

**Political Literacy:** In countries with low political literacy, the complexity of issues might make it difficult for the general populace to make informed decisions.

### **Direct Democracy in Sri Lanka**

For Sri Lanka, implementing direct democracy would ensure that citizens have a stronger voice in governance, promoting participation and accountability. However, challenges such as the need for political literacy and the potential influence of populism must be addressed. Studying successful models like Switzerland could provide valuable insights into how direct democracy can be effectively integrated into Sri Lanka's political system.

### **Conclusion**

Direct democracy provides a powerful means for citizens to influence their government directly. While it has its challenges, the benefits of increased participation, accountability, and transparency make it a valuable complement to representative democracy. Balancing direct and representative democracy according to specific societal needs and contexts is crucial for its success.



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### **Direct Democracy: An Introduction**



#### **What is Direct Democracy?**

Direct democracy is a system where eligible citizens participate

directly in decision-making processes rather than electing representatives to do so on their behalf. This means that the general populace votes on laws, policies, and other significant issues directly.

#### **Key Components of Direct Democracy** **Referendums:**

A process where citizens vote directly on specific legislative measures or policies. In Sri Lanka, referendums are constitutionally provided, but have only been used once, in 1982. There are two *types of referendums*,<sup>6</sup>

**Mandatory Referendums:** These are required for significant changes, such as amendments to the constitution. They require both legislative approval and popular vote.

**Optional Referendums:** These occur when a government decision or policy is challenged by the public through a petition.



### Transparency

Decision-making processes are subjected to public scrutiny, promoting greater transparency.

### Challenges for Direct Democracy

**Practicality:** In large, populous nations, it can be impractical for all citizens to vote on every issue, leading to potential logistical and financial challenges.

**Populism:** Direct democracy can sometimes be swayed by popular opinion rather than expert advice or long-term considerations, potentially leading to suboptimal policy decisions.

### Liechtenstein

This small European country provides its citizens with the right to propose and challenge laws through referendums and initiatives, making it another significant example of direct democracy in practice.

### Germany

Direct democracy is practiced at local and state levels, allowing citizens to vote on regional issues through referendums.

### Italy

Italy permits national referendums where citizens can request a vote to repeal existing laws if sufficient signatures are gathered.

### Uruguay

Known for its use of referendums, Uruguay allows citizens to vote on and challenge laws, offering a South American example of direct democracy in action.

### Benefits of Direct Democracy

#### Enhanced Citizen Participation

Direct democracy encourages active political engagement among citizens, fostering a more informed and involved electorate.

#### Increased Accountability

Elected officials and governments are more accountable to the public, as their decisions can be directly approved or rejected by the voters.

**Initiatives:** This allows citizens to propose new laws or amendments to the constitution. If a proposal garners enough support through signatures, it is put to a public vote.

**Recall:** This grants voters the power to remove elected officials from office before the end of their term. While Sri Lanka has not yet implemented recall elections, there has been significant public discussion about this power, particularly following the removal of an executive president in 2022.

### Examples of Direct Democracy in Action

#### Switzerland

Often cited as the prime example of direct democracy, Switzerland allows frequent referendums and initiatives at both national and local levels. Swiss citizens have used these tools to influence over 240 issues in the past 150 years.

#### California, USA

California has a robust system of direct democracy, allowing citizens to propose and vote on laws and constitutional amendments through initiatives and referendums. A notable example is the 2003 recall election of Governor Gray Davis.