

CO4.2: Participation rates of first-time voters

Definitions and methodology

This indicator presents information on voting turnout and gender and age differences in voting turnout through two main measures:

- *Voter turnout in the latest parliamentary election*, based on administrative information collected by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).
- *Voter turnout ratios for women relative to men and for people aged 18-24 relative to people aged 25-50*, based on data taken from the taken from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES 2011-2016).

Voter participation or turnout is defined here as the number of votes cast in a national parliamentary (and/or presidential election) as a proportion of the voting age population – that is, the total number of potential voters of voting age in the given country (generally the population aged 18 and over that meet given residency and/or citizenship requirements). International comparisons of voter turnout rates can be affected by differences in legal voting age, the voter registration process, and whether voting is compulsory or not (see comparability and data issues below).

In addition to these main measures, this indicator also presents information on public interest in politics through one measure:

- *Proportion (%) of people reporting that they are 'not at all interested' in politics, by age group*. These data come from the World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 6 (2010-2014), where respondents were about their interest in politics and could choose from four responses: very interested, quite interested, hardly interested and not at all interested. Data refer to the proportion of people answering that they are 'not at all interested' in politics.

Key findings

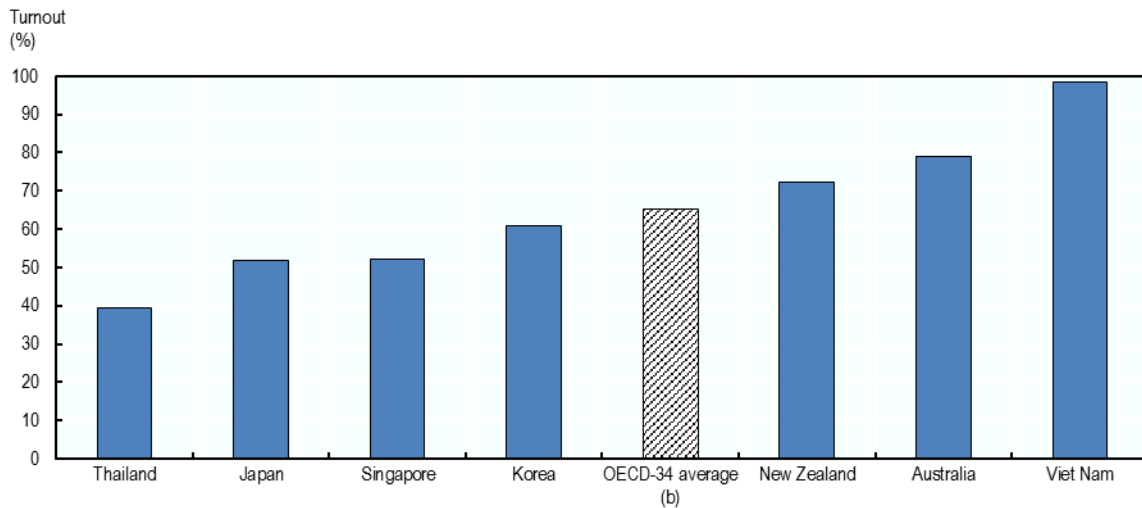
Voter turnout rates differ drastically across the covered Asia/Pacific countries (Chart CO4.2.A). In some of the covered countries, like Japan, Korea, Singapore and especially Thailand, turnout rates are relatively low – in the former three countries, voter turnout at the latest parliamentary election was only around 50-60%, while in Thailand it was as low as 39.4%. In others, however, turnout is comparatively high. For example, in Australia – where voting is compulsory for all citizens aged 18 and over – voter turnout at the latest parliamentary was, at 79.0%, well above the average for OECD countries (65.2%). In Viet Nam, turnout at the last election was as high as 98.3%.

Gender differences in voter turnout are slim in the covered Asia/Pacific countries, but young people are sometimes much less likely to vote than their older counterparts (Table CO4.2.A). Comparable data on differences in voter turnout between men and women and across age groups are available for only a few of the covered Asia/Pacific countries. However, those data that do exist show that while across the covered countries voter turnout does not differ much between men and women, in some of the covered countries turnout

Other relevant indicators: CO4.1 Participation in voluntary work and membership of groups and organisations for young adults; CO3.1 Educational attainment by gender

among young people aged 18-24 is as much as 25% (Korea) or 30% (Japan) lower than turnout among slightly older people aged 25-50. Notably, though, this is not the case in Australia – there, voter turnout rates among people aged 18-24 are effectively identical to those for people aged 25-50.

Chart CO4.2.A. Voter turnout in the latest parliamentary election, 2016 or latest available^a
 % of the voting age population



Note: Voting Age Population (VAP) refers to the total number of potential voters of voting age in a given country. Voting age population (VAP) turnout statistics are calculated by dividing the total vote by an estimated voting age population.

a) Data for Japan, Thailand and New Zealand refer to 2014, and for Singapore to 2015

b) The OECD-34 average refers to the unweighted average across OECD member countries with available and comparable data. See OECD Family Database Indicator CO4.2 (<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>) for more detail.

Sources: [All countries: IDEA voter turnout database as of June 2017](#); [OECD-34 average: OECD Family Database Indicator 4.2](#)

Table CO4.2.A. Gender and age differences in voter turnout, latest available year
 Voter turnout ratios for different population groups

| | Year | Women relative to men | People aged 18-24 relative to people aged 25-50 |
|------------------|------|-----------------------|---|
| Australia | 2013 | 1.00 | 0.99 |
| China | - | .. | .. |
| Hong Kong, China | - | .. | .. |
| Japan | 2013 | 0.96 | 0.69 |
| Korea | 2012 | 0.98 | 0.75 |
| New Zealand | 2011 | 0.99 | 0.86 |
| Singapore | - | .. | .. |
| Thailand | 2011 | 0.98 | 0.90 |
| Viet Nam | - | .. | .. |
| OECD average | - | 0.99 | 0.83 |

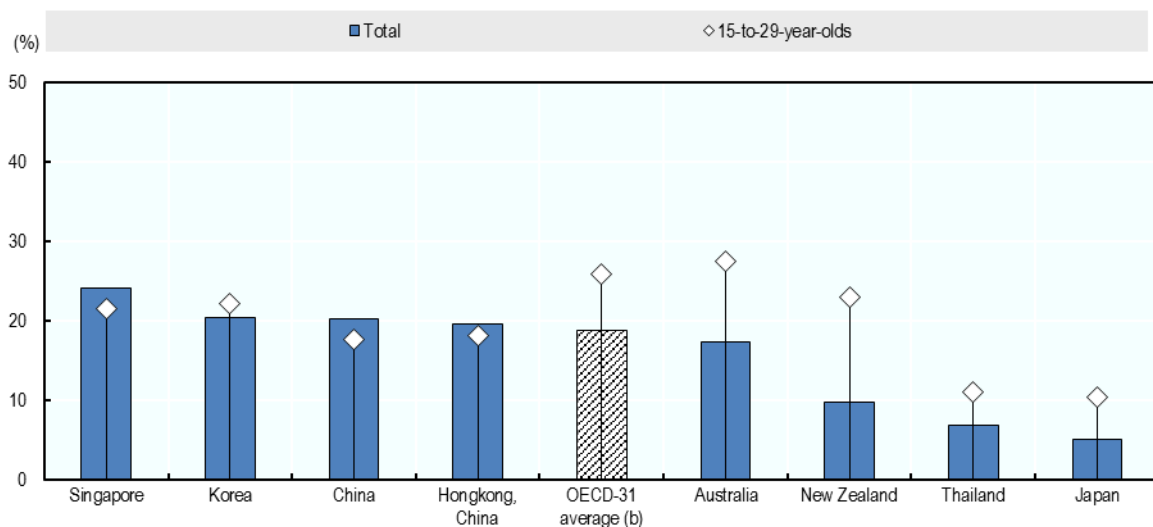
a) The OECD average refers to the unweighted average across OECD member countries with available and comparable data. See OECD Family Database Indicator CO4.2 (<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>) for more detail.

Sources: [Australia, Korea, Japan, New Zealand and Thailand: Module 4 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems \(CSES 2011-2016\)](#); [OECD average: OECD Family Database Indicator 4.2](#)

The share of young people expressing a lack of interest in politics varies somewhat across the covered Asia/Pacific countries (Chart CO4.2.B). In some of the covered countries, the share of young people aged 15-29 reporting that they are 'not at all interested' in politics is comparatively low – in Thailand and Japan, for example, only about 11% of young people say that they are 'not at all interested' in politics, well below the average for OECD countries (26%). In others, like New Zealand and especially Australia, it is slightly higher (23% and 28%, respectively), though still relatively similar to the OECD average. Notably, in most of the covered Asia/Pacific countries young people are not much more likely – and in some cases are actually slightly less likely – than the general population to express a lack of interest in politics. In fact, among the covered countries, only Australia and New Zealand see any real difference between young people aged 15-29 and the total population in the share reporting that they are 'not at all interested' in politics.

Chart CO4.2.B. Lack of interest in politics, around 2010-2014

Proportion (%) of people reporting that they are 'not at all interested' in politics, by age group



a) Data for Korea and Japan refer to 2010, for New Zealand to 2011, for Australia, China and Singapore to 2012, and for Hong Kong and Thailand to 2013
 b) The OECD-31 average refers to the unweighted average across OECD member countries with available and comparable data. It is based on data from the European Social Survey for European OECD countries and the World Values Survey for non-European OECD countries. See OECD Family Database Indicator CO4.2 (<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>) for more detail.

Sources: [All countries: World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014](#); [OECD-31 average: OECD Family Database Indicator 4.2](#)

Comparability and data issues

The data on voter turnout used in this indicator come from two sources: the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). The IDEA database is built on administrative data, and is arguably the most reliable source of information on voter turnout. It does not, however, provide data on turnout disaggregated by demographic markers like age and sex. For this

reason, the data in Table CO4.2.A on differences in voter turnout between men and women and across age groups are taken from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems ‘survey’ (CSES module 4, 2011-2016) – an international collaborative research programme whereby a common ‘module’ of surveys questions is placed into national post-election surveys, with the resulting common data later merged to form one comparable international dataset. Detailed information on the methods used by the CSES can be found on the [CSES website](#).

Cross-national differences in voter turnout may be affected by a variety of factors, such as the legal voting age, the system of registration/enrolment, and whether or not voting is compulsory. In most of Asia/Pacific countries covered here the legal voting age is 18, although it is slightly higher in Korea (19) and Singapore (21). Only Australia enforces compulsory voting, although Thailand also has compulsory voting laws that are not currently enforced (IDEA, 2016).

The data on interest in politics used in Chart CO4.2 are taken from the World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 6 (2010-2014). The World Values Survey (WVS) is a worldwide network of representative national surveys carried out in almost 100 countries covering almost 90 percent of the world's population. A common questionnaire is used across countries. Six waves of surveys have been released from 1981 to 2014, with the latest (Wave 6) carried out over the 2010/2014 period. Sample sizes do vary somewhat across the covered Asia/Pacific countries, from around 850 in New Zealand, 1000 in Hong Kong (China), and 1200 in Korea and Thailand, to approximately 2000 in Singapore, 2300 in China and close to 2500 in Japan. For more detail on the methods used by the World Values Survey, see the documentation [available here](#) on the WVS website.

Sources and further reading: Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), (2016), *Compulsory Voting*, http://www.oldsite.idea.int/vt/compulsory_voting.cfm [Accessed: 25 June 2017]; World Values Survey, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>; OECD (2014), *Society at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2014*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264220553-en>