

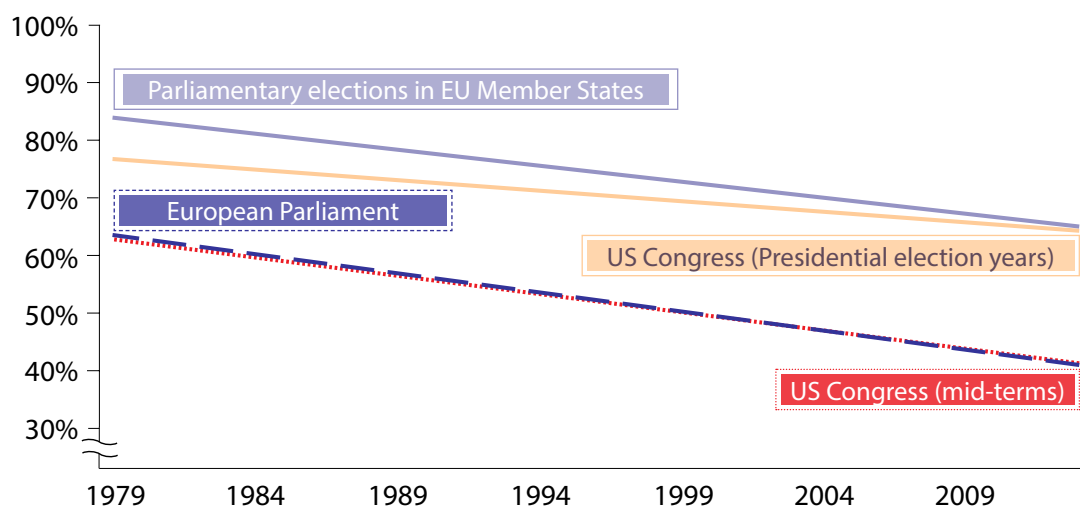
Turnout in European elections

Discussion of the forthcoming European Parliament (EP) elections, which are due to take place between 22 and 25 May 2014, often focuses on the question of turnout. The graphs below aim to put the trend in turnout in the seven EP elections held to date into the broader context of trends in national parliamentary elections in the European Union and United States. A more detailed picture of the differences in turnout in EP elections among Member States is also provided.

Trends in national and EP elections

The first graph gives trend lines for turnout in four different types of election in the period since the first European Parliament elections took place in 1979.

The trend lines show that voter turnout has been on a consistently downward path at elections, both within the European Union and in the United States. Indeed, these trends are consistent with a general decline in turnout at elections in most G20 democracies since 1945 – from around 80% in the immediate post-war period to just over 60% today.



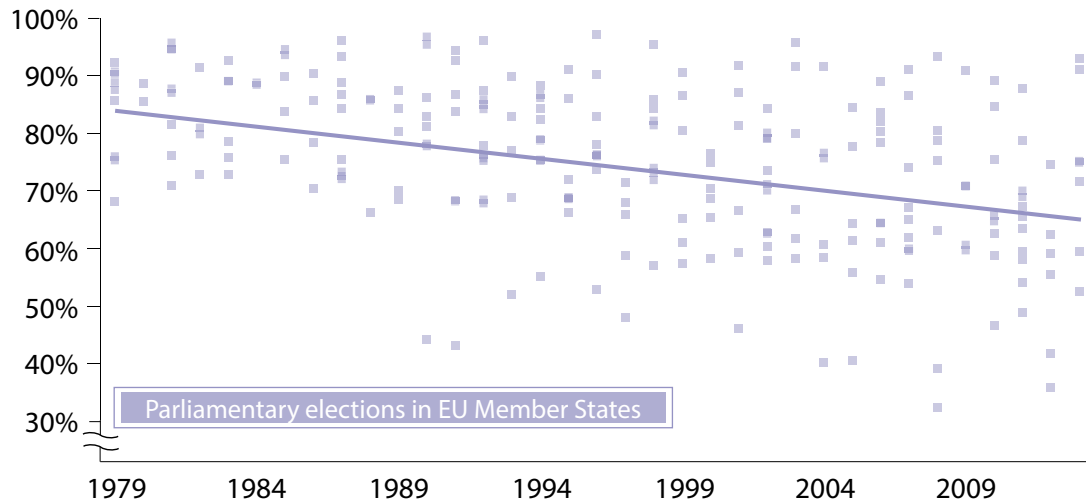
The graph highlights the remarkably close relationship between the path of turnout in EP elections and (mid-term) US Congressional elections, in both absolute values and trends. They correspond almost exactly. The parallel declines in turnout at Member States' parliamentary elections and at European Parliament elections demonstrate that voters treat EP elections in the same way as their national elections, but with turnout at national elections around 20% higher. It is widely recognised that elections in which voters can change their government attract more voters than other elections.

From the US perspective, the Congresses elected in mid-term years are considered no less legitimate law-makers than their counterparts elected at the same time as US Presidents. But it is clear from the difference in turnout between those two sets of Congressional elections that voters are more likely to turn out when they are taking decisions on who runs the executive branch of government as well as who controls the legislative.

Notes: Turnout in European Parliament elections is calculated as the total number of votes cast in all Member States as a percentage of the total number of registered voters in those countries. Turnout for national parliamentary elections in Member States is calculated on the same basis, totalling all elections taking place in each year to create an annual whole-EU aggregate. (The second graph provides more detail of the individual national elections). Turnout in elections to the US Congress is also based on total votes as a percentage of registered voters. They are split into two series, one for the years (1980, 1984, etc.) in which voters also elected the President on the same day (when turnout is normally significantly higher) and a second for the mid-term years, in which the Presidency was not contested (1982, 1986, etc.).




























Turnout in national elections in the EU

The second graph shows the wide variation in turnout in parliamentary elections among EU Member States. Each dot represents the turnout in an individual national parliamentary election in one of the EU-28 Member States (for those which joined the EU in 2004 or later, only elections from 1990 on are considered). The light blue trend line is the same as that shown on the first graph.



Change in turnout at most recent elections

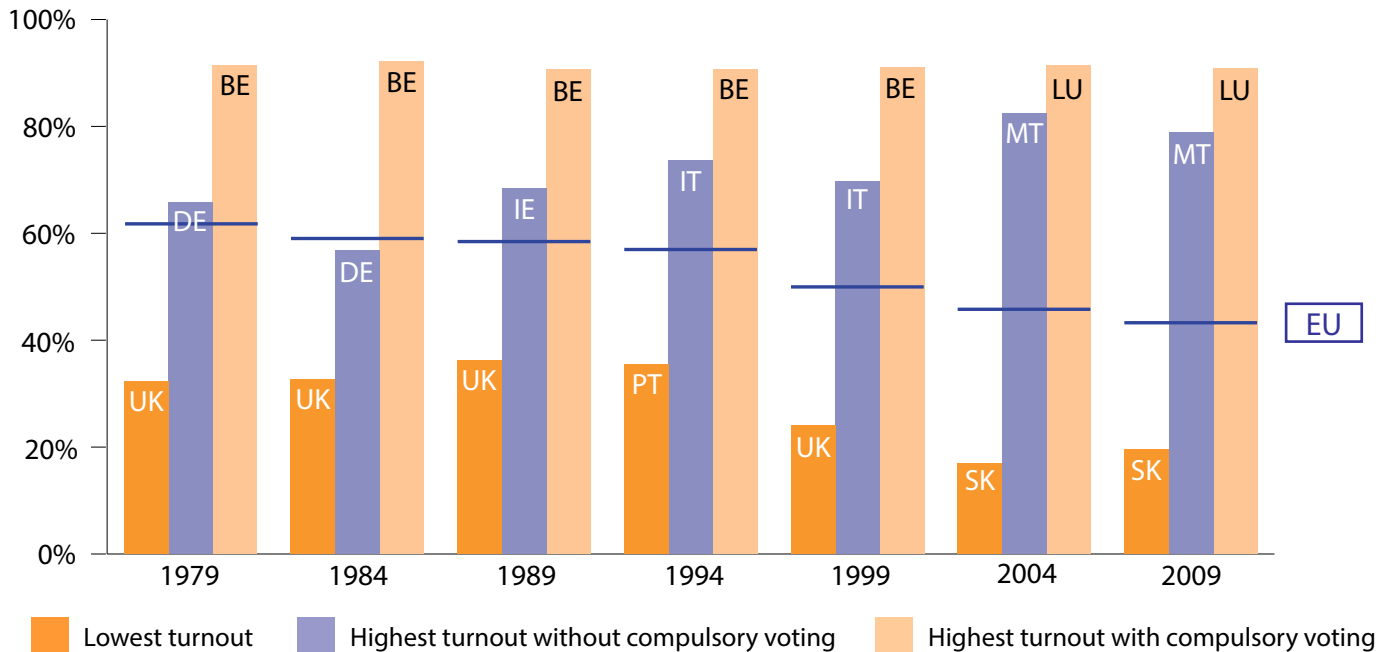
The table below shows the turnouts at the 2009 EP election and at the most recent national parliament election in each Member State since then. The change in turnout from the previous election is given in percentage points. The average decline in turnout at national elections held since 2010 has been 2.2 percentage points.

	EP elections		National elections				
	Turnout 2009	Change 2004-2009	Turnout at last election		Change between last two elections		
EE	43.9%	17.1	63.5%	(2011)	1.6	(2007-2011)	
LV	53.7%	12.3	59.5%	(2011)	-5.2	(2010-2011)	
DK	59.5%	11.7	87.7%	(2011)	1.1	(2007-2011)	
SE	45.5%	7.7	84.6%	(2010)	2.6	(2006-2010)	
PL	24.5%	3.7	48.9%	(2011)	-5.0	(2007-2011)	
AT	46.0%	3.5	74.9%	(2013)	-3.9	(2008-2013)	
SK	19.6%	2.7	59.1%	(2012)	0.3	(2010-2012)	
FI	40.5%	1.1	67.4%	(2011)	2.4	(2007-2011)	
DE	43.3%	0.3	71.5%	(2013)	0.8	(2009-2013)	
SI	28.3%	0.0	65.6%	(2011)	2.5	(2008-2011)	
CZ	28.2%	-0.1	59.5%	(2013)	-3.1	(2010-2013)	
ES	44.9%	-0.2	68.9%	(2011)	-6.4	(2008-2011)	
BE	90.4%	-0.4	89.2%	(2010)	-1.9	(2007-2010)	
LU	90.8%	-0.6	91.1%	(2013)	0.2	(2009-2013)	
IE	57.6%	-1.0	70.0%	(2011)	3.0	(2007-2011)	
PT	36.8%	-1.8	58.0%	(2011)	-1.6	(2009-2011)	
FR	40.6%	-2.1	55.4%	(2012)	-4.6	(2007-2012)	
HU	36.3%	-2.2	46.7%	(2010)	-17.7	(2006-2010)	
NL	36.8%	-2.5	74.6%	(2012)	-0.8	(2010-2012)	
EU	43.0%	-2.6			-2.2		
MT	78.8%	-3.6	93.0%	(2013)	-0.3	(2008-2013)	
UK	34.5%	-4.7	65.8%	(2010)	4.4	(2005-2010)	
IT	65.1%	-6.7	75.2%	(2013)	-5.3	(2008-2013)	
GR	52.6%	-10.6	62.5%	(2012)	-8.4	(2009-2012)	
CY	59.4%	-13.1	78.7%	(2011)	-10.3	(2006-2011)	
LT	21.0%	-27.4	35.9%	(2012)	3.5	(2008-2012)	
BG	38.9%		52.5%	(2013)	-8.1	(2009-2013)	
RO	27.7%		41.8%	(2012)	2.6	(2008-2012)	
HR			54.2%	(2011)	-5.4	(2007-2011)	

Turnout in Member States at European Parliament elections

The bar chart below illustrates the range in turnout among Member States at EP elections. For each of the seven elections held since 1979, the chart shows the lowest turnout among all Member States, the highest in a Member State without compulsory voting, and finally the highest overall.

The blue lines indicate the EU average turnout in each EP election; this is the same as calculated for the first graph.



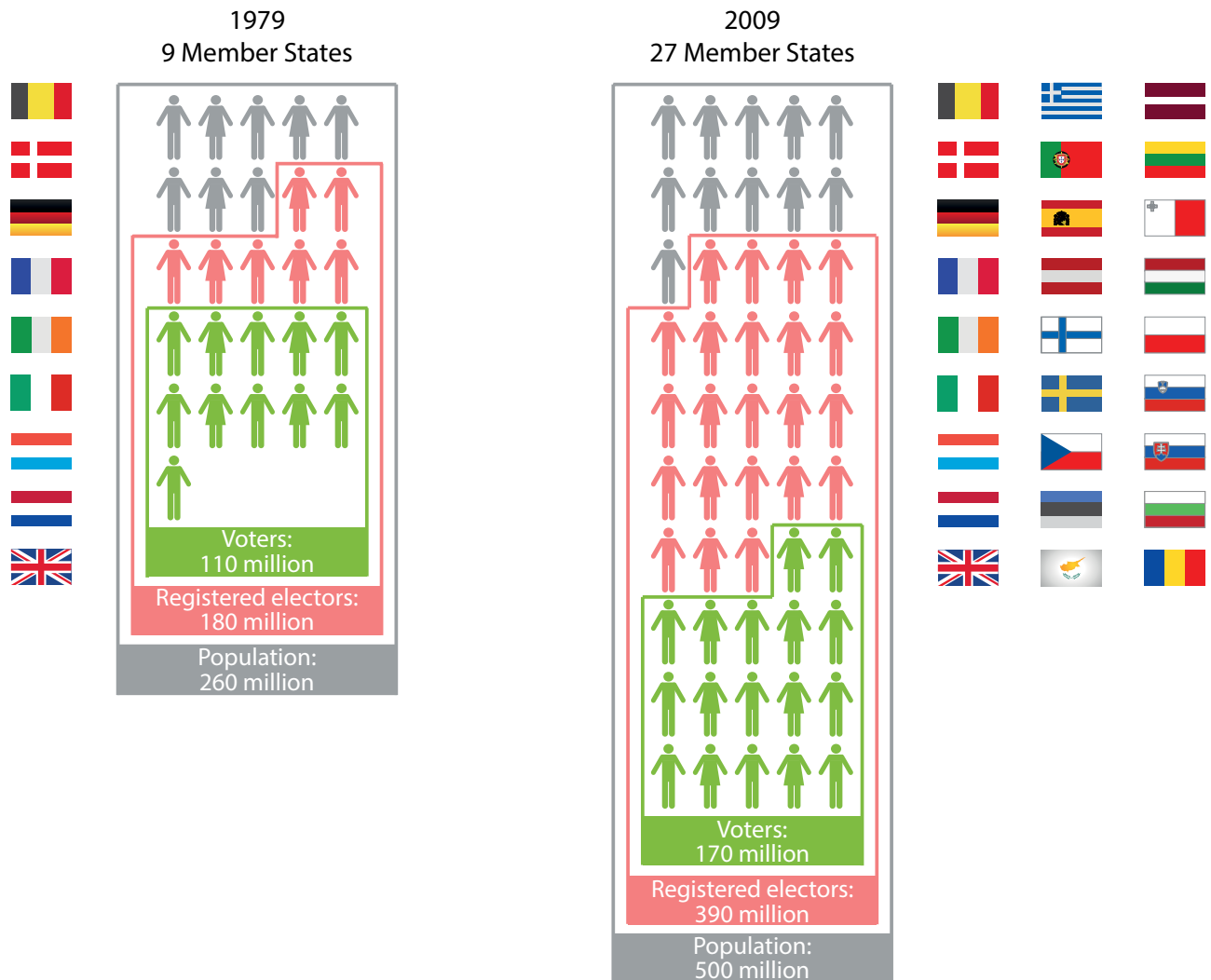
The table below shows the turnout in each Member State, by election, since 1979.

	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009	
LU	88.9%	88.8%	87.4%	88.5%	87.3%	91.3%	90.8%	
BE	91.4%	92.1%	90.7%	90.7%	91.0%	90.8%	90.4%	
MT						82.4%	78.8%	
IT	84.9%	83.4%	81.0%	73.6%	69.8%	71.7%	65.1%	
DK	47.8%	52.4%	46.2%	52.9%	50.4%	47.9%	59.5%	
CY						72.5%	59.4%	
IE	63.6%	47.6%	68.3%	44.0%	50.2%	58.6%	57.6%	
LV						41.3%	53.7%	
GR		77.2%	79.9%	73.2%	71.5%	63.2%	52.6%	
AT					49.0%	42.4%	46.0%	
SE					38.8%	37.9%	45.5%	
ES			54.6%	59.1%	63.0%	45.1%	44.9%	
EE						26.8%	43.9%	
DE	65.7%	56.8%	62.3%	60.0%	45.2%	43.0%	43.3%	
EU	61.8%	59.0%	58.3%	56.7%	49.5%	45.6%	43.0%	
FR	60.7%	56.7%	48.7%	52.8%	46.8%	42.8%	40.6%	
FI					30.1%	39.4%	40.5%	
BG							38.9%	
PT			51.2%	35.5%	39.9%	38.6%	36.8%	
NL	58.1%	50.6%	47.2%	35.7%	30.0%	39.3%	36.8%	
HU						38.5%	36.3%	
UK	32.3%	32.6%	36.2%	36.4%	24.0%	39.2%	34.5%	
SI						28.4%	28.3%	
CZ						28.3%	28.2%	
RO							27.7%	
PL						20.9%	24.5%	
LT						48.4%	21.0%	
SK						17.0%	19.6%	

⚠ Compulsory voting (In Italy, voting was also compulsory for the 1979, 1984 and 1989 elections.)

Voters and EU population, 1979-2009

The graphics below aim to illustrate the change in voter turnout in EP elections relative to the increase in population as the number of Member States has increased. They show, for 1979 and for 2009, the number of people that voted (green) in the EP elections relative to the number of registered voters (red) and the total population (grey). The last of these includes those too young to vote, non-citizens and those otherwise ineligible to vote. Each symbol of a person represents 10 million people.



Notes:

Data are taken from the "Voter Turnout Database" of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). IDEA provides data only for the second/final round of voting. For Member States which have two rounds of voting in national parliamentary elections turnout in the first round is normally higher, although the differences are not substantial within the aggregate EU figure. Only the regular five-yearly EP elections are considered, and not those held only in newly acceded Member States. All pre-1989 German data are for West Germany only.

Turnout may also be measured as a proportion of voting-age population or voting-eligible population. Whereas these two are both based on estimates of population, using registered voters provides a definitive figure. However, that figure will always be out of date, and there are significant variations between countries as to the accuracy of the registers.

Comparisons of voter turnout should be treated with caution as there are many possible reasons to explain differences between jurisdictions, elections and years: for example, whether voting is compulsory (and if so, the severity of sanctions for abstention, in both law and practice), the electoral system used, the perceived uncertainty of the result, other elections/referendums taking place on the same day, and ease of voting (day and hours of polling, possibilities for postal and/or proxy voting, etc.).

Country codes:

Austria (AT)	Cyprus (CY)	Finland (FI)	Hungary (HU)	Lithuania (LT)	Poland (PL)	Slovenia (SI)
Belgium (BE)	Czech Republic (CZ)	France (FR)	Ireland (IE)	Luxembourg (LU)	Portugal (PT)	Spain (ES)
Bulgaria (BG)	Denmark (DK)	Germany (DE)	Italy (IT)	Malta (MT)	Romania (RO)	Sweden (SE)
Croatia (HR)	Estonia (EE)	Greece (GR)	Latvia (LV)	Netherlands (NL)	Slovakia (SK)	United Kingdom (UK)

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