**Democracy Revision Tasks**

**Task 1**

Give a definition of direct democracy. Provide examples of this form of democracy in action.

**Task 2**

Give a definition of representative democracy. Provide examples of this form of democracy in action.

**Task 3**

“Direct democracy is superior to representative democracy when it comes to **practicality**”.

How far do you agree with this view? Give explanations and examples.

**Task 4**

“Representative democracy is superior to direct democracy when it comes to **accountability**”.

How far do you agree with this view? Give explanations and examples.

**Task 5**

“Direct democracy is superior to representative democracy when it comes to **representation**”.

How far do you agree with this view? Give explanations and examples.

**Task 6**

“Direct democracy is superior to representative democracy when it comes to **participation**”.

How far do you agree with this view? Give explanations and examples.

**Task 7**

Note the views of the following political theorists in terms of their views on democracy:

1. Schumpeter: believes that a democracy was simply a method towards decision making and that the people should be happy to choose someone else to make those decisions on their behalf.
2. Hobbes:
3. Plato:

**Task 8**

Read the essay that follows that answers the question below:

**“The benefits of a direct democracy are far superior to those for representative democracy.”**

**Discuss with reference to the ideas of relevant theorists.**

**(20 marks)**

* Pick out the K, Keg (total of 8) and A points (total of 6).
* Re-write the conclusion so that it is improved and can achieve all 4 points.

Democracy, translating as the rule of the people, is the style of governance employed in the United Kingdom. While a democratic nation adheres to a set of recognised ideological values, variations pertaining to the representation of power do exist. The two mainstream styles of democracy are direct; the people vote directly on all legislation at hand, and representative; the people elect a representative to uphold their views. The UK has opted for a system of representative democracy, however, its legitimacy and effectiveness continues to be questioned, with some believing that a system of direct democracy would be far superior. While both systems are fallible, this essay will nonetheless argue that representative democracy is superior, primarily due to its practicality.

Representative democracy is a favourable style of governance for a multitude of reasons. The main advantage of representative democracy holds over direct democracy is practicability. In a multicultural, densely populated and modern society, such as that of the UK, representative democracy can be effectively employed. The people elect representatives, who hold certain expertise and credentials, to embody their views and beliefs. This type of democracy is logistically feasible and allows for a relatively smooth running of a nation. Dissimilarly, if the UK were to adopt a system of direct democracy, the logistics of orchestrating mass referendums on all proposed legislation and amendments would quite simply be impossible and therefore not suited to a developed, modern 21st century nation. Another desirable characteristics of representative democracy, which makes it superior to direct democracy, is that government is composed of expertise and people experienced in their relevant field of work. Plato argues that without this you would have mob rule; delineating that were a country to follow the tenets of direct democracy, without the guidance of the educated, the ‘bewildered masses’ would steer the country into a state of nature. There is some logic to this argument, for surely someone who possess a depth of knowledge concerning the legislation at hand is more adequately equipped to deliberate on it than someone without this level of understanding? The argument to support representative democracy is strengthened by virtue of the division of labour. This means that ordinary citizens do not have to be involved in decision making – they are instead relieved from this burden – allowing them to carry on with their chosen pursuits. This can be advantageous for the individual and is integral to the smooth running of a nation. Additionally, it is increasingly argued that the expanding use of referenda and e-voting, in conjunction with a representative style of democracy, enhances the democratic process by driving engagement. It is suggested that the relatively high voter turn-out in referenda supports this claim. For example, voter turnout for the Scottish independence referendum was 86% - exceedingly higher than general election turnout. Political theorist J.S. Mill is a proponent of democracy in this sense, arguing that a democracy which encourages the involvement of the people precipitates the right decision being made. Representative democracy’s ability to draw in on aspects of direct democracy help to create a well-balanced and practical system of governance.

While these points clearly underpin the advantages of a system of representative democracy, there are certain fields within which direct democracy excels. The first pertains to accountability and legitimacy – it heightens the people’s control, making it a purer form of democracy than representative. The population are directly involved in decision making and this in tandem with popular participation and equality in franchise allows for the emergence of a precise view of all citizens. When legislation is deliberated in this matter, the public are more likely to accept the outcome. The Swiss cantons employ this style of governance. Theorist John Locke emphases the importance of legitimacy in democracy, stating that without the legitimacy, such as that provided within a system of direct democracy, the power held by the state is illegitimate. In modern British society, however, is direct democracy an idealistic and even utopian vision? And moreover, when the public are given the power to vote directly on legislation which requires a depth of knowledge, are they vulnerable to political manipulation and making the ‘wrong’ decision? Many would argue that the use of direct democracy, through referenda, allowed for this to occur during the Brexit vote. Brexit, for which the public voted in favour, has created an uncertain future for Britain, increased economic instability and weakened diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries. This outcome supports the Hobbesian view of democracy, but particularly direct democracy, which advocates that it is pernicious and will result in the destabilising of the state. Therefore, while increasing participation in politics through implementing a system of direct democracy would increase legitimacy, it is simply unattainable and can arguably have an insidious effect through allowing people who are devoid of the required intricate understanding of complex issues to hold the ability to directly influence legislation. It can also be argued that in a constant state of direct democracy, legitimacy and participation is not increased. The system tends to be flawed in the sense that in order to be practicable many people are resultantly excluded from the franchise (these tend to be people of a low class or who are uneducated). In essence, therefore, large swathes of the population are not receiving political representation by virtue of exclusion from the process. This was also the case in ancient Athens. The question must therefore be asked as to whether direct democracy provides greater legitimacy or merely the illusion of it? Evidence would support the later conclusion.

There are clear strengths to both representative and direct democracy. While many argue that direct democracy is superior by virtue of its inclusive nature and the increased accountability it provides, it is overly simplistic and idealistic to believe that this system would be practicable within a modern society. Its aims are unattainable. Representative democracy, instead, accounts for the needs of a developed nation, providing a system of effective democratic representation, which adheres to the key tenets of democracy and allows for smooth governance.