

**Definition and measurement**

Voting in national parliamentary elections is one indicator of people's participation in their community's national life. The indicator used here to measure the participation of individuals to the electoral process is the "voter turnout", i.e. the number of individuals that cast a ballot during an election as a share of the population of voting age – generally the population aged 18 or more – as available from administrative records of member countries. Different types of elections occur in different countries and for different geographical jurisdictions. For some countries, it should be noted, turnout for presidential elections and regional elections may be higher than for national parliamentary elections, perhaps because those elected through these ballots are constitutionally more important for how those countries are run. Equally, relatively frequent elections may reduce turnout. Data about voter turnout are extracted from the international database organised by the Institute for Democratic and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). This section also presents data on the turnout of voters by selected socio-demographic characteristics. These data, based on surveys of individuals undertaken after major elections, are based on the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), an international research program that collects comparable data on elections. Estimates of the total voter turn-out from these surveys may differ from those based on administrative data, shown in CO4.1. Highly educated people are defined as those who have attended university and low levels as those who have not completed secondary school.

**A high voter turnout is a sign that a country's political system enjoys a strong degree of participation.** While low voter turnout might reflect satisfaction in the country's management, it also implies that the political system reflects the will of a limited number of citizens.

**Voter turnout rates in most recent parliamentary elections varied hugely across OECD countries (Panel A, CO4.1).** Over nine in every ten people turned out to vote in Australia, compared to less than one in every two in Korea. The legal imperative to vote in some countries does not appear to explain much of the observed cross-country variation. Parliamentary voting is a legal obligation in Australia, Belgium, Greece, Luxembourg, Mexico, parts of Switzerland and Turkey. Many of these countries also recorded low rates of voter turnout.

**Voter turnout has generally declined in most OECD countries in the last generation (Panel B, CO4.2).** Very large falls in voter turnout in the last generation were recorded in the Czech and Slovak Republics, Korea and the United States. Only four OECD countries have bucked the general trend towards lower voting turnout: Australia, Luxembourg, Mexico and Spain.

**More educated people are more likely to vote than less educated people (CO4.2).** However, the average OECD figure hides considerable variation. The voting gap between the highly and less well-educated populations is very large in the United States, Hungary and Poland. However, in a minority of countries, including Korea, Ireland and Chile, less educated people are somewhat more likely to vote than better educated people.

**Older people are much more likely to vote than younger people (CO4.3).** Especially large differences are found in Korea, Japan and the United Kingdom. Unusually, in Italy, Belgium and Australia there is a small tendency for the young to vote more than the old. The higher participation of elderly people in national elections, as well as the growing share of older people as population ageing takes place, may also influence the political process, increasing the risk of electoral sanctions for governments introducing cuts to social programmes that disproportionately benefit the elderly.

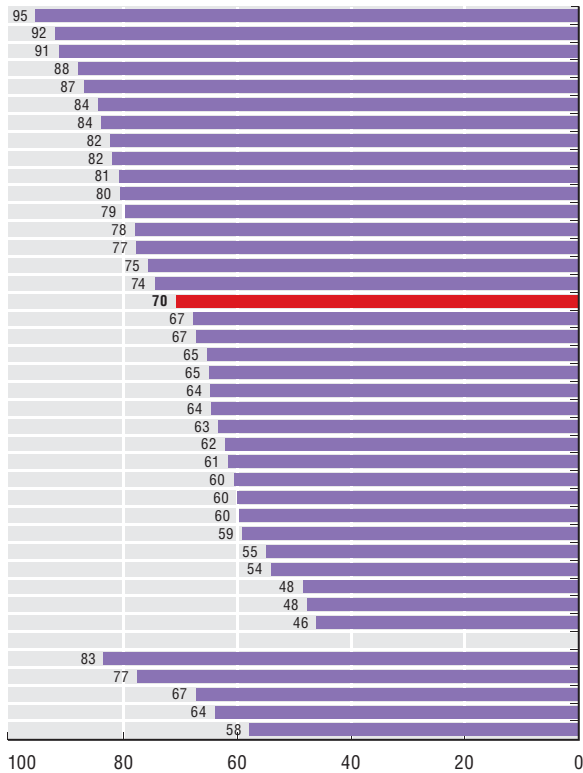
**Figure note**

Figure CO4.2: Low education refers to category 1-4 in CSES, from none to incomplete secondary and high education refers to category 7-8, university level.

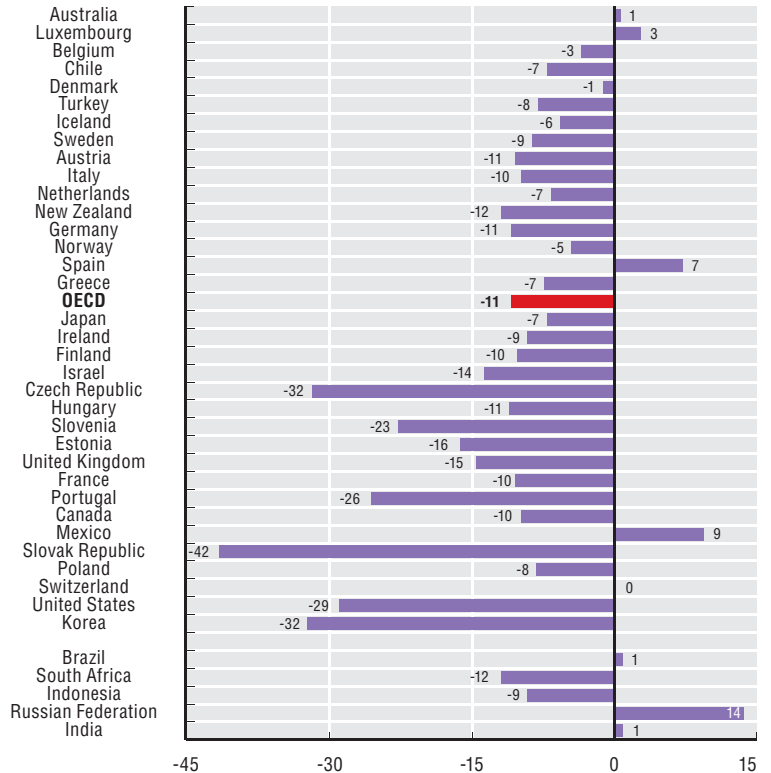
Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

CO4.1. Voting rates are generally falling

Panel A. Voting rates in the most recent election, percentages (↘)

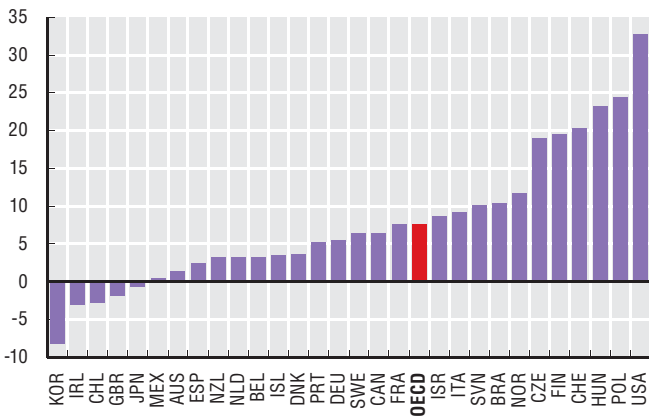


Panel B. Change in voting rates, percentage points (1980 to most recent election)



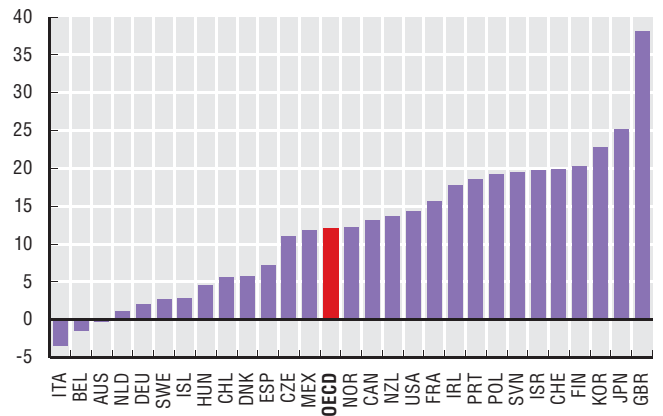
CO4.2. More educated people are more likely to vote

Percentage point difference in voting rates between high and low educated people



CO4.3. Older people are more likely to vote

Percentage point difference in voting rates between those 55+ years old and those 16-35 years old



Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) ([www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)), Module 2 and 3 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) ([www.cses.org](http://www.cses.org)).

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