

# Should referendums be more widely used

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



Referendum can be defined as when the citizens either all or those in specific regions vote on a specific issue of public importance and it is conducted nationally, regionally, and locally an example of a referendum is the 2011 referendum on changing the current first past the post system to proportional representative. The public have one vote each on a specific issue and the referendum focuses on a single question with a yes/no answer.

Many countries such as the United Kingdom use referendums There are many advantages to using referendums in the United Kingdom it entrenches constitutional change and it is a pure form of direct democracy because it lets the electorate decide on the outcome of the referendum also the people's views on a particular question are clearly indicated a referendum helps to make decisions legitimate and confirms the principle of government by consent.

Another advantage of referendums is that provides increased acceptance for decisions because if the citizens have demonstrated their expressed consent, they are more likely to accept the decision. Another important advantage to referendums is that it prevents governments from making unpopular decisions when a “ no” vote is delivered. Referendums entrenches constitutional changes it protects them from attacks by future governments whose policies may be short term because in order to reverse a referendum decision, it is widely accepted that a fresh referendum would have to be held.

This principle prevents the possibility that a future government would simply dismantle constitutional reforms already made. The disadvantages of referendums can be said that some issues may be too complex for the

<https://assignbuster.com/should-referendums-be-more-widely-used/>

majority of the citizens to understand and make a judgement on. We may be better educated than ever but some political questions may be too difficult and technical, if people don't understand the question they are being asked in the referendum they could end up making the wrong choice for themselves and the wider society.

Many would argue that such matters should be left to our elected representatives under the guidance of experts as it is far too complex for the majority of citizens. An important disadvantage of referendums could be said that there is a danger that some people will use referendums as an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the government and ignore the issue in question altogether. The 2004 vote on the devolution for the North East England could be said to have been the result of such an effect.

There is a danger that in a referendum one side will prevail simply because it has more resources although many limitations are placed on campaign expenditure it seems that money will always play a decisive role. The most serious objection could be described as the danger of the tyranny of the majority. Referendums are effectively government by the majority and the minority that lose out are not taken into account. Elected representatives are able to weigh up the interests of the majority against those of the minorities. We expect modern democratic governments to protect minorities.

Referendums leave them defenceless. This danger was recognised by liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill. Referendums that have been used recently is the 2004 North East England vote on if there should be an elected assembly for the North East region it produced 22.1% Yes vote and 77.9% No vote and the turnout was 47.7% the proposal to setting up assemblies in the <https://assignbuster.com/should-referendums-be-more-widely-used/>

North East was rejected. The 2005 referendum on if Edinburgh should introduce a congestion charge in the city centre produced a yes vote 25.6% and a no vote 74.4% the turnout 61. % this proposal was also rejected.

The 2008 referendum in Manchester which produced 21.2% yes vote and 78.7% no vote the turnout was 53.2% on a congestion charge was also rejected. The last referendum which was the 2011 referendum on if the current first past the post electoral system should be changed to proportional representative produced a yes vote 32.1% and a no vote 67.9% and the voter turnout was 42.2% this proposal was also rejected. The referendums are used because it is a pure form of direct democracy and it makes sure that decisions are legitimate.

In all the referendums held the one thing they all had in common is that they were concerned with important constitutional changes. This means that they were about proposed changes to the system of government. Constitutional changes in the past have not been subjected to popular approval but the electorate are now better informed and therefore insist on being consulted in decisions which affect them. In conclusion I think that referendums should be held because as citizens we are better informed in current issues and therefore we would like to be consulted in decisions which affect us as citizens.