**MySQL & Knowledge Discovery in the SPL Database**

**Investigation of Nonfiction Checkouts pertaining to Arab and Middle Eastern Countries**

**MAT 259A**

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**Introduction.** The United States has been involved in several armed conflicts in the Middle East and Northern Africa in the twenty-first century, whether intermittently or continuous. In particular, the US war in Afghanistan has the distinction of being the longest-running conflict in US history, beginning in October 2001 and continuing to the present. Using the Seattle Public Library database, I investigate how library patrons checkout materials relating to certain countries in these regions, in the hopes of gauging the interest of Americans in the conflicts over time. In addition, I include checkouts of a few terms the media associates with these regions to find the associations Americans make between places and concepts.

Search query:

SELECT

YEAR(cout) AS Year,

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%iraq%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Iraq',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%israel%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Israel',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%afghanistan%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Afghanistan',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%iran%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Iran',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%palestine%' OR title LIKE '%gaza%' OR title LIKE '%west bank%' , 1, NULL)) AS 'Palestine',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%syria%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Syria',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%lebanon%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Lebanon',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%tunisia%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Tunisia',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%libya%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Libya',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%somalia%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Somalia',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%yemen%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Yemen',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%saudi arabia%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Saudi Arabia',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%terror%' OR title LIKE '%terrorism%' , 1, NULL)) AS 'Terror',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%arab spring%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Arab Spring',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%islam%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Islam',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%war%', 1, NULL)) AS 'War',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%intifada%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Intifada',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%refugee%' OR title LIKE '%refugees%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Refugee',

COUNT(IF(title LIKE '%vietnam%', 1, NULL)) AS 'Vietnam'

FROM

spl\_2016.outraw

WHERE

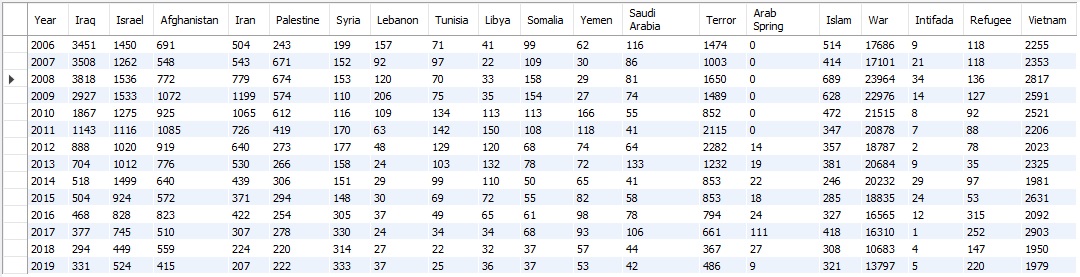
YEAR(cout) BETWEEN 2006 AND 2019

AND deweyClass >= 900

GROUP BY YEAR(cout)

ORDER BY YEAR(cout);

Output table and associated plots:



**Analysis:** Observe first that “Vietnam” is clearly not a country in the region of interest, nor has the US been involved in conflicts Vietnam for decades. This search term is meant only to provide a comparison of interest in present conflicts in relation to a previous one. We observe that while interest in “Vietnam” has stayed relatively constant in the period 2006-2019, interest in Middle Eastern and Arab nations has steadily decreased. This notably includes Afghanistan, despite the conflict persisting throughout this period.

The notable exception to this trend is Syria, where interest remained constant up to 2015, but afterwards roughly doubled. Notably, the trend of checkouts for “Syria” is quite similar to the trend for “refugees,” suggesting that refugees in general seem to be associated primarily with Syria in the public imagination, especially around 2015-16.

Also interesting is that interest in titles related to “Israel” and “Palestine” have mostly waned in the period 2006-2019, despite the continued strife between them. In particular, while the Trump Administration moved the US embassy in Israel and made other changes to US policy in Israeli relations, this apparently did not change the number of checkouts.