

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:

- *The 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 7 (2017-2020), 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

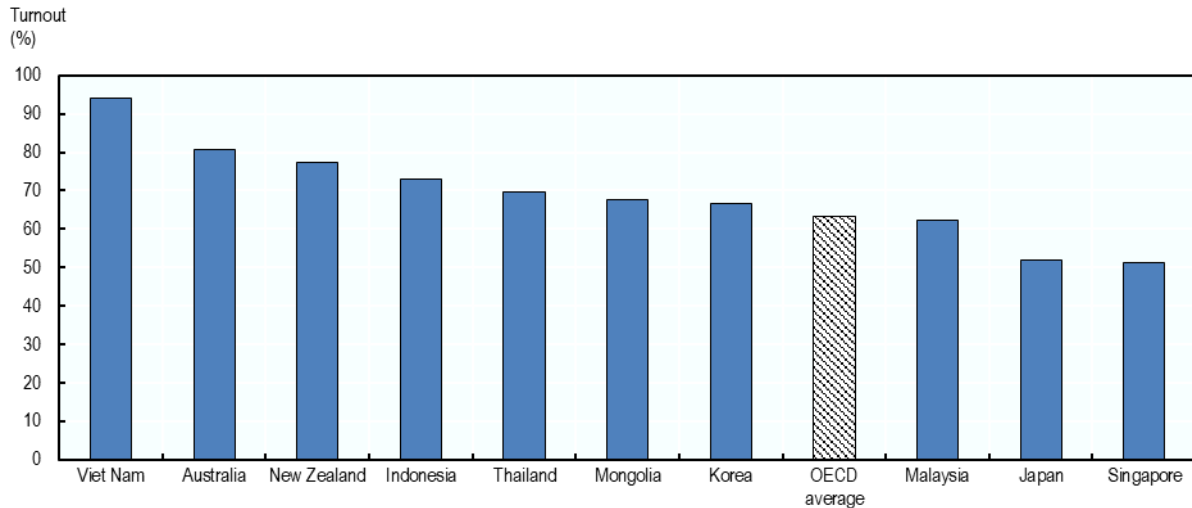
Voter turnout rates differ drastically across the covered Asia/Pacific countries (Chart CO4.2.A). In some of the covered countries, like Japan and Singapore, turnout rates are relatively low – voter turnout at the latest parliamentary election was only around 52%. In others, however, turnout is comparatively high. For example, in Australia – where voting is compulsory for all citizens aged 18 and over – voter turnout at the latest parliamentary was, at 80.8%, well above the average for OECD countries (63.1%). In Viet Nam, turnouts at the last elections was as high as 94%.

Gender differences in voter turnout are slim in the covered Asia/Pacific countries, but young people are 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 among young people aged 18-24 is as much as 25% (Korea) or 30% (Japan) lower than turnout among

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

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
 % of the voting age population, 2021 or latest available



Note: 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. Data for Japan refer to 2014, for Malaysia to 2015, for Australia, Indonesia and Thailand to 2019, and for Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand and Singapore to 2020.

Sources: All countries: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) <https://www.idea.int>; OECD average: Society at a Glance Asia/Pacific 2021.

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

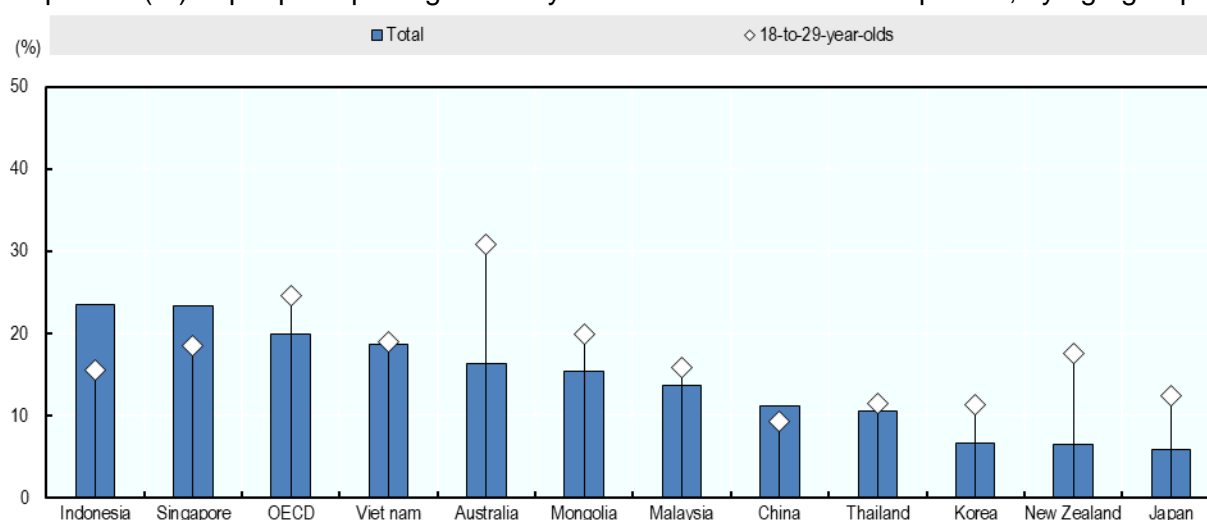
a) The OECD average refers to the unweighted average across OECD member countries with available and comparable data. See OECD Family Database Indicator CO4.2 (<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>) for more detail.

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 18-29 reporting that they are 'not at all interested' in politics is comparatively low – in China and Korea, for example, only about 9% and 11% of young people say that they are 'not at all interested' in politics, well below the average for OECD countries (25%). In others, especially Australia, it is slightly higher (31%), 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 18-29 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 2017-2020

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



Note: Data for each country refers to different years; Australia 2018, China 2018, Indonesia 2018, Japan 2019, Malaysia 2018, Mongolia 2020, New Zealand 2019, Singapore 2020, South Korea 2018, Thailand 2018 and Vietnam 2020. The OECD-32 average refers to the unweighted average across OECD member countries with available and comparable data during period 2017-2020.

Sources: [All countries: World Values Survey Wave 7: 2017-2020](#)

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: Thailand also has compulsory voting laws but these are not enforced.

The data on interest in politics used in Chart CO4.2 are taken from the World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 7 (2017-2020). 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. Seven waves of surveys have been released from 1981 to 2020, with the latest (Wave 7) carried out over the 2017/2021 period. Sample sizes do vary somewhat across the covered Asia/Pacific countries, from around 1000 in New Zealand, and 1200 in Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam to approximately 2000 in Australia and Singapore, 3000 in China and close to 3200 in Indonesia. 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), (2021), *Special Voting Arrangements: Between the Convenience of Voting and the Integrity of Elections*, <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2021.56> [Accessed: 13 December 2021]; World Values Survey, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>; OECD (2019), *Society at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2019*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264220553-en>