galvanising the broader population around political issues, and at times inciting positive political change

- Renewed power for indiv to receive and disseminate information very widely and effectively → interact freely by accessing and sharing political opinions → quickly unite around pressing political issues → assemble into movements
- **EG** **Black Lives Matter movement**
- **EG** **2019 Anti-Extradition Bill protests in HK**
- **EG** **Arab Spring uprisings** in 2010/11: social media platforms bypass traditional media outlets controlled by authoritarian govts → easier to voice discontent and demand change → used to organise protests, share information and images, and coordinate efforts across multiple cities and countries → overthrew long-standing authoritarian regimes in Middle East and North Africa

[-] Disruptor: algorithm

Δ status quo: innate preference for perspectives we already agree with generates echo chambers that further entrench existing ideological divides – political polarisation

- Social media companies are profit-driven → social media algorithm recommends content and accounts that are of interest to the user based on tracking his/her online behaviour, so that users are attracted to the platform
- Users are only exposed to information and opinions that confirm/reinforce existing beliefs → perpetuate confirmation bias → echo chambers → limit exposure to diverse viewpoints, amplify users' pre-existing ideologies, lack of empathy for opposing viewpoints
- **EG** **2020 US Presidential election**: social media criticised for contributing to political polarisation and spread of misinformation
- **EG** Research from University of Cambridge: social media posts about “political outgroup” (i.e. mocking one's political opponents, slamming political rivals) receive twice as many shares as posts that champion people or ideas from one's own “political ingroup” → fuel political polarisation in US and other democracies

Social Impact

Increased connectivity

- Over social media, one can – through close intimates – get to know distant connections virtually, and concurrently nurture deeper relationships with online contacts that often pave the way for face-to-face interactions.
- **EG** Facebook group **Pandemic Pals**: formed during the COVID-19 pandemic to connect people who were feeling isolated due to social distancing. The group provides a platform for people to share their experiences, support each other, and even make new friends.
- Researchers from University of Connecticut and three Spanish universities found that social media use increased across all groups of Spanish adults during the pandemic. They found that Spanish people used Whatsapp to stay connected with friends and family, and YouTube and Instagram to learn new skills and keep active.
- Social networking websites enable people of similar interests to come together and engage in discussions.
- EG** Facebook allows its users to create and join interest groups and “like pages”. This gathers people with similar interests, tastes and preferences and allows them to engage in discussions about their respective interests and hobbies.

Cyberbullying and harassment

- Anonymity → no way to identify perpetrators → do not face consequences for actions → emboldened to engage in cyberbullying and harassment
- This can lead to serious mental health issues for victims and can even have tragic consequences.
- **EG Malaysia:** in 2019, a teenager committed suicide after conducting an Instagram poll asking if she should live or die. 69% of respondents voted for her to die.

Deepen divisions in society

- Anonymity, low barrier of entry → increased freedom of expression → liable to abuse and misuse to spread hate speech / express discriminatory views
- **EG** An American uploaded an anti-Islam video titled **“The Innocence of Muslims”** on Youtube, denigrating the Prophet Muhammad. This resulted in protests in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Iran and other parts of the Middle East.

Fake news and misinformation

- Connectedness, wide reach → easier for fake news to affect larger group of people
- Due to novelty of fake news and people’s desire to share novel information to be perceived as being in the know, fake news travels faster than real ones on social media
- **EG Israel– Hamas war:** Unverified accounts entered mainstream political discourse before they are deemed factual. Claims that Hamas had beheaded babies and toddlers, which have not been independently verified, were referenced in remarks by US President Joe Biden in Oct 2023.
- **EG COVID-19 pandemic:** in March 2020, video claiming that drinking bleach could cure COVID-19 was shared widely on social media platforms → a number of people ingested bleach, causing serious harm and even death

Addiction and time-wasting

- Algorithm → increased screen time (people spending excessive amounts of time on these platforms) → reduced productivity, decreased attention span, sleep deprivation
- **EG Study by University of Pennsylvania:** social media use was associated with increased feelings of loneliness and depression. The study found that limiting social media use to 30 minutes per day led to significant reductions in these negative feelings.
- **EG Study conducted by Common Sense Media:** teens spend an average of 7.5 hours per day consuming media, including social media, and that this can have negative effects on their mental health and well-being
- **EG** Studies show that the more time teens spend on social media, the worse their mental health is. British teens who spend five or more hours a day on social media are at two to three times at greater risk of self-harm than their less-online peers.

Privacy

- Surveillance capitalism: people’s personal data sold to companies e.g. Google, Meta → companies collect and scrutinise our online behaviours to produce data that can be further used for commercial purposes → roll out content that user likes
- Personal information can be shared without users’ consent, and hackers can use social media to gain access to sensitive data.
- **EG Facebook–Cambridge Analytica scandal 2018:** Facebook profiles of over 50 mil users were harvested without their consent by political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica to roll out targeted political advertisements in 2016 US Presidential election & 2016 UK Brexit referendum.

Science and Technology

(J) Scientific research

Consider the view that spending money on space travel cannot be justified in today's world.	2023
'The results of scientific research should be available to everyone.' How far do you agree?	2022
'Scientific advancement breeds complacency.' How far do you agree?	2021
Examine the view that the scientist is concerned only with knowledge, not morality.	2020
Can the use of animals for scientific research ever be justified?	2017
'Human need, rather than profit, should always be the main concern of scientific research.' Discuss.	2016
To what extent is it acceptable for private companies to be involved in financing scientific research?	2011

Intro

Scientific research

- Covers a range of sciences and areas of focus e.g. virus pathology, vaccine development, novel treatments
- It is a method of enquiry that encompasses multiple phases
 - What to research (research area and whether it coincides with the public interest)
Funding (from corporations or States) often comes with strings tied
 - How research is conducted (process, methodology)
Ethics: a set of values and norms decided by the general public to act as a guideline, which distinguishes b/w acceptable and unacceptable behaviour – ensures that throughout the course of research and experimental trials, little to no harm is caused to mankind and other life forms
 - Outcomes (whether product of scientific research is made readily available and affordable)
- Prioritising one thing often comes at the expense of other objectives. Consider stakeholder dynamics – how interests of different stakeholders come into conflict.

Consider interests of different stakeholders – what does each want

Individuals	Corporations	Governments	Scientists
Enjoys benefits of research	Funds research	Funds research Regulates research	Carries out research

Public interests

- [WHAT]** Prioritise scientific research that directly improves quality of life / safe to them
- [HOW]** Ethical considerations: if doesn't prioritise public interest -> moral consequences that undermine societal value **EG** He Jianhui, CRISPR gene editing
 - Ignore public's (ethical) interest - because innovation often requires exploring beyond immediate societal concerns (short-sighted) → push boundaries, scientific breakthroughs [prioritising public's interest can stifle creativity, limit research direction]
- [OUTCOME]** Access to benefits - not priced out of the market, denied of benefits

Corporate interests

- **[WHAT]** Profit-driven motive dictates research direction
 - Prioritise markets that promise high returns over addressing needs of those less financially lucrative to serve → focus on popular, high-demand applications rather than critical needs
 - EG AstraZeneca:** halted research on malaria and tuberculosis (plague developing countries), turned to drugs for asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure (rich man diseases)
 - EG** 2014-2016 West African Ebola epidemic: no major pharma firm wanted to invest in vaccines ⇔ COVID-19: took mere months for vaccine to emerge, Pfizer made \$3.5b
 - Research to downplay harms of their products
 - EG** three tobacco companies created and funded **The Center for Indoor Air Research:** conduct research to “distract” from evidence for the harms of second-hand smoke. Throughout the 1990s, this centre funded dozens of research projects that suggested components of indoor air, such as carpet off-gases or dirty air filters, were more harmful than tobacco.
 - EG Sugar industry:** in 1960s, paid scientists at Harvard University to minimise the link between sugar and heart disease, shift the blame from sugar to fat as being responsible for the heart disease epidemic → people replaced fatty food with alternatives high in sugar and carbohydrates → obesity rates increased
 - EG Tobacco industry:** funded research to downplay health risks of smoking. US cigarette company Philip Morris funded research aimed at showing that passive smoking was harmless, then supported research aimed at showing that nicotine was beneficial
- **[WHAT]** Abundance in financial wherewithal, so funding is necessary evil
 - Scientific research needs heavy investments in facilities, infrastructure, resources EG CERN's Large Hadron Collider cost \$4.75b to construct
 - Govts have limited funding & budget cuts EG Oxford and Cambridge: previously received £130m from EU, now share only £1m
 - EG OECD: estimates that more than 60% of research is carried out by private organisations
- **[HOW]** Oppose/ignore regulation on ethics, envt, public health that could threaten corporate profits → harmful, hazardous practices
 - Colonise an emerging market first → max revenue
 - Cut out unnecessary steps in production process → min cost
 - Companies incentivised to rush research → compromise rigour of research & reliability of products e.g. extensive testing
 - EG AstraZeneca vaccine: caused blood clots in 25 European patients soon after its rollout
 - EG Elon Musk's Neuralink: to develop brain implant, rushed animal testing → killed about 1500 animals, violated Animal Welfare Act
- **[OUTCOME]** Faster and more efficient since they are motivated to run a profit - invest in research that can lead to new products, improve efficiency, or give them a competitive edge in the market
- **[OUTCOME]** Restrict accessibility of results since they invested in it, want financial returns
 - [OUTCOME]** Price consumers out, excluded of benefits e.g. medical treatments
 - Pharmaceutical patents, life-saving drugs are priced out the poor's reach. Under World Trade intellectual property laws, holders of patents on pharm products have exclusive rights to market them, which bumps prices up by inhibiting competition, preventing copying
- **[OUTCOME]** Bad intentions but good outcomes
 - Capitalism: need to serve the greater good to make profits
 - Public-private partnerships benefit humanity at large
 - EG Singapore: many projects jointly backed by govt agency A*STAR and firms → SARS detention kit co-developed by A*STAR & Roche Diagnostics

State interests

- **[WHAT]** Allow public interest to dictate research direction
 - Blue sky research: benefits may not be known in advance or may be a long way off.
 - Research in the public interest, where any commercial value might be diffuse and difficult to capture. E.g. research to help make decisions to protect or improve the natural environment or shared fisheries; research into how to reduce or mitigate poverty; research into how to prevent malaria outbreaks. (in cases where there are not enough people suffering from some condition to warrant spending the billions of dollars for research)
 - **EG Orphan drugs:** treat rare medical conditions (orphan diseases) – not profitable to produce without government assistance, due to small population of patients affected by the conditions
- **[HOW]** govt regulation for good of society
 - Slow to manage negative consequences
EG Model AI Governance Framework: introduced in SG in 2019 to govern future research into and use of AI, establish ethical principles
 - Regulate, ban unethical scientific practices
EG He Jiankui, Chinese scientist: in 2018, used CRISPR gene-editing technology to edit DNA in embryos → risk introducing harmful mutations → condemned as unethical, jailed, govt tightened regulation, formed new national medical ethics committee
 - Prevent funding vacuum filled by profit-making companies
- **[WHAT]/[HOW]** Corrupted by political motives – slowed and stonewalled by dense politicians & perverted and pretzeled by dishonest politicians
 - Intervene to evade what politicians *believe* are negative outcomes → obstruct progress
EG Bush: in 2001, banned use of federal funds for research on embryonic stem cells to find cure for diseases, as “his position shaped by deeply held beliefs”
 - Intervene to engender what politicians *believe* are positive outcomes → science becomes partisan tool to reinforce ruling party’s power, influence scientists to align themselves with govt policy at the expense of scientific integrity
EG Trump administration: prevented scientists at Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from speaking to the public about the looming COVID-19 pandemic in Feb 2020 → prevented public from making informed decisions about their health
EG Scott Pruitt: appointed by Trump as head of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), but had no scientific background → received donations from corporations, favoured corporate interests → EPA scientists found that insecticide chlorpyrifos has harmful effects on children’s brain development, but EPA decided not to ban
- **[WHAT]** State-sponsored scientific research to expand state power
 - Domestic e.g. AI surveillance
 - International e.g. weapons development

Scientists

- fundamental duty to prioritise public interest in their research because their work can significantly impact society. This duty arises from the social contract b/w scientists and public, where (govt) support, funding and trust given to scientific endeavours come with the expectation that research will serve the common good
- **[OUTCOME]** Careerism compromise scientific integrity
 - Tempted to fabricate or distort findings to ensure success → commit fraud
EG Jan Hendrik Schon, German physicist: claimed to have discovered how organic materials could potentially replace silicon as semiconductors → fabricated key parts of research → journals retracted his articles, stripped of PhD
 - **EG Hwang Woo-Suk**, S.Korean biologist: claimed to be the first to clone human embryo → results were fake, used eggs from his junior researches and black market, as he was blinded by his drive for achievement → articles retracted, fired, prison

Media

- [OUTCOME] Misrepresentation
 - Makes information accessible to masses → oversimplify findings
 - News journalists may not be able to determine reliability of research
 - To hook public's attention misleadingly exaggerate implications for dramatic effect

EG In 1998, surgeon Andrew Wakefield claimed found link b/w vaccines and autism, but unreliable research → although retracted in 2010, his article had been published hundred of times in medical literature & publicised by media outlets → his false claims contributed to anti-vaccination movement

(E) Science as a Solution

'Science is the only answer to global hunger.' Discuss.

2019

General characteristics of science, as a solution

[+] Allows us to identify / delineate problems

[+] Underpins the very tools (tech) we use to solve problems

[-] Amoral tool, limited by political or social factors in its adoption

[-] Research takes time

Food

Food insecurity: deals with the supply of food, as well as challenges posed each step of the way down the food production chain:

1. Production
 2. Storage
 3. Distribution/ transportation
 4. Consumption
-
1. Identify and intercept the problems faced by the food-insecure at an extremely fundamental level
 - Science → investigate and isolate exact causes of food shortages
 - Without science → fundamentally cannot grasp the problem of food insecurity, let alone go about solving it
 - **EG UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change:** found that high temperatures have adversely affected yields of maize and wheat in low-latitude regions → scientists proved that climate change is linked to global hunger
 - **EG Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR):** found that rapid land degradation and reduced biodiversity forms a vicious cycle feeding the faltering agricultural sector in Africa → proposed targeted solutions
 2. Scientific advancements underpin technological implements and innovations necessary to improve the availability, safety, usability of food stocks
 - Science increase agricultural output
 - EG 1950s to 1960s Green Revolution:**
 - Development of high-yielding varieties of cereal grains, expansion of irrigation infrastructure, modernisation of management techniques, distribution of hybridised seeds, synthetic fertilisers, and pesticides to farmers.
 - production of novel wheat cultivars (a plant or grouping of plants selected for desirable characteristics that can be maintained by propagation)
 - HYVs (high-yielding varieties of cultivars) significantly outperform traditional varieties in the presence of adequate irrigation, pesticides, and fertilisers.
 - Cereal production more than doubled in developing nations between the years 1961–1985. Yields of rice, maize, and wheat increased steadily during that period. The production increases can be attributed roughly equally to irrigation, fertiliser, and seed development, at least in the case of Asian rice.
 - Consumption: ensure safety of food
 - EG Irradiation:** use gamma rays or X-rays to kill bacteria e.g. E.coli that cannot be physically washed off vegetables
 - Increase nutrients in food
 - EG Food fortification programmes:** supplying of iodine-fortified salt prevented 750mil cases

of goitre globally

3. Real-world impact of science-based solutions impeded by political factors

- Funding gap - adoption of science is limited
- **EG CGIAR**: persistent funding gap of \$33-50b each year
- Even when there is funding, too much goes to short-term food aid, too little goes to long-term research into resilient systems
- War and conflict disrupt production, distribution
- **EG** Ukraine is main producer of maize, wheat → invasion of Russia disrupted crops to be harvested & exported, presence in Black Sea disrupt distribution → Madagascar is 3rd on Global Hunger Index, imports 96.7% of sunflower oil from Ukraine

4. Trade-off b/w speed and reliability of results

- Slow to ensure safety
- **EG Genetic modification (GMO)**: discovered in mid 19-th century, but not till 1990s that the first genetically engineered tomato became commercially available → in US, FDA conduct numerous tests before approaching GMO food for public consumption
- If rush, lead to unreliable solutions that do more harm to health than improve it
- **EG** Study by New England Journal of Medicine: soybeans modified with genes from Brazil nuts produced proteins that triggered strong, potentially deadly allergic reactions

Environment

- Fossil carbon capture and storage (CCS): remove carbon from atmosphere
- Clean energy
 - Solar energy
 - Limitation: current generation made of silicon – require a lot of energy to produce, rigid, fragile → limited production
 - **EG** SG: lack of vast open spaces for deployment of large solar arrays + little useable space for solar panels, most on roofs
 - Possible breakthrough: use of perovskites (higher efficiency, low cost, flexible) - but degrade easily when subjected to high temp and moisture
 - Hydrogen
 - Clean alternative to natural gas
 - Limitation: need to derive hydrogen e.g. from fossil fuels (blue / white hydrogen)
 - **EG** SG: National Hydrogen Strategy [diversify energy mix] - lay out use cases for hydrogen across sectors, expected to supply ½ of power needs
 - Nuclear energy
 - **EG** SG: looking into nuclear. NUS building research building to study small modular reactors and nuclear safety. In 2023, NTU announced new research centre for nuclear fusion, collaborate with France's Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission.
 - Limitations: perceived danger (past leakages, popular media), nuclear waste, high cost
 - Wind, bioelectricity, geothermal and hydropower
- Electric vehicles (EV)

(I) Technological advancements

'The quality of human interaction is diminished by modern communication devices.' How far do you agree?	2023
To what extent is artificial intelligence replacing the role of humans?	2019
'Books serve little purpose in education as technological developments become more sophisticated.' How far do you agree?	2015
Examine the extent to which expenditure on arms and the armed forces is justifiable in the modern world.	2014
To what extent can the regulation of scientific or technological developments be justified?	2014
How far is it acceptable for technology to be used only for financial benefit?	2012
Consider the view that most work these days could, and should, be done from home.	2011
To what extent has technology had a negative impact on the skill levels of the people?	2010
To what extent has technology had an impact on both privacy and security in your country?	2009

Intro

Technology entails the following:

- Industrial or practical applications,
- Of scientific knowledge or principles,
- By humans, for human purposes

General characteristics of technology

- Automation: replace manual / repetitive human work with machines to increase efficiency
- Connectivity: internet, 5G, mobile networks enable real-time communication
- Data-driven: collect, analyse and leverage large volumes of data
- Exponential growth: rapidly evolves and accelerates over time
- Drives globalisation by facilitating the seamless exchange of goods, services, information across borders through digital platforms and networks
- Disruptive: innovations can rapidly displace old systems and establish new norms
- Amoral: depends on users and uses

Economic Impact

- Increase productivity
- Job displacement
- Creation of new industries

Social Impact

- **Communication**: transformed how people interact, fostering global communities through social media and digital platforms while also contributing to issues like misinformation and digital addiction.
- **Education**: democratised access to information and education, offering online courses and resources
- **Privacy** concerns: sophisticated data collection methods **EG** real-time satellite surveillance
- Digital divide between those with access and those without

[-] Disruptor: **mediated** conversations lack the full range of communicational or contextual cues that facilitate exchange of ideas and information

Δ status quo: compromise accuracy of human interaction

- Lack eye contact, body language – not doable through a screen, all nuance gets lost in translation
- **EG** In one study, sarcasm was correctly detected 79% of the time when spoken aloud, but only 56% of the time when the same words were sent via email.
- Typos cause miscommunication → directly impede comprehension by switching words for others with a different meaning but indirectly do so by artificially amplifying emotions
- **EG** In a Harvard study, respondents rated angry emails as angrier and happy emails as happier when they contained errors, as they sounded like the authors had hammered the email out in an angry or happy fit

[-] Disruptor: **distractive** – expected to reply quickly, sense of urgency

Δ status quo: prevent us from devoting fullest attention to each interaction, making them more superficial

- Focus on speed and succinctness → interactions become more touch-and-go, less thoughtful (hurt virtual interactions)
- Distracted by devices during real-world interactions (hurt physical interactions)
- Multicommunicating: manage multiple conversations with multiple people simultaneously → split attention → facile, fragmented interactions

[+] Disruptor: liberate human interactions from **spatiotemporal** constraints

Δ status quo: interact with more people

[+] Disruptor: **effectiveness and efficiency**

Δ status quo: better express ourselves through multimedia nature

- Gets the message across, spell check to ensure accuracy ⇔ in real life, anxiety, attention span deficiencies → unable to convey everything on our minds
- Text, voice, video, emoji

Political Impact

“Big Brother is watching you...” This refrain from 1984 might have felt far-fetched half a century ago, not because we believed democracy was invincible, but because the thought of spies squinting at us through thick binoculars seemed more humorous than horrific. But as the 21st century evolves, George Orwell’s technological dystopia is harder and harder to laugh off...

[+] Disruptor: efficient in transmission of information

Δ status quo: make informed political decisions

- Easy and efficient to obtain information of political import → educated voters
- News of wrongdoing emerges quickly in popular discourse and spreads widely **EG** UK Partygate scandal: video of Boris Johnson and staff having fun at Christmas party → violate social distancing laws he passed → approval ratings fell
- Online fact checkers verify claims asserted by public figures → corroborate or contradict them → ensure public has access to actual facts, expose if leaders are reliable / lying
- **EG Washington Post’s Fact Checker:** Trump made 30k false claims over his presidency
- Online resources document donor and voting patterns of US politicians → information made more transparent
- **EG Joe Biden** was exposed to have voted against desegregating schools in 1970s, then against gay marriage in 1990s, contrary to his liberal platform → forced to make public statement to win back public trust

[+] Disruptor: sheer scale, scope, speed

Δ status quo: amplify voices of people, organise movements

[Refer to social media]

[-] Disruptor: misinformation

Δ status quo: disempower

- Misinformation can circulate far and wide
- Profit-max tech firms, echo chambers confirm pre-existing beliefs
- → people make bad decisions
- **EG** r/The_Donald: subreddit held more than 800k members, who exchanged wild, worshipful posts about then-President Trump, along with content biased towards him → exported their own views by manipulating Reddit's algorithm to hijack its front page
- **EG** COVID-19 conspiracy theories spread in Telegram groups → anti-vax movement

[+] Disruptor: deployed by govt

Δ status quo: disempower the masses [techno-authoritarianism]

- **EG** China: CCP has sprawling security and surveillance network, augmented by facial recognition capabilities to spy on citizens. Police offers use "black tech" (sensors that scan citizens' smartphones) to crack their passcodes and canvass their contents. Tech companies store user data to submit for state review
- **EG** US: NSA spies on personal digital devices, has extensive database of telephone records
- **EG** Black Lives Matter protests: US Department of Homeland Security gathered 270 hours of surveillance footage from 15 cities using drones, helicopters, planes → broadcast live in Customs and Border Protection control room → threaten right to protest

Environmental Impact

- Green technology: e.g. renewable energy and electric vehicles, aim to mitigate environmental damage and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.
- Resource extraction: demand for rare earth materials and minerals for electronics can lead to ecological damage and exploitation in resource-rich regions.
- Energy consumption: some technologies, particularly in data centres and cryptocurrency mining, contribute to significant energy consumption

Cultural Impact

- Cultural homogenisation: increased exposure to Western cultures, overshadow local traditions
- Creativity and innovation: new tools for artistic expression and creative innovation, allow for democratisation of content creation and access to global audiences

Artificial intelligence

Intro

How far is artificial intelligence a threat to humanity?

Artificial intelligence: a form of computer technology concerned with making machines work in an intelligent manner

what is so unique about AI? Defining characteristics/traits

- Types of AI: specialised; mass market; generative

Threat:

- Various degrees of threat: erode, subvert, raise doubts, confuse, harm, (replace, remove?)
- Various forms of threat: direct vs indirect, immediate vs long term, easy to deal vs not
- Sectors that AI impacts (SPECTRA)

Humanity: characteristics that define human beings as individuals, qualities of being humane (human)

- Consciousness and self-awareness
- Emotions and empathy
- Moral and ethical reasoning
- Creativity and innovation
- Social and cultural connections
- Human agency: ability to make decisions

Approaches to frame arguments:

- AI raises concern, but is (at this point) not sufficient to undermine humanity
- AI appears benign, even tantalising, but the real threats are less obvious [apparent vs real]
- AI fundamentally alters the world as we know it by (e.g. putting more power into the hands of a few; bringing out our worst instincts)

Synthesis: amoral tool – depends on uses and users

[+] Disruptor: data analysis

Δ status quo: derive insights from data analysis – help make complicated decisions

- Analyse large amounts of data in a short span of time, derive new insights
 - **EG** 2024 **Nobel Prize in Chemistry**: awarded to John Jumper and Demis Hassabis at Google DeepMind for developing AlphaFold, AI tool to predict protein structures
- Higher accuracy and precision
 - Healthcare sector: used for surgical techniques, recognise cancerous tissue. Professionals tend to have 20-30% false negatives, and false positive are also common. AI use deep learning to unearth hidden patterns to improve accuracy of medical tests.
EG Research lab **Merantix**: use deep learning to detect lymph nodes in human body in CT image
 - Robots with AI assist in microsurgical procedures to reduce surgeon variations that can affect patient recovery
EG **Deepmind**: work with National Health Service to ensure doctors and nurses are in the right place at the right time. It identifies patients with urgent needs and have helped to reduce mortality rates. Artificial intelligence also helps in developing new drugs
EG **Pfizer**: uses IBB Watson, a system that has machine learning to power its search for immuno-oncology drugs.

[–] Disruptor: **automation** – automate algorithmic tasks

Δ status quo: replace socio-economic role, leading to job displacement / mass unemployment

- Algorithmic: follow fixed sequence of steps, or finite set of rules
- Higher productivity → economic imperative to cut costs
- Sectors: retail, transportation

[–] Disruptor: **high computing power and productivity** in interpreting data

Δ status quo: replace socio-economic role involving higher-order skill of interpreting data

- Process large amounts of data with speed and accuracy
- EG 100,000 Genomes Project: completed its goal of recording 100k known structures in 2018 by using machine learning techniques instead of attempting it manually, “took weeks rather than years”

[+] Disruptor: **mechanical** – lack emotional connection

Δ status quo: role of emotional communications are reserved

- A lot of human behaviour cannot be reduced to mechanically following an algorithmic script or set of rules or mindlessly processing a large stack of data → not possible for AI to emulate communicative competencies that come naturally to humans e.g. nonverbal signs
EG Chatbot psychiatrists **Ellie** and **Woebot**: coded to match the input to a pre-determined list of symptoms and solutions coded into them, too clumsy to recreate complex human interaction
- When AI decision-making is based on inaccurate datasets → skewed outcomes
EG **Derm Assist** and **SkinVision** apps: are better at spotting skin diseases in rich, white patients, for the simple reason that people from minority groups and modest backgrounds see dermatologists less frequently, and so their skins appear less frequently in image libraries
- AI cannot understand the ineffable intricacies of human morality
EG **Tesla**’s AI-piloted cars: although can determine the right of way and disambiguate legal from illegal moves, they cannot make decisions to do with simple being a decent road user - drive in rude manner

[+] Disruptor: **weak in genuine creation** (+ fallible, make mistakes)

Δ status quo: social role as creators belongs to humans

[–] Disruptor: **natural interaction** – interact in human-like ways, understand and generate natural language

Δ status quo: manipulate humans

- Generative AI blur lines of authorship → erode trust that society is built on (erode foundation of society) → fractious society
EG Elon Musk’s **OpenAI**: used AI to generate pieces of fake news that sounded highly legitimate — the report was about unicorns. This was easily achieved through intense “training” of this technology simply by feeding it countless articles and reports released online as news.
EG AI scams: in 2023, 13% of scams analysed by the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore (CSA) were likely generated by AI.
- Deepfakes used for impersonation → Videos used to be thought of as the golden standard in legal/justice systems, for verifiability - standard of truth/fact. But now can be faked easily, given the ease of access - v difficult to tell
EG **South Korea**: Telegram channel with more than 220,000 participants was used to create and share AI-generated pornographic deepfake images → target women and girls using their school photos, social media selfies and even military headshots
- Misuse for political manipulation → spread misinformation and propaganda → undermine democratic process and lead to social unrest
EG **Nancy Pelosi**: in a doctored video, speaking was slowed down to appear drunk and slurring → 2.5m views on FB

[–] Disruptor: **amoral**

Δ status quo: used for nefarious intentions

- Manipulation and fake news

EG Cambridge Analytica, British political consulting firm: use algorithms to harvest data of thousands of FB profiles for Donald Trump's 2016 presidential election campaign → AI-learning of their political leanings → targeted advertisements on news feeds in an attempt to manipulate their beliefs

- Programmed for violence and destruction, to kill and cause mass casualties → no one held accountable for errors stemmed from programming of AI, no suitable moral framework & problems of accountability/responsibility

Military: fully autonomous weapons which choose their own targets, including innocent civilians

EG US military: plans to deploy **Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)** – with the help of AI, can shoot down enemies in the Middle East and ease the manpower required to man these drones

(V) Religion

Does religion still have a role in the modern world?	2022
'Religion is an important part of the lives of young people today.' Consider whether this is true in your society.	2019
'Human actions should be based on scientific fact, not religious faith.' How far do you agree with this statement?	2015

Intro

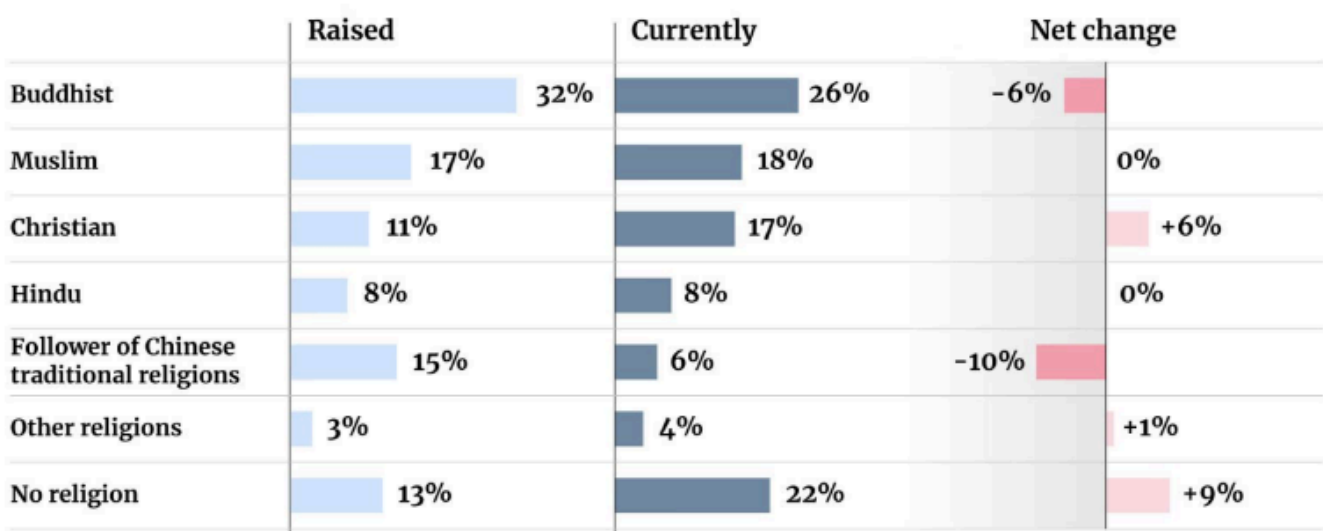
Religion: belief in, worship of, or obedience to a supernatural power or powers considered to be divine or to have control of human destiny (usually formal or institutionalised)

A religion typically comprises

- **Beliefs:** Ideas/principles about the divine or sacred, such as existence of gods
- **Practices:** rituals, worship, prayers, and ceremonies that express devotion
- **Values:** ethical guidelines/moral codes that guide behaviour, based on religious teachings or texts

Maintaining religious identity

% of Singapore's adults who were raised/are currently...



Infographic: Rafa Estrada

Source: Pew Research Center Survey, Sep 12, 2023



[–] Function: convey knowledge

Context: increasing prevalence of scientific and rationalist perspectives

- Highly educated societies: rationalist worldviews offer alternative explanations for fundamental questions traditionally addressed by faith → provide empirical, reliable evidence for phenomena once attributed to divine intervention → scepticism towards religion
- **EG Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution** explains how species, including humans, evolved over millions of years → challenges literal interpretations of creation stories found in religions like Christianity. → In some countries, debates over whether to teach evolution or creationism in schools have led to tensions between scientific and religious communities e.g. removed in S.Korea

- **EG Scopes Trial:** high school teacher John Thomas Scopes charged for violating the law by teaching evolutionism to students, alleged to have violated Butler Act (prohibited teaching of any theory which was premised on the rejection of Creationism)

[–] Function: public role

Context: rise of secular governance, separation of church and state

- Adopt secular governance → ensure religious freedom, promote equality, and maintain social cohesion in increasingly diverse societies
- Separation of church and state → commitment to individual freedoms & recognition of diverse belief systems → religious groups can still engage in social issues, only within the framework of secular state
- **EG** Secular governance in SG: secular educational policies, laws promoting religious harmony, active interfaith dialogue initiatives → maintain social cohesion in multicultural society
- **EG** Laïcité in France: promote neutral public space where all citizens, regardless of religious beliefs, are treated equally e.g. (controversial) policies concerning visible religious symbols

[–] Function: social value

Context: individualism, emergence of diverse belief systems and lifestyle choices

- Growing emphasis on personal freedom and self-expression → many prefer to construct individualised belief systems that align more closely with their personal values, interests, and lifestyles, rather than adhere to the doctrines and rituals of organised religion, which can feel restrictive or outdated → people can tailor their beliefs and practices to fit their unique life experiences, preferences, and values, promoting a sense of empowerment and autonomy
- **EG** Increase in number of freethinkers: decide on their own values based on personal experiences

[–] Function: inherently divisive, rooted in exclusive truth claims and doctrinal differences – exacerbate social and political conflicts when taken to an extreme

Context: pluralistic and interconnected

- Diverse beliefs coexist and interact more than ever before → differences can escalate into social and political conflicts
- More interconnected through globalisation → exposed to a multitude of worldviews → create tension between the need for unity and the persistence of religious exclusivity
- Religion often thrives on clear distinctions between “believers” and “non-believers” → clashes with growing global emphasis on inclusivity and diversity
- **EG** Myanmar: persecution of minority Rohingya Muslims by Buddhist majority. Extreme nationalist Buddhist groups propagate anti-Muslim sentiments, frame Rohingyas as threat to the country’s Buddhist identity
- **EG** Islamophobia in US:
 - Political rhetoric: some politicians and media outlets portray Muslims as threats to American security and values, reinforcing negative stereotypes and legitimising fear
 - Religious stereotyping: many instances of Islamophobia stem from associating all Muslims with terrorism or extremism
 - Rise in hate crimes

[+] Function: moral value – address contemporary ethical and social issues by providing moral framework to navigate today's complex societal landscape

Context: turbulent and highly polarised world

- More interconnected world → moral dilemmas we encounter grow more complicated, often involving issues of equality, justice, human rights
- Religions teach moral values/ethical principles

- [In theocratic / semi-theocratic states] Religious leaders and institutions actively engage in discussions on modern issues such as climate change, social justice, and mental health, offering guidance and support based on religious teachings and principles.
- [Humanitarian aid] Religious organisations often serve as a moral voice, calling for compassion and action in areas where governments and secular organisations may struggle to provide sufficient support.
- **EG** Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*: presents care for the environment not just as a scientific or political issue but as a moral and spiritual imperative. It argues that environmental destruction is closely linked to social injustice and calls for an "integral ecology" that connects environmental care with human dignity, social equity, and ethical responsibility.

[+] Function: social value – offer genuine community and sense of belonging

Context: increasingly lonely

- Rise of digital technology, urbanisation, individualism → weaken traditional social bonds and face-to-face interactions
- Religious gatherings are communal → collectively engage in meaningful social interaction → foster deep interpersonal connections and a shared purpose, offer a sense of belonging and mutual support
- **EG Sikhism**: practice of "Langar": communal meal served to all visitors in Gurdwaras
- Rise of many new religions in the modern world → reflects the human need for religious communities
- **EG Duedeism**: Church of the Latter Day Dude (modernised form of Taoism, emphasising harmony and taking it easy)

[+] Function: emotional value – provide comfort, hope, and meaning & promote resilience

Context: uncertainties and hardships

- Religion offers a sense of peace and emotional stability through spiritual practices e.g. prayer, meditation, worship
- Religion offers explanations for life's challenges and promises of a higher purpose or afterlife → help individuals cope with grief, fear, and suffering
- **EG Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO)** in SG: During Covid-19, its members took an inter-religious pledge to uphold their commitment to maintaining solidarity in crisis. They also made a commitment to strengthening the nation's social defence, by showing appreciation to SG's front-line workers, disseminating accurate and reliable information, and supporting the nation's efforts in containing the Covid-19 outbreak by adjusting and adapting their religious rituals and practices.

Synthesis: both can co-exist

Religion pertains to morals and innate motivations; scientific inquiry is the use of scientific methods to acquire knowledge about the natural world

EG Abdul-Baha, the eldest son of the founder of the Baha'i faith stated that "Religion without science is superstition. Science without religion is materialism."

Environment

Uncategorised

'Fossil fuels should no longer have a part in the production of energy.' Discuss.	2023
---	------

(R) Responsibility of stakeholders

Assess the view that most natural disasters are the result of human activity.	2016
---	------

Individuals

[+] Ability: activism

- Collective action – protests, boycotts, whistleblowers
- Sustainable lifestyles due to green tech & magnetism and momentum surrounding sustainable living

[–] Causal impotence

- Feel powerless / lack of agency to effect meaningful change

[–] Climate scepticism

sceptical about science → sceptical about climate change

- Politicised: people make use of science to achieve political goals
- Replication crisis in science
- Scientific results and studies are inaccessible to most people + problem compounded by hot takes on social media (media use sensationalised language)

Corporations

[+] Ability: abundance of resource at their disposal

[+] Cause of the problem: should give back to atone for undoings

- In pursuit of profits, corporate negligence + govts fail to restrain their actions
- **EG** Coca-Cola: initially world's worst plastic polluter → shrunk carbon footprint by 24% over 10 years, created 100% plant-based beverage bottle in 2021

[+] Corporate social responsibility,

- Progressive corporations e.g. social enterprises made commitment to societal welfare

[–] Ability: lack financial ability

- Costly to go green
- Expecting companies to reduce themselves to the brink of bankruptcy to bankroll social movements or solve social issues they have nothing to do with is unfair & could cause collapse, dispossessing employees of their livelihoods and depriving society of the firm's services
- **EG** COVID-19: in SG, 73000 business entities forced to halt operations, median philanthropy level fell from \$3000 in 2017 to \$1000

[–] Duty: purpose of existence

Firms' sole purpose of existence is to maximise profit, thus no contractual obligation to improve society's well-being

- Companies are defined by what they buy and sell, and anything beyond that is voluntary, not obligatory; charities are defined by what they have to give to society, hence giving is their responsibility and raison d'être
- Companies are not charities

Government

[+] Ability

- Access to resources to implement initiatives
- Has mandate & authority to introduce policies on nation-wide level
- Env't protection requires transnational collaboration and joint efforts that can be most effectively negotiated on a governmental level

[+] Duty to care for citizens

[-] Ability

- Economic: monetary gains from resource extraction
- Political: short term limits / frequent election cycles → perennial need to appeal to voter base, many of whom are preoccupied with more immediate concerns → choosing to make short-term trade-offs for long-term gain is politically unpopular → not in party's best interest to tackle long-term issues

NGOs

[+] Increasing activism

- Enter esp when govts are seen to be incapable or unwilling to fulfil their duties
- Increasing in size and activeness due to indiv themselves becoming more vocal and aware of local/global issues

[-] Under govt regulation, public scrutiny

- Threat to public order, face more overtly hostile attitudes from govts
- Tarned by internal scandals, reduce public trust in these institutions

International collaboration

Roles

- Coordinate efforts
- Set shared targets
- Ensure some degree of accountability

[+] Nature of the problem requires global efforts

- Impacts are transboundary, practical geopolitical implications e.g. climate refugees

EG UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

- Ratified by 197 parties, 1st global treaty to explicitly address climate change
- Established annual forum known as Conference of the Parties (COP)
 - **COP 3, Kyoto Protocol 2005**: first legally binding climate treaty. But only included developed countries. did not compel developing countries incl major carbon emitters China and India to take action + US later withdrew as not including developing countries make US less competitive economically
 - **COP 21, Paris Agreement 2015**: required all countries to set emission-reduction pledges. Govts set targets, known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs). As of Sep 2023, 149 updated NDCs have been submitted since Paris Agreement

• Climate finance

- Developed countries provide financial resources to help developing countries meet their targets
 - Mitigation: projects to cut emissions

- Adaptation: projects to prevent or overcome effects of extreme weather

EG COP 2009 Copenhagen Accord: parties agreed to mobilise US\$100 bil a year from developed countries for developing countries by 2020

EG COP 28 @ UAE

- Approval of a “loss and damage” fund: countries who created problem of climate change would compensate those experiencing its most devastating effects (most affected but least responsible) → climate justice
- Fossil fuel phase-out: commit to achieve net-zero by 2050, 1st time that COP explicitly addressed need to end use of coal, oi, gas

[–] Lack of international consensus and cooperation

- Collective action problem: can only be solved through collective effort, but countries are self-serving, incentivised to act in self interest rather than for common good → tragedy of the commons (short term self interest vs long term collective good)
- Voluntary, no enforcement mechanisms to compel countries to sign agreements
Trade-off: ensuring universal adoption, while tolerating lower standards (risk low adoption rates if enforce stricter standards)

EG Australia: domestic policies advocated expansion of coal projects to boost economic growth → insisted that the language in their declaration be watered down & declared a climate crisis only for the Pacific Islands but not for Australia

EG China: National Energy Administration planned to step up coal-production capacity and bolster oil and gas exploration to ensure domestic supply capabilities → need fossil fuel for energy security in short term before supply chain of clean alternatives is well established

- Blatant refusal of some govts to acknowledge the existence of, much less take action on, climate change

EG US former President Trump publicly stated he did not believe in the reality of human-caused climate change → withdrew from Paris Agreement in 2017, rolled back Obama-era envt regulations

(V) Balance priorities

In your society, how well are the demands of the economy and the environment balanced?	2015
Should there be any controls over the production of energy when the need for it is so great?	2015
Discuss the view that, with an increasing global need for energy, every possible source should be exploited to the full.	2014
How important is it to save plant and animal species which are in danger of extinction?	2013
'Environmental concerns and economic growth cannot co-exist.' Do you agree?	2011

(E/P) Environmental efforts

Since the extinction of species is a natural phenomenon, is there any point in trying to preserve it?	2022
Assess the view that attempts to control climate change can never be truly effective.	2017