

IB Geography

Exam Answer Examples



“The causes of global climatic change are essentially human.” Discuss this statement.

Introduction

Global warming is a change that is occurring but there are various suggestions and theories as to the causes of global warming.

Human Causes

Many scientists argue that global warming is happening at the current rate due to human activities.

The Greenhouse Effect

* Argument that humans are drastically increasing the amount of CO₂, Methane, CFCs, nitrous oxides and sulphur dioxide in the atmosphere.

* The main causes of the increases are due to growing global population levels (more transport, more consumption, more food needed) but also increasing levels of industrialisation in many of the poorer countries and the use of fossil fuels as the energy to power most of it.

* These gases are adding to the existing greenhouse layer and making it thicker. The greenhouse layer allows solar radiation to pass through (so incoming solar radiation levels remain stable) but it traps longerwave heat radiation emitted from the earth's surface. This is leading to an imbalance in the energy budget and causing the atmosphere to warm up.

Natural Causes

Some scientists argue that humans are not the main cause and that it is a natural process.

* Global atmospheric temperatures have always varied throughout time and respond to changes in the amount of incoming solar radiation at certain times due to solar flares/sunspots.

* There are arguments that increased volcanic activity can have a significant effect on atmospheric temperatures due to the huge amount of gases released during eruptions.

Conclusion

In conclusion I think that both arguments are valid but the significant aspect is that in the past global temperature changes have tended to be more gradual when caused by natural factors. The main concern of the current warming is its rapidity & this seems to be at least influenced if not caused by the emissions of greenhouse gasses by humans. Most current scientists believe that global warming is being seriously enhanced by human activities.

Examine why most countries want to reduce their dependence on oil.

Introduction

Industrialisation has changed the way humans live allowing much greater consumption and more choice. Most industrial processes depend significantly or at least in part on oil as a raw material and as an energy source. The drastic improvements in transport and increased access to cars, planes, motor-cycles around the world has also vastly increased our reliance on oil. Oil has become the backbone of most economies but it is a finite resource and is running out.

Main Content

Many countries are keen to reduce their dependency on oil because:

* With a limited supply of oil and increasing demand (China & India industrialising) world prices are rising and causing the prices of most things in most economies to rise with them.

* Increasing dependence on Middle Eastern countries for oil supplies (UK & US resources are dwindling) has been causing political tensions for many countries as they aim to secure supplies for their own countries.

* Recent conflicts in the Middle East & North Africa (Iraq & Libya) have led to volatility in oil prices with large & sudden increases which causes many problems for economies, firms and individuals.

* Increasing concern over climate change with the bulk of scientists suggesting that fossil fuels (of which oil is one) are one of the major causes due to CO₂ emissions.

* Linked to this are targets for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions that many countries have signed up for (Kyoto Agreement). Reducing fossil fuel combustion is the fastest way to do this.

Increased public awareness of climate changes and increased public desire to combat it is pressurising Governments into looking for ways to change.

* Environmental accidents (BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, 2011) have raised awareness of the hazards of the oil industry, with loss of life, significant environmental damage & significant economic damage to many firms and individuals affected by the spill.

* Increasing cost of oil is making alternative sources (renewables) comparably more affordable & this is leading to increased investment in them & new technologies which should further drive the cost down. Solar power & wind power have had significant developments & biofuel use has vastly increased in recent years.

“Government attempts to control population growth are ineffective.” Discuss this statement.

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 behaviour. This may make them seem less effective in the short run.

Conclusion

There are examples of effective and ineffective population growth policies.

* I think that 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.