1.2 Direct versus Representative Democracy and Debates on Reform: 30-minute Pack

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Short answer questions may be answered in notes or bullet points; for levels-marked questions write in full sentences and construct a developed argument.

1 Evaluate the extent to which the UK faces a participation crisis, and assess the effectiveness of the proposed reforms of compulsory voting, e-democracy, wider use of referendums and lowering the voting age to 16 in addressing that crisis.

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(Total for Question 1 is 30 marks)

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Mark scheme · 1.2 Direct versus Representative Democracy and Debates on Reform: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

Level 0 No relevant material.	**0**
Level 1 Limited knowledge of participation trends or reforms, with little analysis or evaluation. Judgement, if present, is unsupported or assertive rather than evidenced.	**1-7**
Level 2 Clear, accurate knowledge of participation evidence and reforms, with some developed analysis of how reforms might address problems. Evaluation is present but may be one-sided or rely on general claims.	**8-15**
Level 3 Detailed, accurate knowledge used to construct a sustained analysis of participation trends and the strengths and weaknesses of each reform, with balanced evaluation and some synthesis across reforms, leading to a reasoned judgement.	**16-23**
Level 4 Sophisticated, wide-ranging knowledge and analysis used to produce a tightly argued evaluation that weighs evidence of a participation crisis against the realistic effects, trade offs and feasibility of each reform, and reaches a well-substantiated, balanced conclusion on the overall extent of the crisis and the likely effectiveness of the reforms.	**24-30**

Indicative content:

- Evidence of a participation crisis: falling turnout in some UK general elections compared with mid 20th century peaks, long-term decline in membership of major parties since the 1990s, reduced trade union political influence, and a decline in traditional forms of local activism and canvassing.
- Qualification: turnout and participation are uneven rather than uniformly low, with spikes in engagement for disputed referendums or charismatic leaders; younger cohorts show different patterns of engagement such as social media activism and protest rather than party membership.
- Compulsory voting case for: could raise turnout quickly, increase the representativeness of electoral outcomes and reduce the bias of electorates towards older and more affluent voters.
- Compulsory voting case against: coerced voting may increase informal or uninformed ballots, could be resisted as illiberal in a liberal democracy, and implementation would require enforcement mechanisms and sanctions that raise practical and ethical questions.
- E-democracy case for: lowers costs of participation, enables quicker mobilisation, and can reach underrepresented groups through online registration, e-petitions and digital consultations; examples include large numbers of petition signatories and petition-driven debates.
- E-democracy case against: digital divides and misinformation risk entrenching inequalities, online engagement is often shallow or ephemeral, and cybersecurity and verification raise practical barriers to making e-democracy fully reliable and trust-worthy.
- Referendums case for: can boost engagement on specific issues, create high-profile moments of public involvement and increase the perceived legitimacy of major constitutional decisions.
- Referendums case against: risk of oversimplification, populist manipulation, weakening of parliamentary deliberation and the marginalisation of minority rights, as critics argued in the 2016 EU referendum.
- Lower voting age case for: enfranchising 16 and 17 year olds can embed voting habits early and ensure policies affecting youth are represented, with the Scottish experience in 2014 as a relevant example.
- Lower voting age case against: questions about political maturity and the need for civic education, though evidence from jurisdictions where 16 year olds vote suggests mixed but often positive effects on turnout among young people.
- Synthesis: different reforms address different aspects of the participation problem; compulsory voting is blunt and controversial but effective at raising turnout, e-democracy and lowering the voting age are incremental and can change patterns of engagement over time, and referendums address salience but carry risks to representative institutions.
- Conclusion: a nuanced judgement may argue that the UK faces important participation challenges rather than a single unified crisis, and a package of targeted reforms, improved civic education and measures to reduce inequality of access may be more effective than any single reform on its own.

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