Voting for growth

Sir—Your “Politics brief” on direct democracy (August 14th) ignores a crucial aspect, namely its effect on the economy. Over the past decades scholars have carried out serious econometric cross-section studies, using the fact that the voters in the 26 Swiss cantons have different opportunities for undertaking popular referendums and initiatives. In some cantons, for instance, almost any issue can be brought to the vote. In others, the set of issues is more restricted, for example, it excludes the budget.

The result of more extended participation rights for voters is striking: cheaper and more efficient provision of public services; lower debt per person; higher income per person; and, most importantly, a happier population. The causation does indeed run from direct democracy to these outcomes, not the other way round, and no other factors are responsible. Direct democracy is even more beneficial than you suggest.

Zurich

BRUNO FREY