

Voting

A corrigendum has been issued for this page. See: <http://www.oecd.org/about/publishing/Corrigendum-Society-at-a-Glance-2016.pdf>

Voter turnout rates vary substantially across the OECD. A high voter turnout is a sign that a country's political system enjoys a strong degree of participation or that voting is mandatory. Voting-age turnout rates in parliamentary elections are above 80% in Australia, Belgium, Denmark and Turkey where voting is mandatory, as well as in Iceland, Korea and Sweden. They are below 50% in Switzerland (Figure 7.7). Low turnout not only reflects limited participation by registered voters, but possibly also that many potential voters do not register. Among non-OECD countries, voter turnout is highest in Indonesia (83%) and lowest in Colombia (52%).

In general, younger voters are less likely to cast their vote than the electorate in general: voter turnout among 18 to 24 year-olds is, on average, 16 percentage points lower than for adults aged 25 to 50 inclusive (Figure 7.8). In the United Kingdom, Slovak Republic and Israel, young people are much less likely to vote than prime-age individuals. Only in Korea are younger voters more likely to cast their vote than prime-age individuals. On average there is no significant difference in voter turnout between men and women.

Overall interest in politics is an important factor for social cohesion. This constitutes a key challenge for politicians to ensure that most citizens feel concerned by politics and participate as actors into the political life of the society. **On average one in four young people reports to be not at all interested in politics** compared to one in five for the total population in OECD (Figure 7.9). Chile and Portugal report the highest level of disinterest in politics among the total population whereas Denmark, Germany, Japan and Norway report the lowest levels. Among young people aged 15 to 29, disinterest in politics is high in Chile, the Czech Republic and Hungary. In Brazil and Colombia, more than 40% reported to be not at all interested in politics.

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 in the electoral process is the "Voting age population turnout", i.e. the percentage of the voting age population (VAP) that actually voted – as available from administrative records of member countries. The VAP is an estimate as it is difficult to accurately account for people who are of voting age but who are not registered voters, whatever the reason. In countries where registration is compulsory and/or automatic (e.g. based on the civil register), as, for example in Scandinavian countries, the number of registered voters will be close to the VAP.

Definition and measurement (cont.)

Cross-national comparisons for voter turnout data can be affected by a variety of factors including, the legal voting age, the voting registration system (automatic or requiring action by the potential voter) and whether voting is compulsory or not. In most OECD and European countries, the legal voting age in the national elections is 18 years old, but young people can vote from age 16 in Austria and from age 17 in Korea.

Different types of elections occur in different countries according to their institutional structure and 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. Data about voter turnout are extracted from the international database managed by the Institute for Democratic and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).

However, IDEA does not involve a disaggregation of voters by age and gender. For information on younger voters and by gender, surveys had to be relied upon. Data have been taken from both the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES module 4: 2011-16), and the European Social Surveys (ESS). The ESS has data on participation in the last national election (parliamentary or presidential). However, sample sizes are small, and for that reason CSES data has been used where available.

Data on interest in politics, are from the European Social Surveys (ESS) and the Word Value Survey Wave 6: 2010-14 (WVS). The questions in both surveys ask about *How interested in politics* and the respondent to choose between four categories: very interested, quite interested, hardly interested and not at all interested. Data refer to the rate of people answering to be not at all interested in politics.

Figure notes

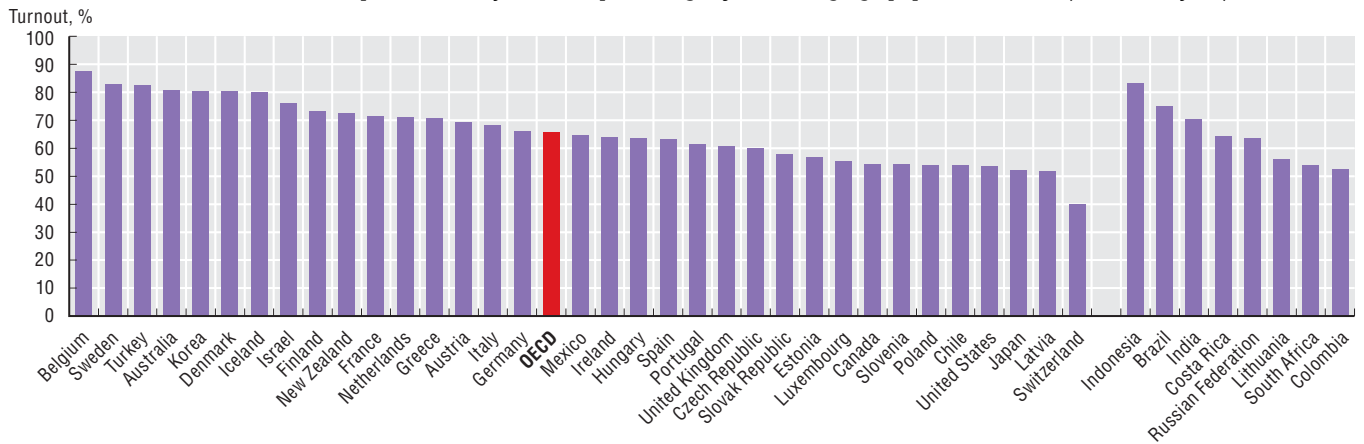
Figure 7.7: Data refer to parliamentary elections, with the exceptions of Colombia, France, Korea, Mexico, Poland, the Russian Federation and the United States, where presidential elections are considered due to higher participation rates. Instead of 2015: 2014: Belgium, Hungary, Japan, Latvia, New Zealand, Slovenia, Sweden; 2013: Australia, Austria, Chile, Czech Republic, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg; 2012: France, Korea, Lithuania, Mexico, Netherlands, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, United States; 2011: Canada, Ireland, Spain, and Switzerland. Data for Norway are not available. Data for Norway are not available.

Figure 7.8: Data for Chile, Latvia, Luxembourg and Turkey are not available.

Figure 7.9: Data for Canada, Greece, Latvia and Luxembourg are not available.

7.7. Large variation in electoral participation in OECD countries

Voter turnout in latest parliamentary election, percentage of the voting age population, 2015 (or nearest year)

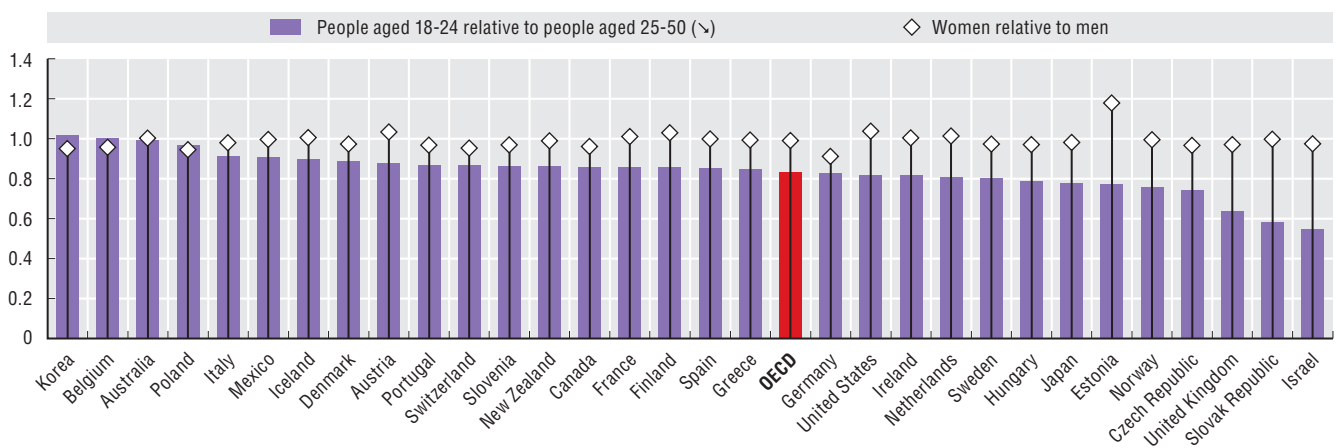


Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) voter turnout database.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933405740>

7.8. Young people tend to vote less

Voter turnout ratios for different population groups, around 2012/13

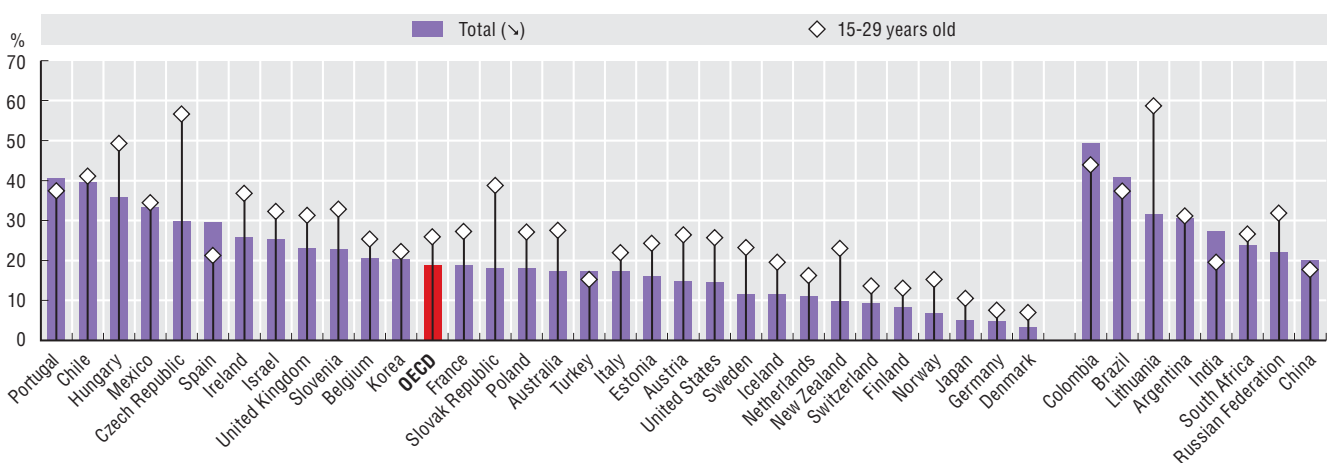


Source: Module 4 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES 2011-16) and European Social Survey (ESS) for other countries.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933405752>

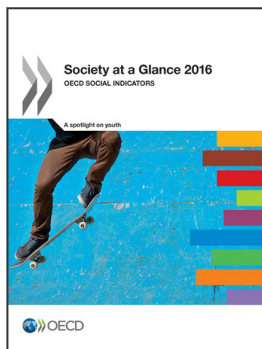
7.9. One in four young people in OECD not at all interested in politics

Share of people reporting to be not at all interested in politics, by age group, around 2012-14



Source: European Social Survey ESS6-2012, ESS7-2014 and World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-14.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933405767>



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