Table 9.1 Arguments in favour of and against direct democracy

Arguments in favour of direct democracy	Arguments against direct democracy
A pure form of democracy. The system is a true form of democracy because everyone has a say on an issue rather than having their views expressed through representatives.	**It is not practical.** In a modern state the number of issues, plus the size of the population, means a system of direct democracy would be unresponsive and impractical.
Increased legitimacy. Decisions have greater democratic legitimacy because they have the support of the majority of the people.	**Tyranny of the majority.** Minority groups and interests may have their needs and concerns overlooked when decisions are based on a majority vote.
Improves participation. Participation is greater when people have more opportunities to be involved in issues that directly affect them.	**Undermines elected representatives.** Having direct democracy in a representative system undermines the role of those representatives and allows them to pass the responsibility for difficult decisions to the public. Representatives are less accountable and have less responsibility for their policy decisions.
Increases public engagement. Regular public debates and discussion of issues help to improve public engagement in the running of the country.	**Low turnouts.** A low turnout means that only a small group of people make decisions which affect everyone. This undermines the legitimacy of the decisions being made.
Improves political education. Political education is improved because people need to be informed in order to make decisions.	**Emotional responses.** People can tend to vote on the basis of emotion rather than the practical considerations of major issues.
It works. Countries like Switzerland regularly use direct democracy to make decisions and are seen to function effectively.	**Populist outcomes.** People can tend to vote on popular short-term measures that will benefit them, rather than consider what will be in the national interest and good for everyone.