

'In a globalised world, it is increasingly difficult for governments to rule effectively.' Discuss.

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Whenever the United States of America sneezes, the whole world catches a cold. This is but one consequence of us living in this highly interconnected and globalised world. It is not only our ideas, information and people that will spread all over the globe, but even our economic woes, as seen during the 2008 recession. In view of how the dissemination of ideas and information, along with the flow of human capital from country to country, has radically altered the nature of governance, it is difficult to argue that governments have not found it any tougher to govern and meet their ends of the social contract effectively in this globalised age. The easy flow of news and the rise of transnational citizen journalism also complicates domestic rule when it is under scrutiny from the international community, especially when domestic imperatives are at odds with international imperatives. Though there are governments that have not felt the pinch of globalisation or even those that take advantage of it, these states are few and far between. As such, I do believe that it is increasingly tougher for states to govern effectively in this age of globalisation.

With the advent of social media, one can notice the futility of censorship in the globalised age. Even traditional media has become globalised, allowing us to watch news or read print articles about a foreign land we have never visited before. This liberalisation of the flow of information has led to the proliferation and dissemination of a panoply of ideals and ideas, the more prominent of which has threatened various states' monopolies of power. Be it a democracy or a dictatorship, a government enjoys as monopoly of power agreed upon by the people in the social contract. With their subordination to the government's laws and regulations, the governed are promised stability, peace, and above all else that their welfare is protected by the state. Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote in 'The Social Contract' that 'Men are born free; and everywhere he is in chains' for the social contract is essentially a trade-off between the governments' personal liberties for a collective freedom to peace and stability. The unrestricted flow of information in this globalised age has threatened to dismantle this status quo, for traditionally Western liberal ideals, have found their way to the rest of the world and citizens of authoritarian states have become dissidents to some extent. By no means is this a negative trend, but we can all objectively see that the various states are finding it more difficult to control their people, and the social contract is being dismantled by the very people it was meant for – the governed. Citizens no longer see that trade-off as a fair one and desire more personal freedoms, giving rise to instances like the Arab Spring, where the despotic regimes of Mubarak and Gaddafi were overthrown, or the Tiananmen Square Protests, where students called for greater democratic rights in China. Even in Singapore, with the influx of Western liberal ideals, people have started to question the People's Action Party's more 'draconian' laws like the Internal Security Act, and Article 377A of Singapore's Penal Code, which is seen to limit the freedoms of homosexuals. By no means am I making normative judgement on whether these instances are to be celebrated or not, but I am simply pointing out that a government needs the support of the people and political authority to govern effectively, and the flow of such ideas has threatened to dismantle that authority. Prima facie, it is indeed more difficult for a state to govern people who have grown more rebellious in spirit to demand more from the social contract than the status quo allows for, as a result of globalisation.

However, we cannot make such generalisations so hastily without considering countries that have been relatively untouched by globalisation. Police states like North Korea seems to be free from such issues, due to its policy of censorship and propaganda to indoctrinate her people to be loyal to the state. Arguably, such Western liberal ideals are going to find it difficult to penetrate the minds of the North Korean people, let alone slip into Kim's personal dictatorship of a police state. North Korea is one of the few governments whose rule and unrestricted monopoly of power remain unscathed by the claws of globalisation. To a lesser extent, we also have China, which is still able to maintain the allegiance of her people to the state through censorship. The influx of liberal ideals has been curbed by the Great Firewall of China, and not allowing the services of Google and Facebook to enter the state. Controlling the search engine Baidu also allows the Chinese government to regulate the content seen by her people, and mitigate the effect of globalisation on the minds of her citizens. As such, the grip of globalisation has not made governing too difficult for China and North Korea, insofar as they still managed to hold onto their political authority and monopoly of power due to such regulations.

Admittedly, it is clear that such states are few and far between, and if we were to look at how globalisation in Eastern Europe via the liberalisation of the media caused the various communist governments to topple in 1989, or how globalisation had fanned the flames of revolution during the Arab Spring, it is clear that governments are losing their grip on power and this will undoubtedly impair their ability to govern in this globalised world.

On the other hand, some might argue that globalisation has actually made it increasingly easier for governments to govern effectively. These people might celebrate the ingenuity of governments in exploiting the forces of globalisation to meet domestic imperatives and protect the welfare of the people. These people might cite success stories like how Singapore managed to overcome her ageing population and declining birth rates via the inflow of foreign talent, both white-collar and blue-collar foreign workers to fill in the gaps in the workforce. The Third World has taken advantage of the rise of multinational corporations and free trade for their economic development, as seen from the great economic success of the four Asian Tigers of South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong. These countries managed to transform their economies to improve the lives of their people by riding the waves of globalisation. With this in mind, it is understandable for people to think that globalisation has actually made it increasingly easier for governments to govern effectively.

However, there are always two sides to every story. Despite some countries riding on the wave of globalisation for better futures, other countries are drowning in it. Globalisation has brought about a host of unprecedented problems. The easy flow of human capital and interconnected global economies gave rise to new threats like transnational terrorism and the spreading of economic slumps. Governments today have it a lot tougher to protect the welfare of their people, and ensure that they uphold their end of the social contract. One issue that clearly epitomises this is the issue of migrants that even became a key point of contention in the 2016 Presidential Elections in the USA. With the rise of globalisation, many migrants have found their way to the USA, which contributes to an increased risk of terrorist attacks and even the loss of jobs for the average American. Donald Trump won because of his promises to ban Muslims from entering the country and build a wall to deter Latino migrants from entering the country, and this shows the severity or at least perceived severity of these problems arising from globalisation. Likewise, the fact that Brexit was partly motivated by the disdain of European migrants in the United Kingdom also indicates the perceived severity of the flow of people. Taking a closer look at the 'success stories', Singapore's utilisation of foreign talent was not without a spike in nationalistic and even xenophobic sentiments. The growth

of the Asian Tigers was not achieved without accepting the great risks of being part of an interconnected global economy, which is clearly seen when the Asian Financial Crisis crippled these Asian economies. All these problems indicate the decreasing ability of governments to uphold their end of the social contract to maintain the welfare of the people. While riding the waves of globalisation, each country risks drowning in it too. While there are success stories, the tide of globalisation is uncontrollable and it is just a matter of time before one falls off. Indeed, globalisation has ultimately still made the task of governing more difficult than ever before.

Besides that, globalisation has also allowed for international scrutiny of domestic matters, which has complicated the nature of governance. Governments need to meet not only the needs of the governed, but also of other governments and foreign groups. The easy flow of information and rise of transnational citizen journalism due to the advent of social media has allowed foreign entities to keep watch on a country's domestic affairs, and makes it easier for such foreign entities to interfere or chastise a country for its choices in the domestic arena. This is exemplified by the strong international opposition to Duterte's war of drugs that allowed for extra-judicial killings. This conflict of interests complicates the governance of the Philippines, as they are forced to choose between a rock and a hard place. 'Either let the country remain in its crime-ridden state or be condemned by the world' is my guess at the dichotomy put forward by Duterte. Human rights watchdogs have also been quick to condemn Singapore for charging Amos Yee using the Internal Security Act, complicating what was actually a relatively fair trial based on agreed-upon laws. With international scrutiny as a result of globalisation, governments may find it more difficult to make decisions in their governance when domestic imperatives contradict international opinion.

In the grander view of human history, human populations have diverged when the early humans migrated from the African continent to the rest of the continents. Today, humans are converging with the advancements in transportation and communication technology. This new-found interconnectedness is not based on some superficial construct, but perhaps an idiosyncratic sort of human kinship and very human qualities such as the love of freedom. Perhaps that is why such ideas easily intoxicate us as we yearn for more liberty, threatening the state's authority in doing so. The problems associated with globalisation, and the greater international scrutiny, also makes it more difficult for governments to rule effectively today. That is why the statesmen of the world must prepare themselves for this great convergence of mankind we call globalisation and embrace it with a forward-looking spirit, for only if we can ride the waves of globalisation can humanity explore the uncharted waters of the future.

Comments:

Good range of examples from around the world. Counterargument on states untouched by globalisation could be refined.