



“Government attempts to control population growth are ineffective.” Discuss this statement. [15 marks]

Introduction

Population growth levels are of concern to all countries around the world since they have a direct impact on economies, provision of services such as health & education & general long term planning.

Ineffectiveness of Policies

Many governments actively try to influence population growth levels through affecting birth rates. Several developed countries have been attempting to increase birth rates in recent decades.

The UK has tried to increase the birth rate through providing financial assistance for parents to ease the cost of raising children. This is done through ‘Child maintenance’ payments each month and tax credits that can be used for the cost of childcare. It has also increased the time a mother may take off work to 1 year and this can now be split between the mother and father which give more flexibility.

These policies have some effect but ultimately are just incentives to encourage more people to have more babies. In reality other factors may be more significant such as the recent economic depression which has seen falls in disposable income much greater than the assistance available for parents & so negating many of the effects of the policy.

In addition to this, cultural or religious traditions/expectations may have much more influence on couples than government incentives.

India on the other hand is trying to reduce its birth rate through increased investment in family planning services and education and greater availability/affordability of contraception for people. This again is having some effect but many people ignore the advice and still want/continue to have large families.

Immigration: Another aspect to population growth is migration. The USA has been trying to limit the numbers of immigrants it receives but has had limited success as illegal migration over its land border with Mexico continues in large numbers. It is a similar situation in Europe as the EU tries to tighten its borders with limited success.

Effectiveness of Policies

On the other hand population policies can sometimes be quite effective.

Strict implementation of a policy such as China’s 1 child policy is a good example. By making it law and imposing severe financial penalties they have successfully drastically reduced the birth rate. There are criticisms about this approach and evidence that it has not been as successful in rural areas but overall it has worked.

Governments have had success in attracting immigrants to affect population growth more often than restricting immigration. The UK immigration laws attracted Indian workers after Indian independence in the 1940s.

More recently Dubai has boosted population growth through attracting Indian & Pakistani immigrants to support its booming construction industry.

It can be argued that populations do respond to government policies even when they are incentives rather than laws but it tends to be a more gradual/long term change in behavior. This may make them seem less effective in the short run.

Conclusion

There are examples of effective and ineffective population growth policies.

Ultimately it depends on how strictly the policy is implemented and the time scale that its success is to be measured over that determine how successful it will be.

In countries where there are strong religious/cultural trends for high birth rates a policy based around immigration/emigration may be more successful than one directed at birth rates.