

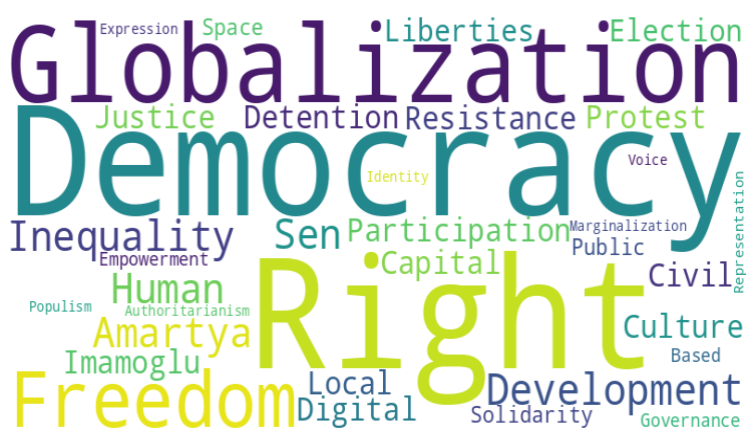
A Mass Arrest, A Test of Freedom: Is This the End of Globalization?

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Introduction

March 2025. One of the largest mass arrests in Turkey's history was triggered by the detention of a mayor elected by millions of voters. The sudden arrest of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu on charges of "aiding terrorism" and "corruption" shocked not only Turkey but also the world. Thousands gathered in front of the municipal building and calls for protest quickly spread across the country. The government's response was disproportionate: nearly 1,500 people were detained in Istanbul alone; hundreds were injured because of police interventions using tear gas, plastic bullets, and batons. This was interpreted not only as the punishment of a political figure and a local problem, but as a global crisis of freedoms and norms.

The İmamoğlu case is a critical example of how the development-freedom relationship, established by Amartya Sen, is being tested today. According to Sen, development is not solely about economic growth. In this context, what is happening in Türkiye should be seen as a moment of crisis in the fragile relationship between globalization and democracy. How could justice, equality, rights and freedom of expression become so fragile? Is globalization to blame?



Arrest, Reaction, and Theoretical Framework

Many thinkers talk about “progress” in almost every field. Marx said each stage was more advanced than the previous one. As a result of the collapse of capitalism, the most advanced society would be established, and the end would be reached. (Marx 60-61) According to Fukuyama, history "will one day stop" because the effort to find a new and best order will one day end. (Fukuyama 16) All these thinkers who deal with the process based on “progress” in history have designed a certain “end”. But they do not say how this happens. In other words, there is no statement about what the dominant ideology or order will be when we come to the end of history.

Today's “history” is no longer defined as it was in the past, with categories such as political and cultural revolutions, republics and monarchies, empires and dynasties, famines and epidemics, but rather as a process controlled and regulated by authority and excess. (Munslow 186)

Globalization gained a momentum, especially with the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, with the spread of international free trade, the development of information technologies, and the unlimited mobility of capital. This Western-centered structure spread throughout the world with promises of democracy, human rights, and development. However, since the 2008 global financial crisis, this model has experienced serious breakdowns. The deepening of economic inequalities, rising populist reactions to issues such as migration and security have led to fragmentation uncertainty replacing the ideal of “shared prosperity” promised by globalization. At the end lifestyles, civilizations, nations, regions, communities, and ethnicities began to form, the world became sliced; globalization remained a claim in the void. With exclusions, intolerances, terrorism, extremism, corruption, poverty, injustice, oppression, and conspiracies, the world's glory was again disrupted.

Describing the negative effects of globalization, Baudrillard says: “Globalization promised freedom, prosperity, and happiness for everyone, but this is only its advertisement. Globalization, like colonialism, is founded on an extraordinary violence.” If we are under an illusion about globalization, we will also pay a “bill”. So, what is this illusion? Or is it also freedom and human rights?

Since March 2025, Turkey has been experiencing a tense period that has led to mass protests. İmamoğlu was arrested unexpectedly on charges of “aiding terrorism” and “corruption”. In fact, the ballot box was expected but not prison because İmamoğlu had recently announced that he would be a presidential candidate in the first election against Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and received nearly 15 million votes in the voluntary voting process opened by the opposition party. The details of the investigation file were not shared with the public; concrete evidence regarding the allegations were not presented to the public, and large-scale protests were held across the country. Thousands of people took to the streets in many cities, especially in Istanbul. Nearly 1,500 people were detained during the demonstrations. (BBC Turkish).

This development is not just about serious accusations against a local administrator. It was also a turning point in which the public's trust in politics and the judiciary was tested. Beyond today's authoritarianism debates, the İmamoğlu case brings the theoretical relationship between development and freedom back to the agenda. Because this example points to the potential to produce a structure in which political representation is limited, the area of freedom of expression is narrowed, and citizen participation is punished. At this point, Sen defines development not only as economic growth or income growth, but also through individuals' access to their fundamental freedoms. “Real development” is possible to the extent that people can freely make decisions about their own lives and defend their rights.

If individuals in a free open environment hesitate to take an active role in democratic processes “for fear of being arrested and blacklisted”, and if public power limits the sphere of expression and judicial processes are far from transparent, then the basis on which the development process is based must be questioned. Therefore, the İmamoğlu case is also requires us to rethink the issues of freedom, representation, and legitimacy on a global scale. Some thinkers oppose globalization by calling it a new form of old colonialism. However, the point that everyone agrees on is that no one can escape globalization anymore and that it is an irreversible process.

As to Strange, globalization is a fraud and that it emerged from the superficial combination of various tendencies by many scattered thinkers (Strange 293). With globalization, there have been changes in the structure of risks, dangers, and threats. The rapid spread of globalization has also brought about serious changes in the understanding of international security (Üvez 46). Nationalism and religion have also been rediscovered. Beck's

'Risk Society' theory also argues that globalization is defined not only by economic and cultural integration processes but also by crises and uncertainties.

As a result, governments are trying to spread their own “values” through globalization and eliminate the “bad” ones. Those who are under an illusion about globalization see moral perfection as possible because technological perfection seems attainable. However, “Everyone must be saved – this is the contemporary ideal of democracy” (Baudrillard 3)

Schiller's addresses this issue and states that cultural imperialism is not only a media effect, but also the process by which dominant powers manipulate other societies in accordance with their own interests. This transformation is not forced, but often occurs voluntarily through economic, cultural or ideological pressures, and through the targeted society's elite.

It is also important that while globalization aims for an ideal such as the world being governed by uniform and universal laws, the world is increasingly moving towards an introverted autarkic order. The physical, economic, and psychological walls that have been built around the world indicate a serious regression in the spirit of globalization regarding fluidity. (Ariboğan) Specially trade wars have dealt a serious blow to the long-dominant neoliberal understanding of globalization. Trump's move has not only challenged the fundamental principles of the free trade regime but has also signaled the rise of nation-states trying to reestablish their economic sovereignty. The reshaping of trade rules in line with political interests has brought to the fore discussions that globalization may no longer be an irreversible process. British Prime Minister Starmer has described these steps as “the end of the world as we know it”! This has made the question of whether globalization has come to an end a frequently discussed issue both in academic circles and in the global public opinion.

Indeed, I think the lawsuits filed by states against the arbitrary tariffs imposed by the Trump administration in the US show how it is shaken in relation to the international economic crisis. The basic principles of the global trade regime are now becoming increasingly fragile in the face of political national interests.

Contradictions of Globalization: Is Development for Everyone or for the Privileged Few?

Globalization was seen as a door of hope that carried the economy to every part of the world and accelerated information and technology. The free-market logic was strengthened by international trade agreements and the digital revolution. However, this did not mean equal opportunity for everyone. So, is the globalized world getting better or worse? A world where people have more pleasure and easier access is a better world?

Joseph Stiglitz is one of those who emphasize that globalization has not been able to transfer its expected benefits to developing countries, but, on the contrary, it has deepened income inequality. Globalization has increased economic efficiency, it has not been able to demonstrate the same success in carrying values such as democratic participation, transparency, and social justice - *at least in Turkey*.

So, can this situation be defined as development? According to Sen, the answer is clear: No. Political representation, participation, fair sharing, and accountable governance are the cornerstones of this definition. The tension experienced in countries like Turkey, whose economies are intertwined with the global system today, stems from this very source. For this reason, when evaluating the globalization process, we must necessarily look at the issue of freedom. Freedom is not, of course, being able to do what you want. However, a person who has all rights may not be completely free. If we make a robot, give it some requests, and create a perfect environment where it can fulfill these requests, we cannot make a free robot.

The spread of these rights brought about by globalization should have actually improved freedom, we should be able to say that freedom has also increased. So why can't we? Because development is not only about economic performance; it is also about creating a social order.

The Turkish example is at the center of this discussion. When the freedom of individuals is threatened; it becomes impossible to define economic success as development.

CONCLUSION

Is globalization a deception fabricated for the purpose of exploiting the minority in order to increase the profit margins of multinational corporations, or is it a process that will ensure the establishment of peace and human rights and eliminate the imbalance in income distribution? I do not think there is a simple answer to this question.

Also, politicians and their supporters who demand freedom are becoming targets. Amartya Sen's approach can help us understand why democratic politics is being targeted. The empowerment of free individuals and accountable citizens threatens the fragile balance that authoritarian regimes have established with globalization.

When we look at the effects of globalization on our lives, we cannot claim that either criticizing or praising it in its entirety is an objective attitude. What needs to be done is to consider this phenomenon in all its aspects, to examine what it is, what it has gained, what it has lost, and the consequences it may have from now on.

In this context, what we need is a governance structure where judicial independence is guaranteed, and arbitrary decisions are prevented. We also need democratic models where the voices of communities are heard. We should develop social policies that reduce inequalities in income distribution, not just a system that protects capitalists. We need a new generation that will work for new global cooperation models where the autonomy of local communities is guaranteed.

Developing countries are afraid of problems such as terrorism, economic hardship, income inequality, poverty, education and health. Globalization can only establish a meaningful connection with development when it transforms into participatory communities and fair economic structures can coexist.

In conclusion, the arrest of a mayor and the events that followed should not be seen as an isolated domestic policy of Turkey; it should be evaluated as a process of global unification. Unless globalization is restructured around justice, pluralism and freedom, it will continue to produce tension rather than cooperation.

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