

Youth representation in politics

The representation of young people in politics is key to strengthen their democratic engagement and encourage whole-of-society buy-in to tackle common challenges. To deliver youth-responsive policies, governments need to reinforce their technical and administrative capacities as well as ensure that young people are represented in politics to better inform decisions and deliver fairer outcomes (OECD, 2022). Large gaps in youth representation in politics continue to exist and addressing them is essential, as they may have a lifelong impact on trust in government and engagement in democracy (OECD, 2020).

While 20–39-year-olds represent 34% of the voting age population on average across OECD countries, only 23% of members of parliament (MPs) on average were under 40 in 2022 (representation gap of 11 percentage points). Variations appear across countries, with 39% of parliamentarians in Mexico being under 40 compared to 4% in Portugal. The largest representation gaps are seen in Israel, Türkiye and the United States (all -29 p.p.). In contrast, the proportion of young people in parliament closely approaches actual population proportions in Germany and Latvia (-1 p.p.), Denmark and Finland (-2 p.p.) (Figure 12.10).

Representation gaps also remain high in countries' executive branches. In 2022, across OECD countries, only 56 out of 756 of cabinet members were under 40 (7%) and only 16 were aged 35 or under (2%). The average age of cabinet members across OECD countries has remained stable from 2018 at 53 years old, ranging from 65 in Japan to 45 in Denmark for 2022. The five youngest cabinets were in Denmark (average age of 45), Estonia (47), Lithuania (48), Sweden (48), Norway (49), and Finland (49). The countries experiencing the largest average age decreases compared to 2018 were Chile (with an average age decrease of 8 years), Germany (-7), Slovenia (-5), France (-5) and Greece (-5). On the other hand, the countries that experienced the most significant average age increase were Mexico (+6), Iceland (+6), Australia (+6), Canada (+5) and Italy (+5) (Figure 12.11).

Such representation gaps may have an impact on how likely young people are to engage in politics. On average across OECD countries, young people (ages 18–29) are less likely to engage in institutionalised forms of political activity than other age groups. The most marked gaps were noted between young people and those aged 50 and above. For instance, young people were less likely to vote in national elections (by 27 p.p. compared to those 50+) and regional elections (18 p.p.), as well as contact an elected policy maker or government official (7 p.p.). On the other hand, young people were more likely to engage in non-institutionalised forms of political activity, including signing an online or paper petition (7 p.p. compared to those 50+), taking part in public demonstrations (5 p.p.) and posting political content on social media (4 p.p.) (Figure 12.12).

Methodology and definitions

Data on indicators related to political engagement was sourced from the 2021 OECD Trust Survey, which classifies 'young people' as 18–29. The OECD explores perceptions of public governance using nationally representative survey data from the OECD Trust Survey conducted across 22 countries. Most countries were surveyed in November–December 2021, with a few surveys taking place in 2020 and January–March 2022.

Data on the share of young parliamentarians refers to the share of parliamentary representatives aged 40 and under obtained from the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Parline database. Data on people aged 20–39 as a share of the voting age population (people aged 20 and over) was obtained from the OECD Demography and Population database.

Data on the average age of cabinet members was collected through desk research of OECD countries' cabinet membership from official government websites and members' biographies. The data reflects cabinet membership as of 20 December 2022.

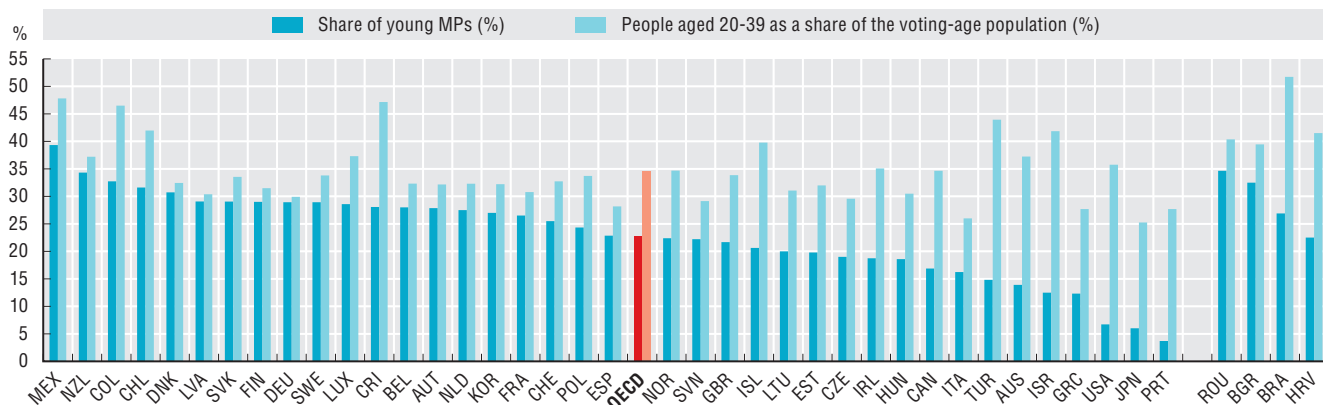
Further reading

- OECD (2022), *Delivering for youth: How governments can put young people at the centre of the recovery*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5b0fd8cd-en>.
- OECD (2022), "Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People", *OECD Legal Instruments*, OECD, Paris, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0474>.
- OECD (2021), "Youth representation in politics", in *Government at a Glance 2021*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c3488416-en>.
- OECD (2020), *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations?*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/c3e5cb8a-en>.

Figure notes

- 12.10. Share of young people as a share of the voting-age population from 2021. National Parliament average age is from 2022, with the exception of Australia and Colombia, which dates from 2021.
- 12.11. Data for members of cabinet in Canada (1 member), Bulgaria (1), Greece (1), Mexico (1) could not be found. Representatives were selected based on the members of cabinet listed on official government websites. 2022 data for Brazil was not available. 2018 data for Brazil, Bulgaria, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Lithuania and Romania was not available.
- 12.12. Reflects responses to the survey question 'Over the last 12 months, have you done any of the following activities? Please tick all that apply'. Options 'Worn or displayed a campaign badge' and 'Attended a trade union or party meeting' are not shown due to low response rates.

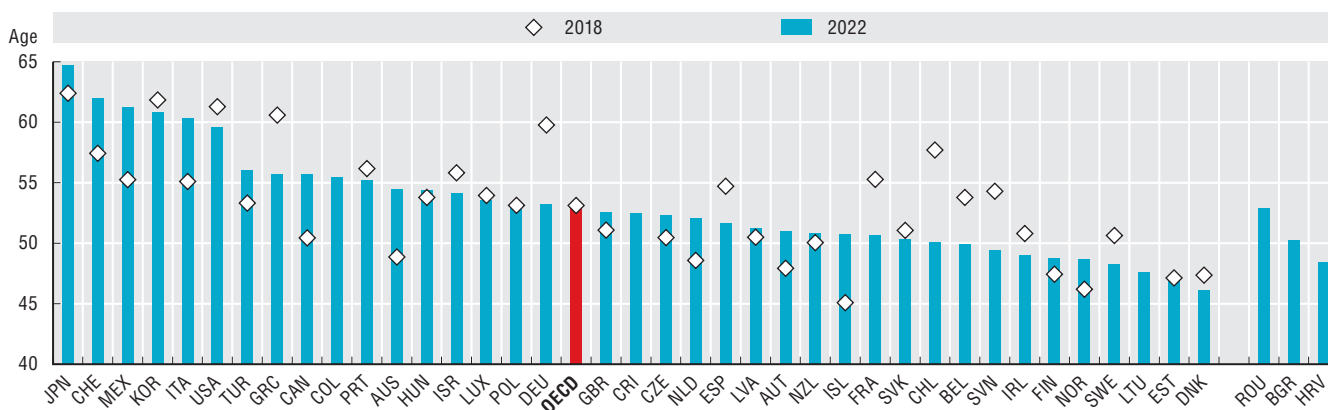
12.10. Share of members of parliament aged 40 and under, and people aged 20-39 as a share of voting-age population, 2022



Source: OECD calculations based on OECD Demography and Population database (2021); and Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Parline database on national parliaments (2022).

StatLink <https://stat.link/cusqnp>

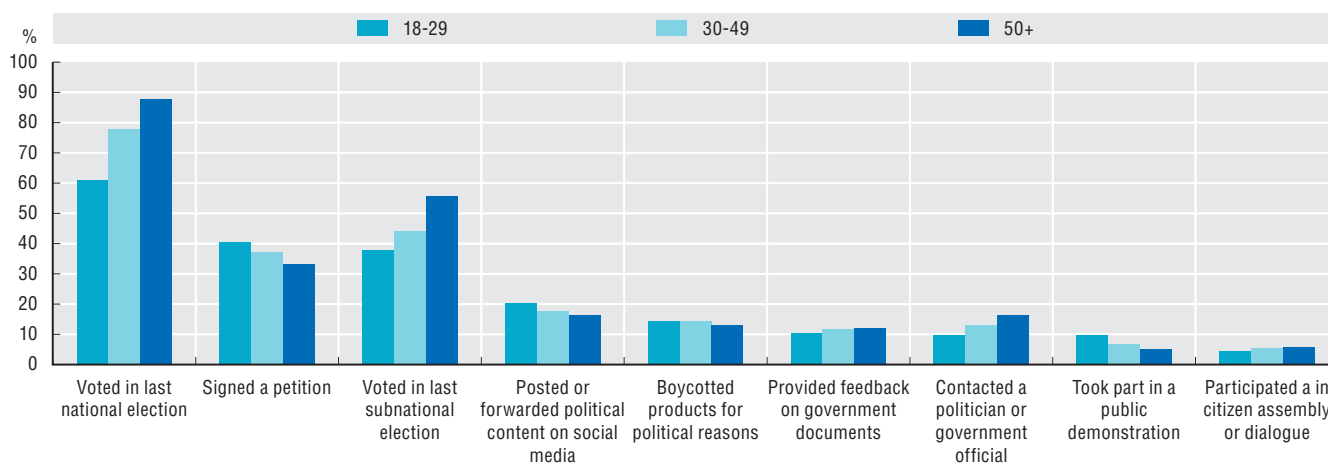
12.11. Average age of cabinet members by country, 2018 and 2022



Source: OECD calculations based on publicly available data on official government websites as of 20 December 2022.

StatLink <https://stat.link/Oblwcn>

12.12. Participation in political activities by age group, OECD average, 2021



Source: OECD Trust Survey (<http://oe.cd/trust>).

StatLink <https://stat.link/mfa1bp>



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