

The West, the Rest, and Climate Change Debate Topics

Topic 1	Free Global Trade
Summary	Would the emerging economies benefit from free global trade?
Context	Free trade's virtues have been praised for three hundred years. By allowing every country equal access to all markets, the theory says, you guarantee the most efficient allocation of resources and the cheapest prices for consumers. This means reducing tariffs, and quotas, and other forms of protectionism that prevent countries from trading goods freely. Can such a theory work in practice? Specifically, can it help the world's least developed countries provide themselves with a better quality of life? Western liberal rhetoric says it can, and points to international institutions such as the World Trade Organization to promote free trade of goods, and the World Bank to provide credit for development projects. However, so long as the West continues to protect its own agriculture and industries from the international market – such as through the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy, or the United States of America's bailout of its steel industries – its position is arguably hypocritical, which jeopardizes a full embrace of free trade around the world. This debate centers on the benefits, detriments, and practicality of free trade.

Topic 2	Effectiveness of ASEAN
Summary	Should ASEAN be disbanded?
Context	<p>The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was founded in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. In 1984 Brunei Darussalam was admitted, followed by Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar/Burma in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999. Combined, they have a population of about 500 million, a total area of 4.5 million square kilometers, a combined gross domestic product of US\$737 billion, and a total trade of US\$ 720 billion.</p> <p>The ASEAN Declaration states that the aims and purposes of the Association are: (i) to accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian nations and (ii) to promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries in the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter. In 1995, the ASEAN Heads of States and Government re-affirmed that "Cooperative peace and shared prosperity shall be the fundamental goals of ASEAN."</p> <p>It's a common opinion that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations determination to have consensus on all issues among its diverse membership will prevent the organisation from being effective within a rapidly changing world that requires fast coordinated responses to crises whether economic or military. This debate examines whether ASEAN is beneficial or on the contrary.</p>

Topic 3	The Rise of China
Summary	Is the rise of China a threat to the West?
Context	<p>China's stunning economic growth has convinced the West that it is just a matter of time until China becomes a world superpower. But its ideological orientation makes China a revolutionary power that is threatening both to the United States' status and global structure. Three different logics have been constructed to substantiate the "China threat" thesis. First, ideological and cultural factors make China a threat. Samuel Huntington has added a cultural factor: in the clash of civilizations, the "unholy alliance between Islamic and Confucian civilizations" is the most fundamental threat to the West. For people using this logic, the sensible response from the U.S. is, in the short run, a containment policy, and confrontation is possible if needed; in the long run, the promotion of a peaceful transformation within China. Second, geopolitical and geoeconomic factors. For many realists, even though China has shed off its ideological straitjacket, as a great power in size (territory, population, and economy), China has to pursue its own interest and respect. Nationalism may still drive China into a course of clash with the United States, if the latter refuses to accommodate or share the leadership with China as a rising power. Some scholars fear that democracy can unleash strong nationalism and popular nationalism can make China even more aggressive toward the United States. Third, the collapse of China. Opposed to the previous two perspectives, some people are concerned that if China suffers a</p>

	Soviet-style sudden-death syndrome and spins out of control, it can create an even worse scenario. The sheer size of the population makes refuge problem, the failed state and the followed crises (warlordism, civil war, crime, proliferation of nuclear weapons, etc) impossible for the world to deal with.
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Topic 4	Balance of Power within the IMF
Summary	Should the quota system within the IMF be reconsidered in favour of emerging economies?
Context	The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is an intergovernmental organization that was set up in 1945 to oversee the global financial system by keeping in check its members' balance of payments and the strength of their currency. It has 187 members to date. It also offers loans, mainly to its poorer members, that are usually accompanied by firm requirements to implement neoliberal economic policies, like cutting public spending and lowering corporate tax rates to balance budgets and reduce deficits. The members of the IMF have different numbers of votes, according to their 'quotas', which are calculated according to the financial contributions they make to the Fund and their share of the world economy. The IMF's main governing organ is an executive board comprised of 24 executive directors, 5 directly appointed by the five states with the largest quotas (US, Japan, Germany, France, UK), and 19 elected by the rest of the member states. The executive board has the task of confirming the selection for Managing Director, the head of the IMF. Due to a historical agreement, a European has always held this role, with the second in command from the United States. However, this convention is increasingly being called into question, as well as the Western countries' dominant share of the total number of votes and decision-making powers within the organization.

Topic 5	The Role of the BRICS Coalition in Global Governance
Summary	To what extent does the BRICS group contribute to shaping the global order and global governance?
Context	Over the past few years, the BRICS have been forced to face many hard realities: 1) vulnerable economies; 2) political instabilities; 3) Russia-West confrontations; 4) India-China mistrust; 5) the predicted China-US confrontations ahead with the unfolding of the US Trump Administration. Analysts have in recent years been intrigued by the question of the impact on global politics and global governance brought about by the rise of emerging/rising powers. The BRICS countries and the coalition between them along with the global rise of China in particular have been at the center of many puzzling questions. Especially, against the background of the difficulties and weakening global influences of the BRICS countries, one of the major headline questions can be: is the BRICS as an "emerging group" losing centrality due to the lack of cohesiveness and the economic and political crises in individual BRICS states? Will the BRICS coalition survive as a group when it is seemingly unable so far, both politically and economically, to unveil a common determination to help bring about fundamental changes in the architecture of the existing world order or to accelerate the balancing of the Atlantic dominance?