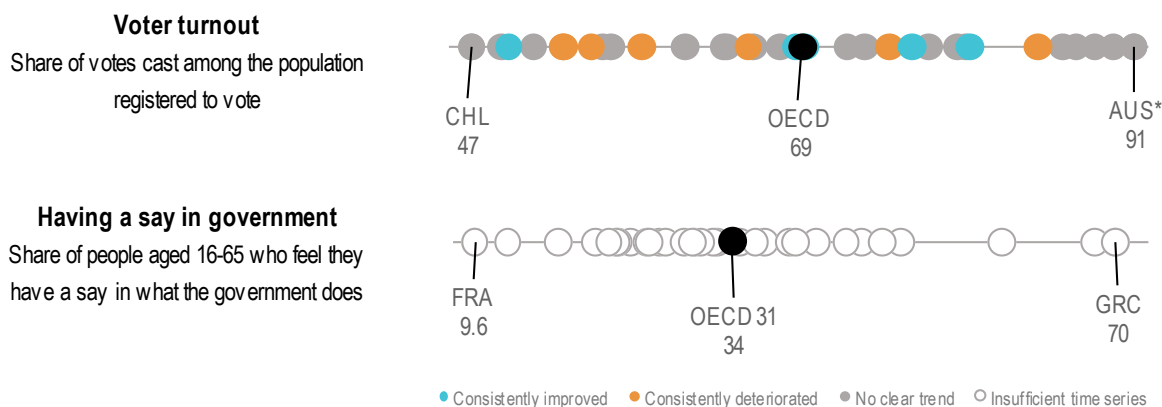


12 Civic Engagement

Civic Engagement is about whether citizens can and do take part in important civic activities that enable them to shape the society they live in. Voter turnout in OECD countries has remained relatively stable since 2010-13, and was around 69% between 2016-19. By contrast, only 1 in 3 people in OECD countries feel that they have a say in what the government does. While older people are more likely to vote, the middle-aged are most likely to feel they have a say – though these patterns vary across OECD countries. 84% of people who have finished tertiary education say they voted, compared to 78% of those educated to secondary level. Gender differences are generally small – and parity has been reached for the OECD on average in both voter turnout and having a say in government. Nevertheless, some countries still have gender gaps in this domain, and these tend to favour women.

Figure 12.1. Civic Engagement snapshot: current levels, and direction of change since 2010



Note: The snapshot depicts data for 2019, or the latest available year, for each indicator. The colour of the circle indicates the direction of change, relative to 2010, or the closest available year: improvement is shown in blue, deterioration in orange, and no clear or consistent change in grey, and insufficient time series to determine trends in white. For each indicator, the OECD country with the lowest (on the left) and highest (on the right) well-being level are labelled, along with the OECD average. For full details of the methodology, see the Reader's Guide.

* for voter turnout signifies that compulsory voting is practiced.

Source: *Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)* (database) (2019), <https://www.idea.int/>; *OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC)* (database) (2019), <https://oecd.org/skills/piaac/>.

Voter turnout

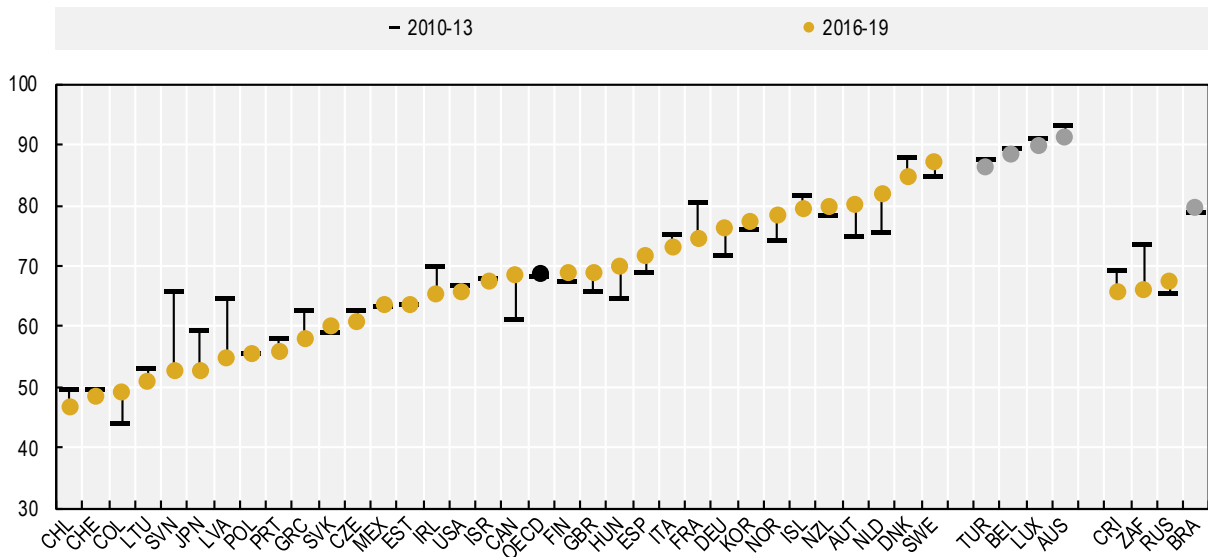
Voter turnout in 2016-19 ranges from 91% in Australia, where electoral participation is compulsory, to 46.5% in Chile (Figure 12.2). On average, about two-thirds of people registered to vote in OECD countries cast a ballot in the last election (68.7%), a share that has remained stable since 2010-13. This stability masks gains of 5 or more percentage points in Austria, Canada, Colombia, Hungary and the Netherlands (mostly countries with above-average voter turnout rates already), and more substantial falls exceeding 7 percentage points in Japan, and 10 percentage points in Latvia and Slovenia.

Having a say in what the government does

The share of people who feel that they have a say in what the government does ranges from 9.6% in France to almost 70% in Lithuania and Greece, and is 34% for OECD countries on average (Figure 12.3). Conversely, 46% of people, on average, feel they have no say, and the remaining 20% are ambivalent. Nordic countries, Chile, Lithuania, Greece and the United States are the only OECD countries where the share of people declaring that they have a say in government exceeds the share of those who report having no say.

Figure 12.2. Substantial falls in voter turnout since 2010-13 are concentrated in a few countries

Votes cast among the population registered to vote, percentage



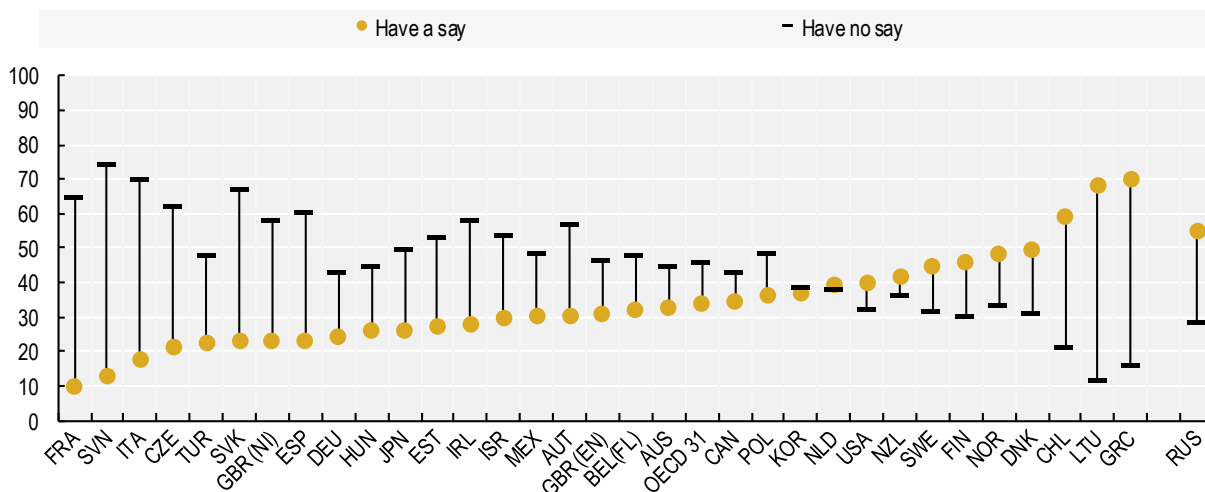
Note: The latest available year is 2019 for Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Israel, Spain and South Africa; 2018 for Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mexico, Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey and the Russian Federation; 2017 for Austria, Chile, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom; 2016 for Australia, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, the Slovak Republic and the United States; 2015 for Canada, Poland, Portugal and Switzerland; and 2014 for Japan. The earliest available year is 2010 for Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Sweden and the United Kingdom; 2011 for Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and Turkey; 2012 for France, Greece, Japan, Korea, Lithuania, Mexico, the United States and the Russian Federation; and 2013 for Austria, Chile, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg and Norway. National elections refer to presidential elections in Brazil, France, Korea, Mexico, Poland, the Russian Federation and the United States, and to parliamentary elections for other countries. Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Luxembourg and Turkey (shown in grey) enforce compulsory voting.

Source: *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)* (database) (2019), <https://www.idea.int/>.

StatLink  <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934082347>

Figure 12.3. Only one in three people feel they have a say in what government does

Share of people aged 16-65 who feel they have a say/no say in government, percentage, around 2012



Note: Data refer to 2011-12 for Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, Poland, the Russian Federation, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom; 2012 for France; 2014-15 for Chile, Greece, Israel, Lithuania, New Zealand, Slovenia and Turkey; and 2017 for Mexico, Hungary and the United States. Data for Belgium refer to Flanders; those for England and Northern Ireland are reported separately. Data for the Russian Federation exclude the Moscow municipal area. The OECD average includes both England and Northern Ireland, and a simple average of the 2012-14 (41.6% for have a say, 35.2% for have no say, not shown here) and 2017 data collection waves for the United States. It excludes Colombia, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal and Switzerland, due to a lack of available data.

Source: OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (database), <https://oecd.org/skills/piaac/>.

StatLink  <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934082366>

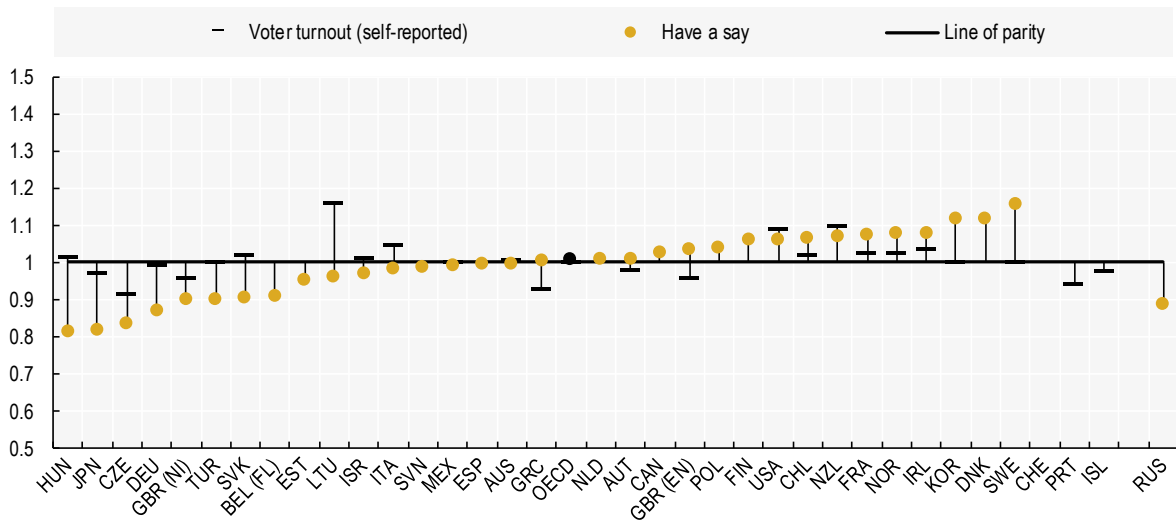
Civic Engagement inequalities: gaps between population groups

Gender gaps in Civic Engagement outcomes are small and marginally favour women

For most OECD countries, differences between men and women in voting behaviour and in feelings of having a say in what the government does are very small. Indeed, gender parity has been achieved for the OECD, on average. Where differences do exist, women tend to do better in a small majority of countries (Figure 12.4). The gender gap in favour of women is largest in Nordic countries and Korea, with Sweden recording the largest difference (where 47.9% of women, and 41.3% of men, feel they have a say in government). The Czech Republic, Japan and Hungary have the largest gender gaps in favour of men. In half of the 24 OECD countries for which data on self-reported voter turnout is available, slightly more women report going to the polls, ranging from less than 1 percentage point difference in Australia, Israel and Hungary up to 9 points in Lithuania. Gender gaps in Civic Engagement are not related: in countries in which more women vote, women's sense of having a say in government is not necessarily higher than men's, and vice versa.

Figure 12.4. In a small majority of OECD countries, the share of women voting and feeling like they have a say in government is slightly higher than that of men

Gender ratio for self-reported voter turnout, 2015-18, and having a say in government, around 2012



Note: The gender ratio is calculated by dividing average values for women by average values for men. Thus, values above 1 always indicate better outcomes for women, and values below 1 better outcomes for men. For self-reported voter turnout, data refer to 2012 for France; 2013 for Australia, the Czech Republic, Iceland, Japan, Norway and the United Kingdom; 2014 for New Zealand and Sweden; 2015 for Greece, Portugal, and Turkey; 2016 for Ireland, Korea, Lithuania, Slovakia and the United States; 2017 for Austria, Chile and Germany; and 2018 for Hungary and Italy. Self-reported voter turnout for Northern Ireland and England refers to values for the entire United Kingdom, and to parliamentary elections, lower house, except for Chile and the United States (presidential elections) and Italy (parliamentary elections, both lower and upper houses). For having a say in government, see the note of Figure 12.3 for reference years and further details. The OECD average refers to the 24 countries shown for self-reported turnout, and the 31 countries shown for having a say.

Source: *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems* (database), <https://cses.org/> and the *OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC)* (database), <https://oecd.org/skills/piaac/>.

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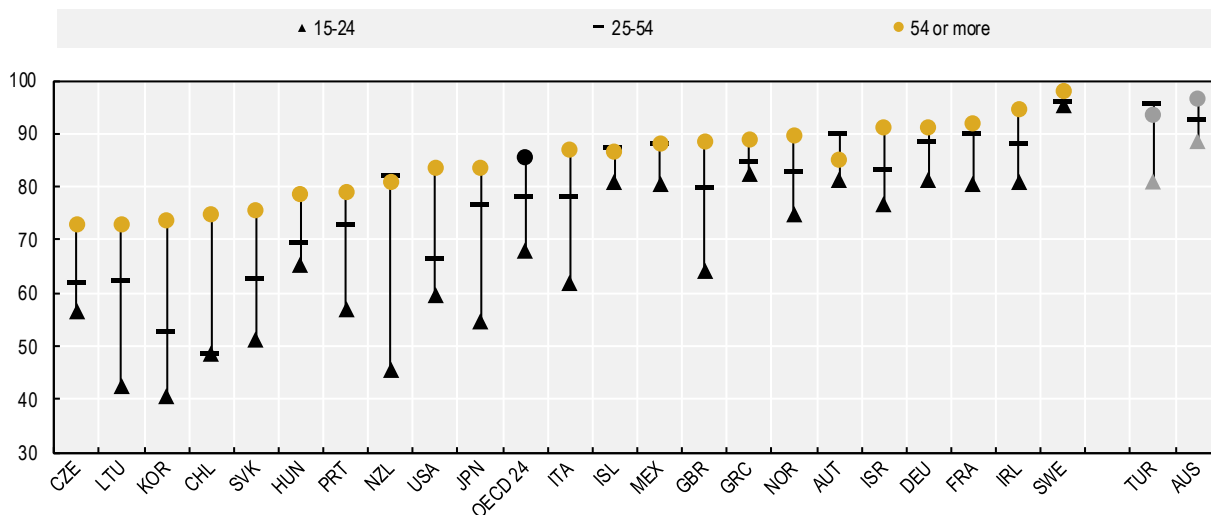
There are notable age- and education-related differences in Civic Engagement

Self-reported voter turnout among older people is higher than among their younger and middle-aged peers. In all countries for which data are available, young people aged 15-24 have the lowest share of voter turnout: 68% for OECD countries on average, versus 85% for people aged 54 or more (Figure 12.5). The age gap is larger in countries with lower overall levels of voter turnout, implying that country differences in political participation among youth account for most of the observed differences across countries.

For the OECD on average, age differences in feelings of having a say in government decisions are very small. Nevertheless, some countries do have sizeable age gaps (Figure 12.6). In some cases, older people are less likely to feel that they have a say in government, relative to younger age groups (e.g. Korea, Estonia, Poland, Slovenia, the Slovak Republic and Austria). By contrast, there are countries in which older generations are the most likely to feel that they have a say (e.g. New Zealand, Lithuania, Greece, the United States, the United Kingdom (England), and Australia). In Chile, the middle-aged are the most likely to feel that they have a say in government decisions.

Figure 12.5. Compared to their younger peers, older people vote more

Self-reported voter turnout by age, percent, 2012-18

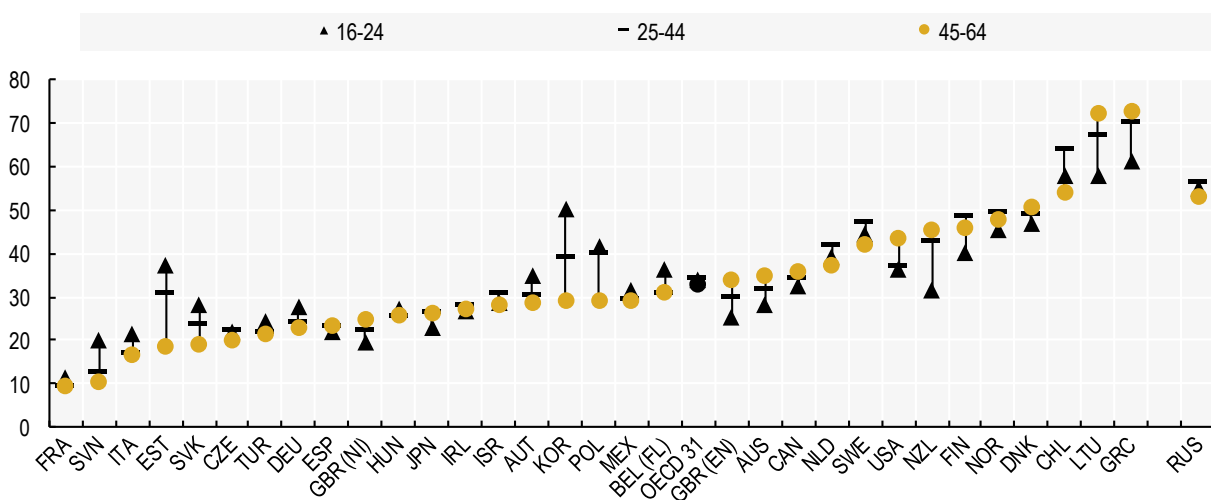


Note: See note of Figure 12.4 for reference years and further details. Australia and Turkey (shown in grey) enforce compulsory voting.
 Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (database), <https://cses.org/>.

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Figure 12.6. The oldest and youngest generations report the lowest share of having a say, depending on the country

Share of people aged 16-65 who feel they have a say in what the government does, by age, percentage, around 2012



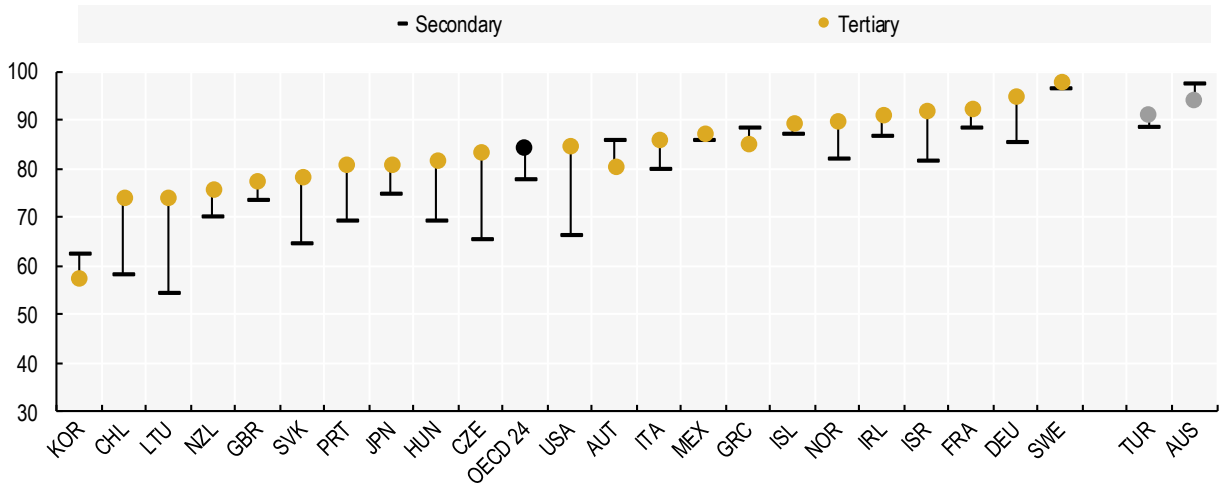
Note: See note of Figure 12.3 for reference years and further details.
 Source: OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (database): <https://oecd.org/skills/piaac/>.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934082423>

In 20 out of 24 OECD countries, people with higher levels of education are more likely to vote (Figure 12.7). On average, 84% of people who have completed tertiary education say they voted, compared to 78% of those educated to secondary level only.

Figure 12.7. People with higher levels of education are more likely to vote

Self-reported voter turnout by level of educational attainment, percent, 2012-18



Note: See the note of Figure 12.4 for reference years and further details. Australia and Turkey (shown in grey) enforce compulsory voting. Source: OECD calculations, based on the *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems* (database), <https://cses.org/>.

StatLink  <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934082442>

Box 12.1. Measurement and the statistical agenda ahead

Civic Engagement is about whether people can and do take part in a range of important civic activities that enable them to shape the society they live in. An ideal set of indicators would address whether individuals have opportunities to engage; whether they perceive that they have the skills, ability and other resources needed to engage; whether they actually take up and realise the opportunities that they have; and whether doing so makes a difference in practice. This chapter presents data on the expression of people's political rights and preferences (voter turnout) and their perceived empowerment in this process (feeling like one has a say in what the government does) (Table 12.1). It is complemented by Reference Chapter 16 on Social Capital, which addresses some relevant institutional factors (e.g. government stakeholder engagement) and social norms (e.g. trust in institutions).

Table 12.1. Civic Engagement indicators considered in this chapter

	Average	Vertical inequality (gap between top and bottom of the distribution)	Horizontal inequality (difference between groups, by age, education, gender)	Deprivation
Voter turnout	Share of votes cast among the population registered to vote	n/a	Gaps in self-reported voter turnout	n/a
Having a say in what the government does	Share of people aged 16- 65 who feel they have a say in what the government does	n/a	Gaps in the share of people who feel they have a say in what government does	Share of people aged 16-65 who feel they have no say in what government does

Voter turnout is measured as the number of votes cast, as a share of the population registered to vote (i.e. the number of people listed in the electoral register). This information is gathered from National Statistical Offices and electoral management bodies, compiled by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, and refers to major national elections (i.e. parliamentary or presidential). Estimates of the distribution of voter turnout (by age, gender and education) are obtained through post-election self-reported survey data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems.

Having a say in what the government does is measured through a question in the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), which asks respondents to what extent they agree with the statement, “People like me don’t have any say in what the government does”. Response options are “strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, or strongly agree”. Having a say in government refers to the share of respondents who either disagree or strongly disagree with this statement; not having a say refers to the share of respondents who either agree or strongly agree.

Correlations among Civic Engagement indicators

There is no correlation between having a say in government and voter turnout, thus implying that feelings of being able to influence politics do not necessarily translate into voting behaviour, and vice versa (Table 12.2).

Table 12.2. There is no correlation between having a say in government and voter turnout

Bivariate correlation coefficients among the Civic Engagement indicators

	Voter turnout (registered)	Having a say in government
Voter turnout (registered)		
Having a say in government	-0.15 (31)	

Note: Values in parenthesis refer to the number of observations. * Indicates that correlations are significant at the $p < 0.10$ level, ** that they are significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, and *** at the $p < 0.01$ level. See the Statlink for an extended correlations table.

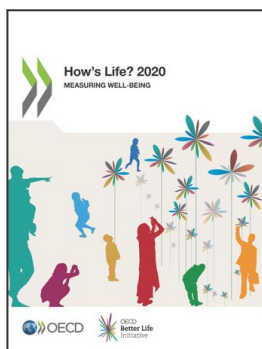
Statistical agenda ahead

Data on having a say in what the government does are sourced from PIAAC, which is only run every 10 years and whose main waves were last conducted by the OECD in 2012. The European Social Survey (ESS), conducted every three years, includes a similar question (positively worded, i.e. “How much would you say the political system in [country] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?”), but covers only European countries. In future rounds, PIAAC will also use a positive question wording to increase comparability. As of now, the measure of having a say in government included in *How’s Life?* refers only to a belief in the (external) responsiveness of public institutions and government officials to citizens’ demands, while excluding (internal) feelings of having the personal competence to participate in politics (Hoskins, Janmaat and Melis, 2017^[1]). In the 2019 revision of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group list of Sustainable Development indicators, both internal and external aspects were added under Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division, 2019^[2]).

Voting is the most traditional form of political voice. However, other forms of political activity such as signing a petition, attending a political meeting or a demonstration, contacting public officials, and participating in campaigns and protest via social media are also important methods of civic expression (Boarini and Diaz, 2015^[3]). Comparable measures of these forms of participation are available only for European countries (via the European Quality of Life Survey) and are not included here.

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- Hoskins, B., J. Janmaat and G. Melis (2017), “Tackling inequalities in political socialisation: A systematic analysis of access to and mitigation effects of learning citizenship at school”, *Social Science Research*, Vol. 68, pp. 88-101, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2017.09.001>. [1]
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division (2019), *SDG Indicators: Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/> (accessed on 12 February 2019). [2]



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