



Part II:

Country by Country

Voter Turnout Country by Country

This section should be read in conjunction with the tables in Part III, which summarize voter turnout in all types of elections country by country, and the ranking tables which follow them.

Austria

Electoral system for the national Parliament (lower house)	List proportional representation
The national legislature is	Bicameral
Number of seats in the national Parliament	183
Number of women in the national Parliament	62 of 183 (33.9%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	Yes
Accession to the European Union	1995

AUSTRIA HAS HAD A VERY HIGH voter turnout in the period since the Second World War. The average turnout for parliamentary elections since 1945 is almost 91 per cent, which is higher than those of most other countries in Europe, or elsewhere in the world. On a global ranking list of voter turnout Austria ranks tenth, and on a regional ranking list of voter turnout in Western Europe it ranks second. Most of the countries in the world that have higher levels of voter turnout than Austria have compulsory voting, which was formerly practised in Austria for national elections but was abolished in most regions of the country in 1979. Only two, Vorarlberg and Tirol, retained compulsory voting until 2004. These two regions have usually shown a higher voter turnout than the rest of the country in recent years.

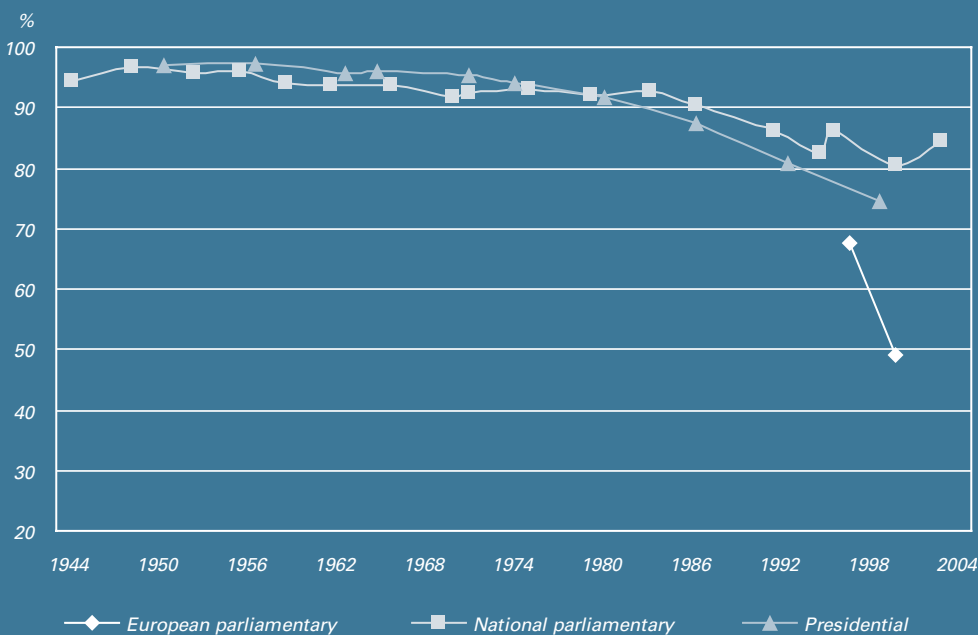
Looking at the turnout trend in Austria since 1945, there are some exceptions to the trend of high turnout. The most recent parliamentary elections show some decline in turnout, which started in the 1980s. Over the 1990s, the average declined by approximately 7 per cent.

A similar trend can be found for presidential elections, where turnout has also declined, by 15 per cent since 1980 and by several percentage points even before then.

Parliamentary elections were due to be held in late 2003, but were called when the governing coalition between the Freedom Party and the Austrian People's Party broke up in September 2002. The elections that followed gave the People's Party 43 per cent of the seats in Parliament—its biggest electoral success in two decades.

Austria has taken part in two elections to the European Parliament, in 1996 and 1999, and these have seen a significantly lower turnout than the national parliamentary or presidential elections. Austria is around the middle on a ranking table of member countries' turnout in European Parliament elections. The Austrian average turnout in both kinds of election is almost 59 per cent—just below the European average of 60.6 per cent.

Figure 1. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Austria, 1945–2002



Belgium

Electoral system for the national Parliament (lower house)	List proportional representation
The national legislature is	Bicameral
Number of seats in the national Parliament	150
Number of women in the national Parliament	53 of 150 (35.3%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	No
Accession to the European Union	Founder

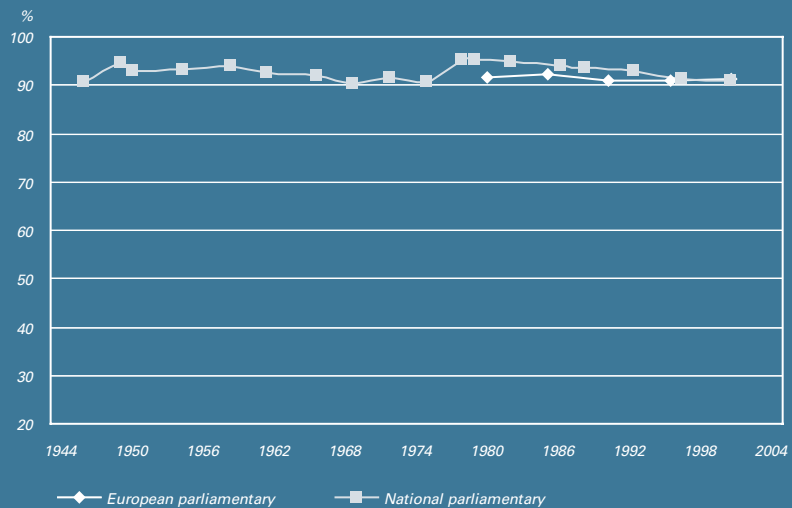
AVERAGE VOTER TURNOUT IN national elections in Belgium has been the highest in Western Europe since 1945: it has never been below 90 per cent. Only Liechtenstein (which is not covered in the statistical summaries in this report) has a higher average turnout in national elections. Belgium also ranks fifth on a global ranking list of average turnout. The main reason for the high turnout would appear to be the practice of compulsory voting. Belgium was one of the first countries in the world to introduce compulsory voting, doing so as early as 1893, and any unjustified abstention is punishable by fines or by removal from the electoral register. This high turnout is, however, accompanied by a relatively high proportion of invalid and blank votes, among the largest in Western Europe. Nineteen parliamentary elections have been held in Belgium since 1945.

The 1999 parliamentary election in Belgium took place at the same time as the election to the European Parliament. One of the main issues during the campaign focused on the dioxin-in-food crisis resulting from polluted animal feed. The outgoing government had had a certain success, for example, in reducing unemployment and the public debt, and the country joined the European single currency in 2002. After the 1999 election the Liberal Party became the leading force in the House of Representatives for the first time since the Second World War, but formed a coalition government with five other parties. The electoral

campaign leading up to the most recent election, in 2003, was mainly focused on tax issues and tax cuts. During its four years in government the coalition had also introduced some very progressive legislation. The Liberal Party and the Socialist Party renewed their agreement and formed a new coalition.

Belgium is a founding member of the European Union. It has experienced five elections to the European Parliament and turnout for these elections is the highest among all the member states—above 91 per cent, which is only one one percentage point lower than the average turnout in national elections in Belgium (a little over 92 per cent).

Figure 2. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Belgium, 1946–2003



Denmark

Electoral system for the national Parliament
 The national legislature is
 Number of seats in the national Parliament
 Number of women in the national Parliament
 Presidential elections
 Accession to the European Union

List proportional representation
 Unicameral
 179
 68 of 179 (38.0%) as of January 2004
 No
 1973

DENMARK HAS HAD STABLE VOTER TURNOUT during the post-Second World War period. Average turnout for parliamentary elections has been approximately 86 per cent with a variation of not more than 7 per cent throughout the years. This consistently high average turnout is an achievement for a country which does not practise compulsory voting, especially since Denmark has held more parliamentary elections since 1945 than any other EU member state (23 elections). The highest turnout ever measured in Denmark was in 1968 when 89 per cent of the voters turned out to vote.

On a global ranking list of average voter turnout Denmark ranks 32, but on a similar list for Western Europe it ranks eighth. Only very few of the countries that rank higher than Denmark in Western Europe do not practise compulsory voting.

The most recent parliamentary election was that of 2001. Turnout was relatively high at over 87 per cent. This was the first time county and municipal elections were held at the same time as the parliamentary elections. The nine-year-long rule of the Social Democrats ended with this election. Issues regarding immigration and the issue of

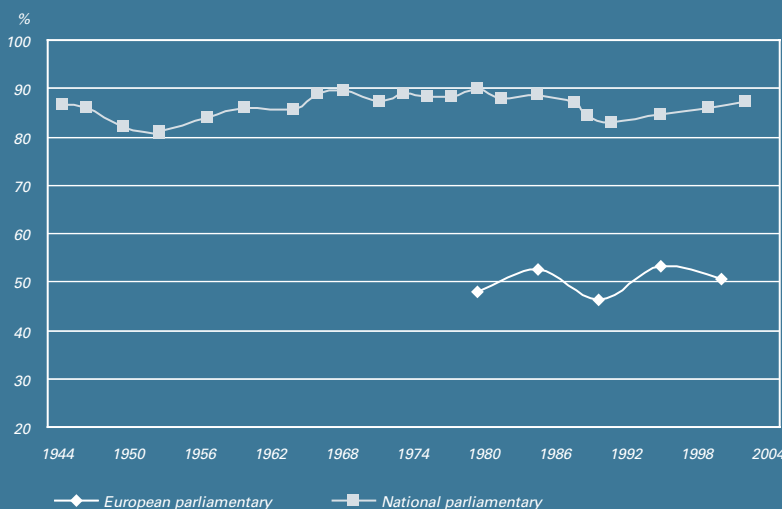
family reunification as a basis for permitting immigration to Denmark dominated the campaign. A minority right-wing coalition government was formed after the election. As a monarchy, Denmark does not have presidential elections.

Women voters in Denmark turn out to vote to the same extent as men, but young Danish voters tend to start voting earlier than they did in the 1940s and 1950s. Turnout at municipal elections, however, is much lower than in national elections. The difference is approximately 15 per cent, and the groups that turn out to vote to a lesser extent at municipal elections include the unmarried, those on low incomes and those who have taken early retirement.

The proportion of invalid and blank votes cast is very low in Denmark—usually well below 1 per cent. Postal voting is allowed, but is not used to the same extent as in other Nordic countries.

Denmark joined the EU in 1973 and has so far experienced five elections to the European Parliament—the same number as the founding member states. As in most other member states, turnout in these elections has been much lower than that for elections to the national Parliament: the average for the five elections to the European Parliament is barely 50 per cent. This places Denmark tenth on a ranking list of average turnout at elections to the European Parliament.

Figure 3. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Denmark, 1945–2001



Finland

Electoral system for the national Parliament	List proportional representation
The national legislature is	Unicameral
Number of seats in the national Parliament	200
Number of women in the national Parliament	75 of 200 (37.5%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	Yes
Accession to the European Union	1995

TURNOUT IN THE FINNISH PARLIAMENTARY election of March 2003 was almost 70 per cent, which is a few percentage points higher than turnout at the three preceding elections held during the 1990s. Turnout declined somewhat during the 1990s, having been slightly higher in the 1960s and the early 1970s in particular. In the 17 parliamentary elections held since 1945, average turnout has been approximately 76 per cent. The highest turnout ever measured in Finland was 85.1 per cent at the parliamentary election in 1962. On a global ranking list Finland ranks 71. Average turnout at presidential elections is somewhat lower at around 74 per cent.

At the most recent election, in March 2003, the Center Party increased the number of its seats in Parliament by eight. The National Coalition Party lost a number of seats and other parties received approximately the same number of seats as at the last election.

The region of Åland—a number of islands which formally belong to Finland but as an autonomous region—has one reserved seat in the Parliament. The candidate for this seat is elected by the first-past-the-post system, although the electoral system used for national elections is a list proportional system.

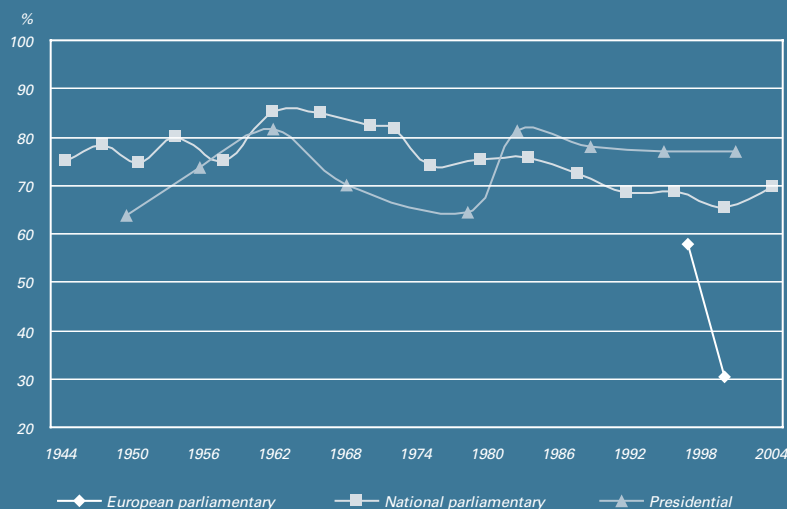
Finland, like the other Nordic countries, has a very high proportion of women members of Parliament (MPs). Of all

the countries in the world, only Denmark, Sweden and lately also Rwanda have a higher proportion of women MPs than Finland. The first woman president in Finland was elected in 2000 and as a result of the 2003 parliamentary election the country had its first woman prime minister as well, although she was obliged to step down shortly afterwards.

Another similarity with the other Nordic countries is the widespread practice of postal voting. All five Nordic countries have allowed postal voting (today abolished in Norway) for national elections, and in most cases for local and regional elections as well. At the most recent parliamentary election in Finland this option was used by almost 30 per cent of voters—quite a high percentage.

Elections to the European Parliament show quite an interesting pattern of turnout in Finland. The country has held elections to the European Parliament twice since joining the EU in 1995. At the first, in 1996, a turnout of almost 58 per cent was recorded. This fell dramatically in 1999, to only 30 per cent.

Figure 4. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Finland, 1945–2003



Part II: Country By Country

France

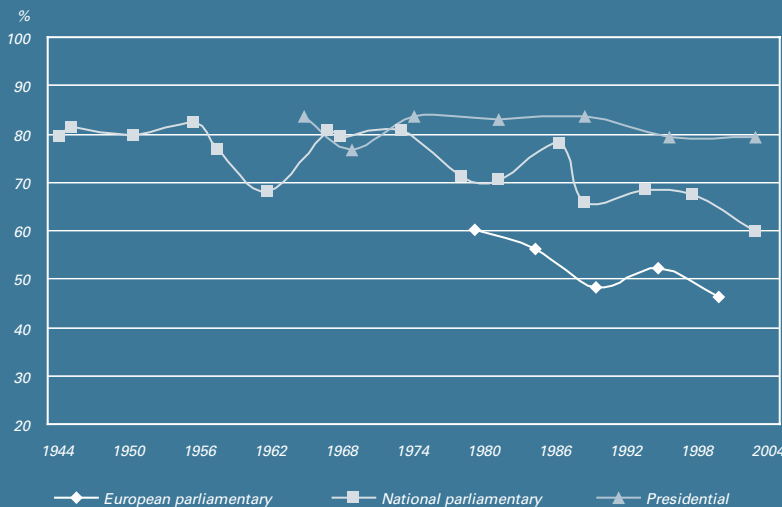
Electoral system for the national Parliament (lower house)	Two-round system
The national legislature is	Bicameral
Number of seats in the national Parliament	574
Number of women in the national Parliament	70 of 574 (12.2%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	Yes
Accession to the European Union	Founder

THE MOST RECENT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION in France took place in 2002. It was held shortly after the presidential election, where sixteen candidates competed in its first round and the leader of the National Front competed against the leader of the Rally for the Republic in the second round. Turnout at that parliamentary election was just above 60 per cent, which is relatively low for a West European country. Turnout for parliamentary elections in France has traditionally been higher—on average approximately 75 per cent since 1945. Only three other West European countries examined in this report show a lower average turnout than France. Turnout has declined throughout the years in France, but the average is still higher than that of many countries in, for example, Latin America and Africa.

France is one of the few West European countries that have presidential elections. These are held every five years. Interestingly, turnout is usually higher for presidential elections than for other types of election in France: the average is approximately 82 per cent. In the second round of the latest presidential election, in 2002, it was almost 80 per cent, because of intense voter interest in the contest between the incumbent president, Jacques Chirac, and the far right candidate Jean-Marie le Pen.

France is a founding member of the EU and has experienced five elections to the European Parliament. Here, as in almost all member countries, turnout is relatively low—on average around 53 per cent—and showing a declining trend at the most recent election.

Figure 5. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, France, 1945–2002



Germany

Electoral system for the national Parliament (lower house)
The national legislature is
Number of seats in the national Parliament
Number of women in the national Parliament
Presidential elections
Accession to the European Union

Mixed member proportional
Bicameral
at least 600. Currently 603
194 of 603 (32.2%) as of January 2004
No
Founder

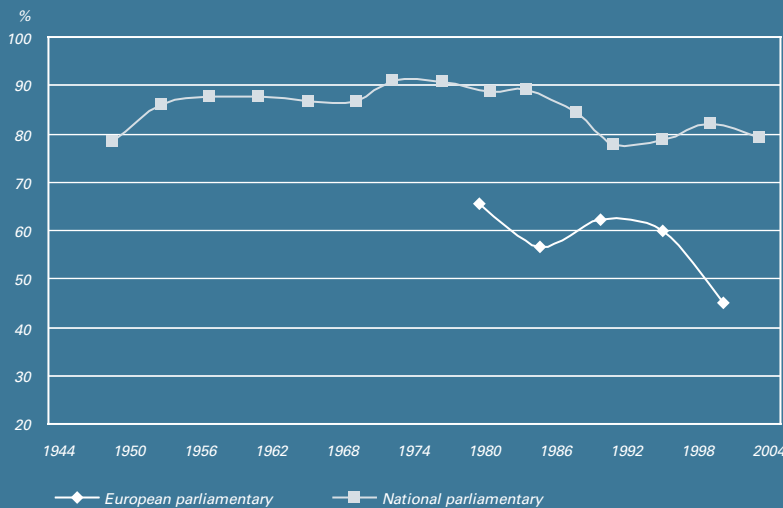
IN GERMANY SINCE 1945 turnout for national parliamentary elections has varied between 77 per cent and 91 per cent. Fifteen national elections have been held during this time; the highest turnout was that of 1972, at 91.1 per cent. The most recent election in 2002 saw a turnout of 79 per cent. Germany's average turnout of 85 per cent places it tenth in Western Europe and just above the European average. Almost half of the European countries that have a higher average turnout have compulsory voting.

Germany has Western Europe's largest electorate—a little over 61 million voters. In 2002 German voters went to the polls after a debate which focused on the disastrous floods that had hit the country in the same year, and

unemployment and the country's economy were also on the agenda. For the first time in German history, television showed a debate between the two main candidates for the post of chancellor. The Social Democratic Party and the Green Party formed a new coalition after the election.

As a founding member state of the EU, Germany has experienced five elections to the European Parliament. Average turnout is 58 per cent but turnout has declined at almost every election. It started at 65 per cent in 1979 but in 1999 turnout had declined by 20 percentage points compared with 1979, to 45 per cent.

Figure 6. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Germany, 1949–2002



Note: Data is for the Federal German Republic (West Germany) up to and including 1989, and for the post-unification Federal German Republic from the 1990 parliamentary elections onwards.

Greece

Electoral system for the national Parliament	List proportional representation
The national legislature is	Unicameral
Number of seats in the national Parliament	300
Number of women in the national Parliament	26 of 300 (8.67%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	No
Accession to the European Union	1981

GREECE SHOWS A FAIRLY HIGH TURNOUT at parliamentary elections. One reason for this may be the practice of compulsory voting. Sanctions are imposed on non-voters, although currently they are not strictly enforced in practice. The most recent national parliamentary election took place in 2000, and turnout—75 per cent—was the lowest since the 1950s. Turnout was very high in the 1980s but has declined by several percentage points since then. Average turnout in Greece since the first election in 1946 is 80 per cent, which is relatively high compared to the rest of the world. Sixteen elections have been held since 1946.

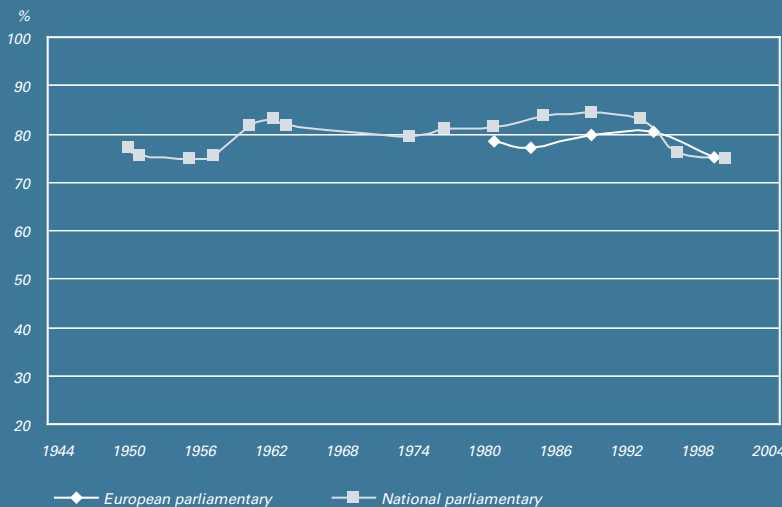
The outcome of the 2000 parliamentary election was a victory for the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) which won almost 44 per cent of the seats. Four different parties are represented in Parliament, out of 26 that contested the election. In 2004, PASOK came out as the second largest party as it lost a few seats in Parliament and 4 per cent of the votes. New Democracy, the second largest party from 2000, won 45 per cent of the votes and the largest number of seats in Parliament.

Greece has the lowest proportion of women MPs among the countries included in this report. Between 8

and 9 per cent of the Greek MPs are women—26 out of a total of 300 MPs.

Greece joined the EU in 1981, and held its first elections to the European Parliament the same year, two years later than those in the other member states. Greece has thus experienced the same number of elections to the European Parliament as the founding members of the EU. It is one of the few member states that show a fairly stable trend in turnout for European Parliament elections—on average 78 per cent, which is among the highest averages among the member states. Greece ranks fourth on a ranking list of average turnout at elections to the European Parliament.

Figure 7. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Greece, 1951–2000



Iceland

Electoral system for the national Parliament
The national legislature is
Number of seats in the national Parliament
Number of women in the national Parliament
Presidential elections
Accession to the European Union

List proportional representation
Unicameral
63
19 of 63 (30.2%) as of January 2004
Yes
Not a member

THIS ISLAND NATION IS ONE out of four countries covered in this report that are not members of the EU. It is one of the smaller European countries in terms of both geographical size and population. Iceland became independent from Denmark in 1944 and, with an electorate of only 200,000 voters, has held 18 parliamentary elections since 1946.

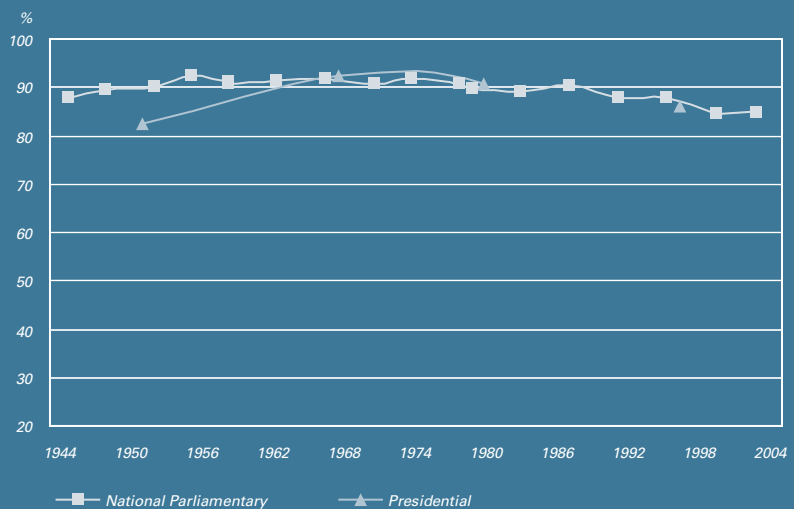
Parliamentary elections take place every four years, as do presidential elections in principle. However, presidential elections have only taken place five times since 1952, usually because there have not been enough candidates standing. This was the case, for example, in 2000, the most recent occasion when the presidential term expired.

At the parliamentary election in 1999, some new groupings of parties emerged. The ruling centre-right coalition was challenged by the newly founded left bloc. The main issues during the campaign were related to domestic economic issues. In 2003 the campaign was focused on mainly EU membership and taxes. Iceland's economy had grown, and inflation and taxes were low compared to other European countries. The coalition formed in 1999 continued in government also after the 2004 elections. Turnout in 1999 was 84 per cent, the lowest ever recorded at a parliamentary election in Iceland, although this should not be considered low in comparative terms. In 2003, turnout increased to 87 per cent which is closer to average Icelandic standard. Historically, voter turnout in Iceland has been high. Although it has fallen a little in recent years, average turnout since 1946 is almost 90 per cent, and the highest voter turnout ever recorded in a Nordic country was that at the parliamentary election in Iceland in 1956. At 92.1 per cent, this must be considered very high in a country where compulsory voting has never been practised, and it places Iceland

fifth on a European ranking list of average turnout. It should be noted that all countries that show higher average turnout have or have had some element of compulsory voting.

Most of the electoral management bodies in Western Europe are located in a government department. In Iceland the elections are run by the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs which, apart from elections, handles judicial issues and issues concerning religion. The electoral administration works very well and runs elections at low cost. Iceland was one of the first countries in the world to introduce voting by mail. Voting by mail, or 'voting by letter', as it was first called, was introduced as early as 1914 for fishermen, sailors and similar groups who were temporarily away from their electoral district. The right to vote by mail was extended to the disabled, the elderly and others in 1923, and today it is possible for all voters to opt to vote in this way. Voting by mail has become a popular alternative among Icelandic voters and is used by approximately 20 per cent of voters.

Figure 8. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Iceland, 1946–2003



Ireland

Electoral system for the national Parliament (lower house)	Single transferable vote
The national legislature is	Bicameral
Number of seats in the national Parliament	166
Number of women in the national Parliament	22 of 166 (13.3%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	Yes
Accession to the European Union	1973

THE MOST RECENT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION in Ireland is that of 2002. Voter turnout then was 62 per cent. Although Ireland has showed great variation in turnout as between different kinds of election, this was the lowest ever recorded at a parliamentary election in Ireland. On a European ranking list of average turnout only Switzerland shows a lower average turnout than Ireland. Ireland does far better on a global ranking list where it ranks around the middle.

On the other hand, the turnout trend at national parliamentary elections is fairly stable. It was above 70 per cent at all elections from 1948 up to and including the 1987 election, and since the 1989 election it has been below 70 per cent. However, the differences are not extreme and the average turnout over the past half-decade is 72.6 per cent.

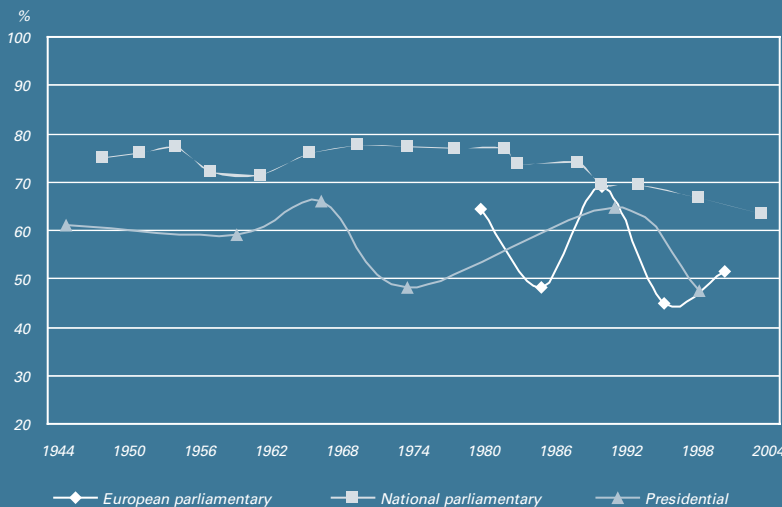
Ireland has had six presidential elections since 1945. Turnout is usually much lower for presidential elections

than it is for parliamentary elections: the average is around 57 per cent, which is roughly 15 per cent less than that for parliamentary elections and the lowest average for presidential elections in Western Europe. This may be because the president enjoys less power in Ireland than in most European countries.

Ireland is the only EU member state to use the single transferable vote (STV) system for both national elections and elections to the European Parliament. Compared to the other European countries covered in this report, it also has very low numbers of invalid or blank votes—usually well below 1 per cent.

Interestingly, at some elections to the European Parliament Ireland has shown a higher turnout than many other member states. However, its turnout at elections to the European Parliament has been the most unpredictable of all the member countries. For some elections it has been well below the European average.

Figure 9. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Ireland, 1948–2002



Italy

Electoral system for the national Parliament (lower house)	Mixed member proportional
The national legislature is	Bicameral
Number of seats in the national Parliament	630
Number of women in the national Parliament	71 of 630 (11.5%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	No
Accession to the European Union	Founder

ITALY SHOWS A FAIRLY STABLE TREND in voter turnout since 1946. The average turnout at parliamentary elections is almost 90 per cent. This is one of the highest in Western Europe and in the world. A slight decline in turnout has been seen recently, at parliamentary elections and at elections to the European Parliament.

The most recent parliamentary election in Italy took place in 2001. The outgoing Parliament was only the fifth to complete its five-year term since the Second World War. Fifteen parliamentary elections have been held in Italy since 1945. In the 2001 election the parties of the far right under the leadership of Silvio Berlusconi won an absolute majority of seats in the Chamber of Deputies and a simple majority in the Senate as a newly formed group under the name the House of Freedoms. After the EU imposed sanctions on Austria after the election there in 2000, when the country included a party of the far right in the government, concern increased within the EU about Italy as well.

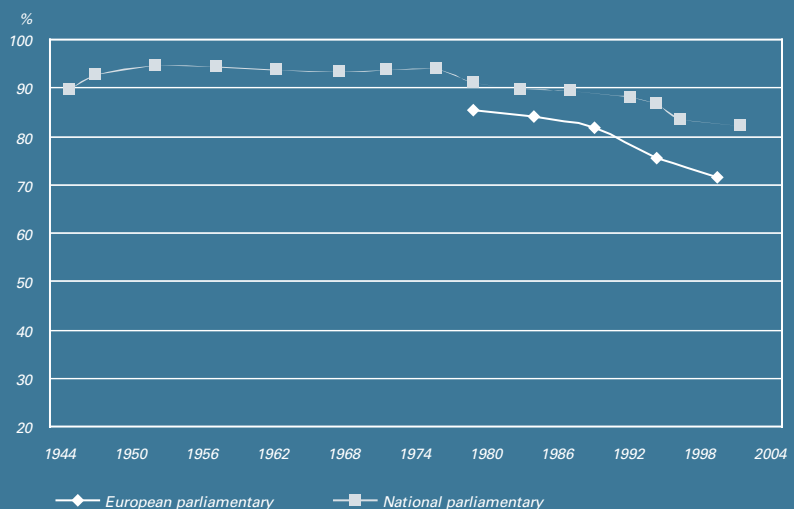
The proportion of women MPs in the new Parliament in Italy is quite low compared to other European countries.

In recent years Italy has greatly reduced the number of polling stations as a result of changes in the electoral system and the system of electoral administration during the 1990s. This has resulted in crowds of voters queuing up to vote, not all of whom have been given the chance to cast their ballot, although voting hours have been extended. This was noted mainly at the 2000 regional elections.

Compulsory voting was practised in Italy previously but today voting is only considered a duty and no sanctions are imposed on non-voters.

Elections to the European Parliament also show a high turnout in Italy—on average almost 80 per cent, which places Italy third on a ranking list of EU member states.

Figure 10. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Italy, 1946–2001



Luxembourg

Electoral system for the national Parliament
 The national legislature is
 Number of seats in the national Parliament
 Number of women in the national Parliament
 Presidential elections
 Accession to the European Union

List proportional representation
 Unicameral
 60
 10 of 60 (16.7%) as of January 2004
 No
 Founder

OF THE COUNTRIES EXAMINED in this report, Luxembourg has the smallest parliament and the second-smallest electorate. The Parliament consists of 60 seats, of which 10 are held by women. The electorate is just above 200,000, which is approximately the same size as those of Iceland and Malta.

Turnout in Luxembourg has remained very stable and high during the past decade in both parliamentary elections and elections to the European Parliament. Average turnout in parliamentary elections is almost 90 per cent. It has declined during recent years but only very little.

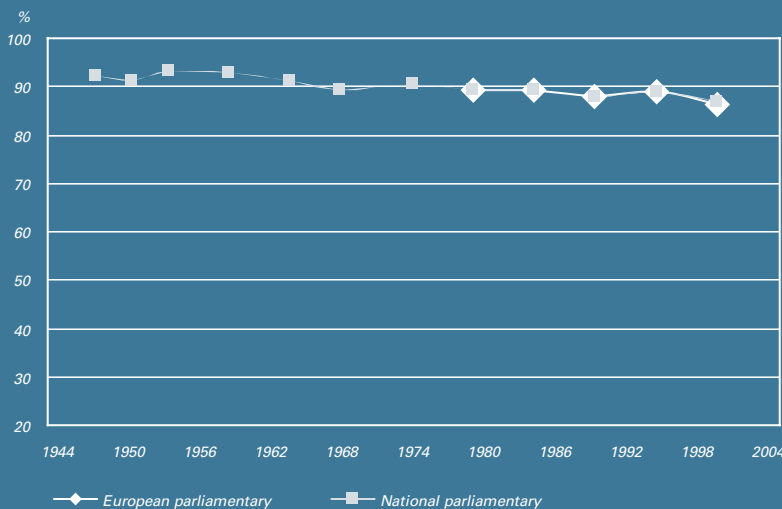
The most recent parliamentary election in Luxembourg took place in 1999. It led to some minor changes in government. The Christian Social Party held

on to power as the largest party in Parliament, but the liberal Democratic Party overtook the Socialist Workers' Party as the second-largest party. Except for the two largest parties, which formed a new coalition government, four others are currently represented in the Parliament.

Luxembourg has had compulsory voting since 1919.

After Belgium, Luxembourg has the highest average turnout at elections to the European Parliament—almost 88 per cent on average since 1979 and never less than 85 per cent. All five elections to the European Parliament in which Luxembourg, a founding member state of the EU, has taken part have taken place on the same day as elections to the national Parliament.

Figure 11. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Luxembourg, 1948–1999



Malta

Electoral system for the national Parliament	Single transferable vote
The national legislature is	Unicameral
Number of seats in the national Parliament	65
Number of women in the national Parliament	6 of 65 (9.2%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	No
Accession to the European Union	Not a member

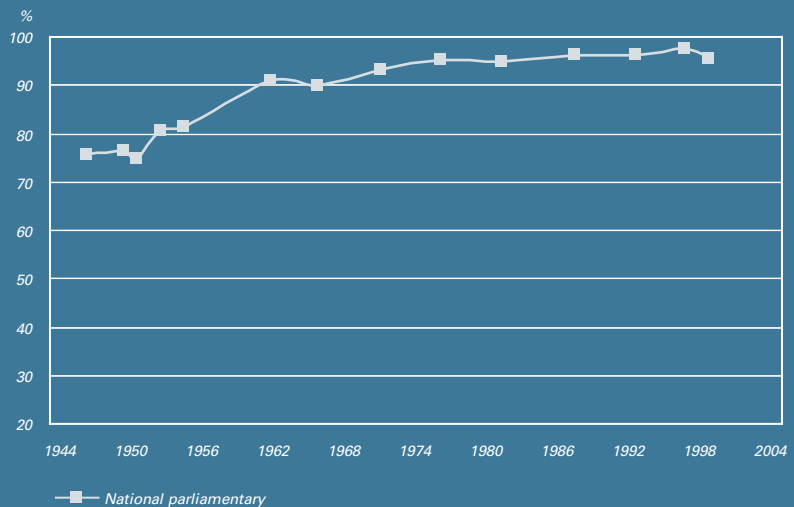
MALTA HAS BEEN CITED MANY TIMES by academics as an example of a country that has a very high voter turnout without having compulsory voting. Among the countries included in this report, of those that do not have compulsory voting, only Iceland shows a higher average turnout than Malta.

Fifteen parliamentary elections have been held since 1947. Turnout was much lower in the 1940s and 1950s than it is today: the first few elections after the Second World War showed turnouts of around 75 per cent, which is not regarded as low but is almost 20 per cent lower than turnout at the most recent election in 1998.

The highest turnout ever measured was in 1996, when more than 97 per cent of registered voters turned out to vote in the parliamentary election. Except for the first few elections after the Second World War, turnout in Malta has remained very stable over the years.

The 1998 election followed the premature dissolution of the Parliament less than two years after the previous election. There was only a one-month campaign and it focused mainly on possible membership of the EU and economic issues. Malta joined the EU on 1 May 2004.

Figure 12. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Malta, 1947–1998



Netherlands

Electoral system for the national Parliament (lower house)	List proportional representation
The national legislature is	Bicameral
Number of seats in the national Parliament	150
Number of women in the national Parliament	55 of 150 (36.7%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	No
Accession to the European Union	Founder

IT WAS COMPULSORY FOR CITIZENS to vote in national parliamentary elections until 1967 in the Netherlands, and this has left clear traces in the history of the country's voter turnout. Before 1970 the average turnout was 95 per cent, but after voting was made voluntary, starting with the next election in 1971, a clear decline in turnout is apparent. The average fell to 82 per cent. Still, the overall average turnout in the Netherlands since 1946 is almost 87 per cent, which places it fairly high up on a global ranking list of voter turnout and seventh on a ranking list of West European countries.

The Netherlands is one of the countries that have introduced new technology in their electoral processes and one of the first to introduce it on a national basis. It is possible today to vote using voting machines at the polling stations in most regions of the country.

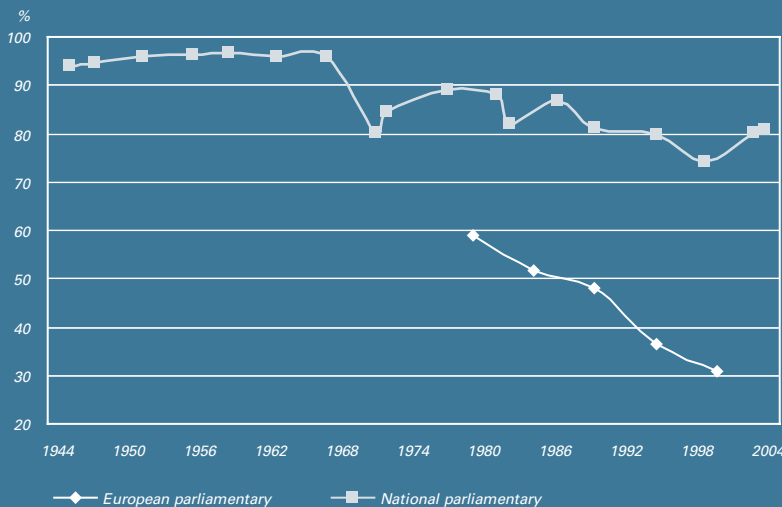
The most recent parliamentary election in the Netherlands (in 2003) and the one before (in 2002) attracted international attention since the leader of one anti-immigration political party was shot dead a few days

before the 2002 election. The 2003 election was called because of the premature dissolution of Parliament. This time the Labour Party increased the number of its seats in the Parliament, one less party is represented, and the party whose leader was assassinated, the List Pim Fortuyn, also lost a large share of its voters compared with the 2002 election.

A large proportion of Dutch MPs are women—almost 37 per cent, which is the fifth-largest share in the world. Only the Scandinavian countries Sweden, Denmark and Finland have a higher proportion of women MPs (as well as the African country Rwanda, after the recent introduction of quotas).

At elections to the European Parliament the Netherlands also shows a declining trend, but it has never been compulsory to vote at these elections. Turnout has fallen at each election to the European Parliament since the first took place in 1979. At 58 per cent in 1979 and 30 per cent in 1999, it has fallen by 5–10 per cent at each election.

Figure 13. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Netherlands, 1946–2003



Norway

Electoral system for national Parliament	List proportional representation
The national legislature is	Unicameral
Number of seats in the national Parliament	165
Number of women in the national Parliament	60 of 165 (36.4%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	No
Accession to the European Union	Not a member

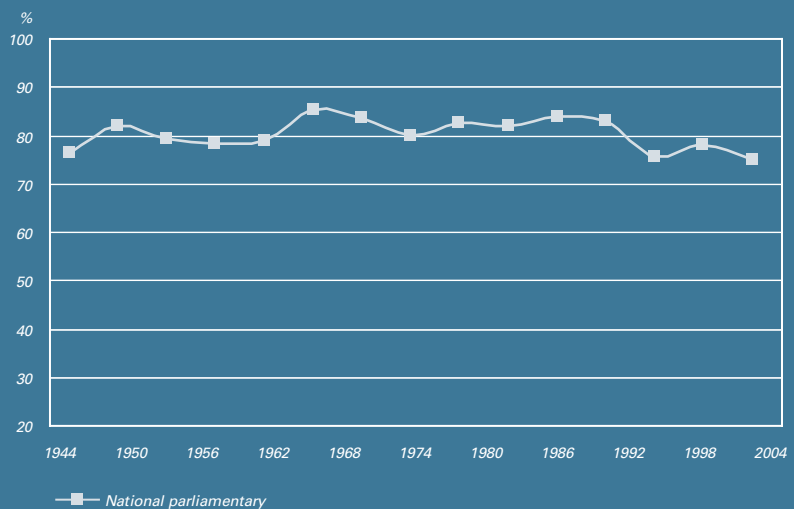
AT THE MOST RECENT parliamentary election in Norway, in 2001, turnout was 75 per cent. This was the lowest ever recorded in a Norwegian parliamentary election since 1927 and it follows a trend of declining turnout in Norway since the beginning of the 1990s. Elections are held every four years and since 1945 there have been 15 elections. Average turnout, at around 80 per cent for parliamentary elections since 1945, is relatively high, at least compared to the rest of the world, although it is somewhat lower than the average in the other Nordic countries. On a ranking list of average turnout in Western Europe, Norway is just below the European average.

The campaign for the 2001 parliamentary election focused on two main issues, taxes and the state of the public services. Norwegian citizens pay some of the highest taxes in the world and, despite the fact that the UN has proclaimed Norway to have the highest standard of living in the world, the opposition parties argued that the income from oil exports should be used, among other

things, to reduce taxes. The results of the election produced no absolute majority in the Parliament. A coalition was formed between the Conservatives, the Christian People's Party and the Liberal Left. The prime minister tendered his resignation. In the new Norwegian Parliament, which had its first sitting in October 2001, over 36 per cent of the MPs were women—comparatively a very high proportion.

Norway, like Ireland, has one of the lowest shares of invalid and blank votes in Europe: these usually account for well below 1 per cent of votes cast. At the last election 20 per cent of Norwegian voters voted before election day by mail or by other means. Postal voting was introduced only in 1997, although it was widely discussed during the 1970s and 1980s. However, postal voting had a short life in Norway. Following the restructuring of the public mail company and the new electoral law that was passed in 2002, it is no longer practised.

Figure 14. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Norway, 1945–2001



Portugal

Electoral system for the national Parliament	List proportional representation
The national legislature is	Unicameral
Number of seats in the national Parliament	230
Number of women in the national Parliament	44 of 230 (19.1%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	Yes
Accession to the European Union	1986

PORTUGAL ACHIEVED A VERY HIGH voter turnout at its first election following the restoration of democracy in 1975. At 92 per cent it was among the highest levels in Europe since 1945. Since then, however, turnout has declined at almost every national election. The most obvious decline took place during the 1990s. At the most recent election, in 2002, turnout was 62 per cent. The average turnout at parliamentary elections since 1975 is almost 74 per cent.

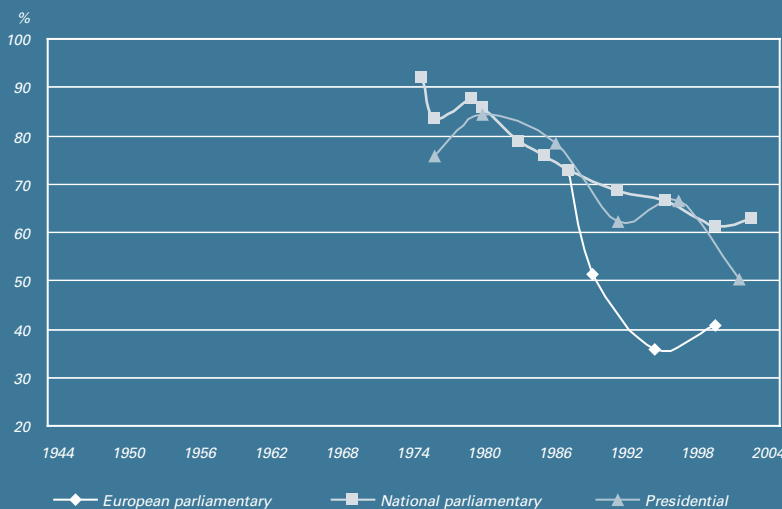
Presidential elections in Portugal show lower turnouts than parliamentary elections. In the most recent presidential election in 2001 turnout was only 50 per cent. The average is approximately 69 per cent.

The most recent parliamentary election in 2002 was held following the premature dissolution of the

Parliament in 2001. The prime minister had suddenly resigned in 2001 after his party was defeated in local elections the same year. During the campaign, perhaps not surprisingly, the focus was on economic issues: Portugal is still one of the poorest countries in the EU. The Social Democrats together with the People's Party formed a coalition as a result of the election.

Portugal has held four elections to the European Parliament since joining the EU in 1986. The average turnout at these elections is lower than that at national elections, at 50 per cent, but Portugal is one the few countries where turnout actually increased at the most recent election to the European Parliament, in 1999.

Figure 15. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Portugal, 1975–2002



Spain

Electoral system for the national Parliament (lower house)	List proportional representation
The national legislature is	Bicameral
Number of seats in the national Parliament	350
Number of women in the national Parliament	99 of 350 (28.3%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	No
Accession to the European Union	1986

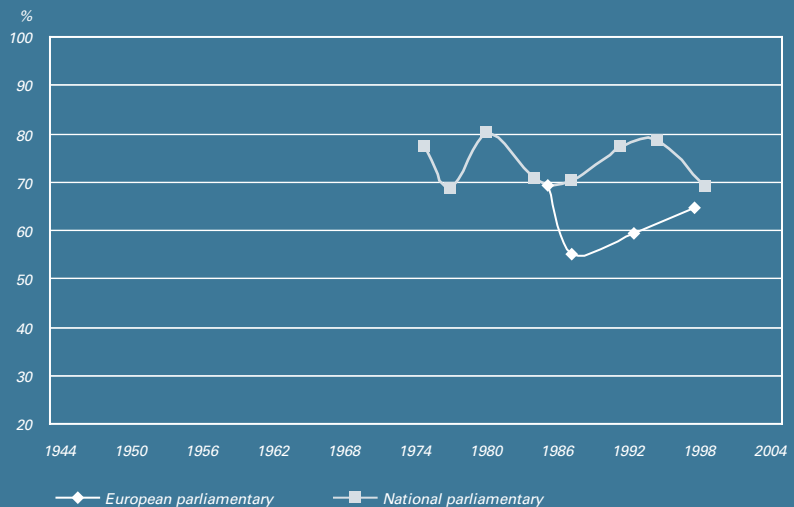
SPAIN HAS ONE OF THE LOWER LEVELS of turnout for parliamentary elections among the member states of the EU. The eight elections to the national Parliament held since 1977 have produced an average turnout of 75 per cent—still not very low compared to the rest of the world. As figure 16 shows, turnout at national elections declined at the most recent election, in 2000, to 68.7 per cent. Only once since 1977—at the second election held in Spain, in 1979—has turnout at a parliamentary election been so low.

The campaign leading up to the parliamentary election of 2000 was marked by bombings carried out by the

Basque separatist movement Homeland and Liberty (Euzkadi Ta Azkatasuna, ETA). The car bombing during this campaign was the third since 1999.

The average turnout at the four elections to the European Parliament since 1986, when Spain joined the EU, is lower than that for national elections, at approximately 62 per cent, but still places Spain fifth on a ranking list of average turnout among the member states.

Figure 16. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Spain, 1977–2000



Sweden

Electoral system for the national Parliament	List proportional representation
The national legislature is	Unicameral
Number of seats in the national Parliament	349
Number of women in the national Parliament	158 of 349 (45.3%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	No
Accession to the European Union	1995

VOTER TURNOUT HAS BEEN FAIRLY HIGH IN SWEDEN since 1945. Eighteen parliamentary elections have been held since then and the average turnout is almost 86 per cent. The pattern of high turnout held until the most recent parliamentary elections in 1998 and 2002, when turnout decreased to 81.4 and 80.1 per cent, respectively. The highest turnout ever in Sweden was in 1976, when a conservative government came to power for the first time in 40 years. At almost 92 per cent, this was the second-highest ever recorded in the Nordic countries, after the election in Iceland in 1963. For national elections Sweden ranks ninth on a European ranking list of average turnout. The declining turnout at parliamentary elections, as well as elections to the European Parliament, has generated much debate among politicians and academics and in the media about low participation and how to increase turnout.

The number of women represented in Parliament has been high over recent decades, and Sweden is at the top of a ranking list showing the proportion of women in parliament. The most recent election, in 2002, resulted in a slight increase in the proportion of women MPs, which

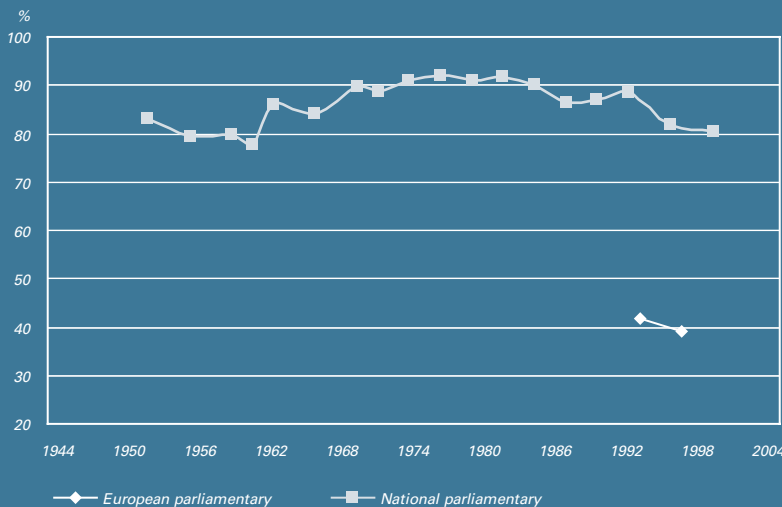
is now 45 per cent. In 1999 Sweden was the first country in the world to have more women ministers than men.

The parliamentary election in 2002 resulted in a third term for the prime minister, who is also the leader of the Social Democratic Party. The party formed a minority government as agreement with the smaller parties on a coalition was not possible. The conservative opposition party faced its worst election since the 1970s, while the Liberals did better than before.

Postal voting has been practised in Sweden since 1942 and 30 per cent of the voters voted by mail at the post office in the most recent (2002) parliamentary election. In the referendum on adopting the euro in 2003, it was almost 32 per cent.

Since joining the EU, Sweden has held only two elections to the European Parliament. In contrast to the parliamentary elections, these elections show a very low turnout—on average 40 per cent, which is the second-lowest turnout in Europe (the United Kingdom having the lowest). The last election to the European Parliament in Sweden, in 1999, produced a turnout of only 38 per cent, which is one of the lowest ever for these elections.

Figure 17. Voter turnout by type of election as a percentage of registered voters, Sweden, 1952–2002



Switzerland

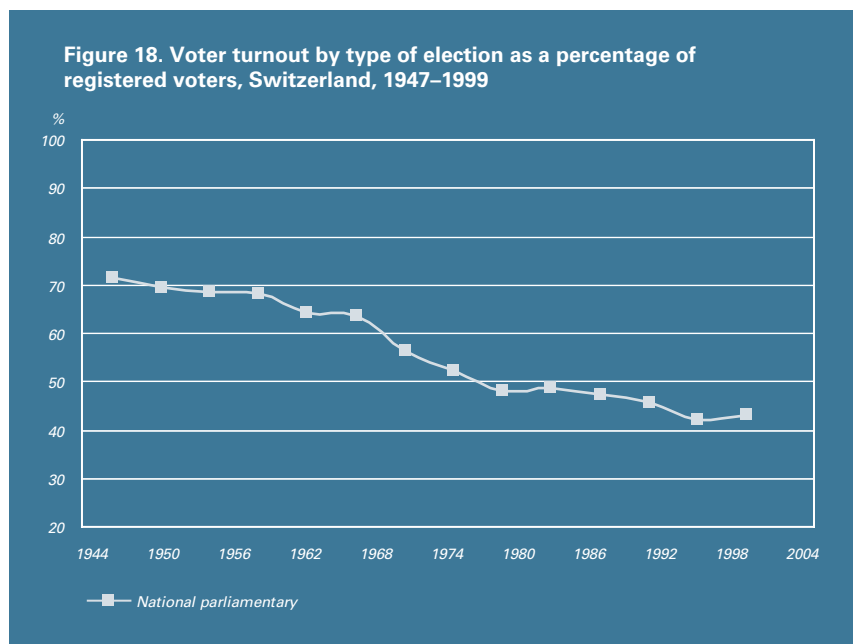
Electoral system for the national Parliament (lower house)	List proportional representation
The national legislature is	Bicameral
Number of seats in the national parliament	200
Number of women in the national parliament	46 of 200 (23.0%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	No
Accession to the European Union	Not a member

SWITZERLAND IS FAMOUS for its many referendums and for this form of direct democracy, but its voter turnout is the lowest in Western Europe and one of the lowest in the world. The average turnout at parliamentary elections in Switzerland has been almost 57 per cent since 1947. From a turnout of almost 72 per cent in 1947, the lowest ever—42 per cent—was recorded in 1995, and at the most recent parliamentary election, in 1999, it was approximately 45 per cent. The trend is clearly declining: every decade since the 1940s, turnout has fallen by a few percentage points.

Compulsory voting was formerly practised in Switzerland. Once it was abolished, a few cantons decided to continue this practice but today only the canton of Schaffhausen has compulsory voting (as it has had since 1904).

Postal voting is used extensively at most elections in Switzerland, and is a growing practice in towns and suburbs. On average in the country, a little more than 50 per cent of the voters choose to vote by mail. There are, however, differences between the cantons. In Geneva and Basle, for example, more than 95 per cent of voters voted by mail in the most recent election, while in places such as Valais or Ticino only a small percentage chose to do so. In several of regions where access to postal voting was simplified ten years ago, turnout has increased.

Switzerland has recently completed pilot projects trying out e-voting. This includes voting on the Internet, by using the telephone, by SMS/text messages and so on. This has mainly been tried at elections in Geneva, but other regions such as Zurich and Neuchatel have also started to test new technology in the electoral process.



United Kingdom

Electoral system for the national Parliament (lower house)	First past the post
The national legislature is	Bicameral
Number of seats in the national parliament	659
Number of women in the national parliament	118 of 659 (17.9%) as of January 2004
Presidential elections	No
Accession to the European Union	1973

At the most recent election in the United Kingdom, in 2001, turnout declined by several percentage points, to 59 per cent—the lowest ever since the introduction of universal suffrage. It has declined at each of the two latest elections in the UK. The highest levels of turnout were measured in the 1950s.

The UK has a maximum parliamentary term of five years, not a fixed term. The most recent parliamentary election in 2001 was called before the end of the parliamentary term, as is common practice. In addition, local elections in England and Northern Ireland had been postponed the month before because of the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. This was the first time since the Second World War that the British Government had decided to postpone elections. One of the main issues in the election campaign was the euro and whether the UK should at some point introduce the single European currency. Foot-and-mouth disease was also a major subject, as well as more traditional issues such as the improvement of schools, hospitals and other public services. The Labour Party won an absolute majority in Parliament.

The UK has experimented with introducing new technologies in the voting process. During the local elections in May 2002 pilot projects were run to try out new, innovative techniques such as remote electronic voting from any computer, touch-screen kiosks, voting by phone or text message, and voting at different public institutions such as libraries. One of the purposes was to increase participation in elections.

The parliamentary elections of 2001 were not the only elections in the British to produce a declining turnout. Turnout is low also at elections to the European Parliament. Although it is not a founding member of the EU, the British voters have voted at all five elections to the European Parliament. At the most recent election, in 1999, turnout was down at the record level of 24 per cent—the lowest ever for elections to the European Parliament in any of the member states. The average turnout in elections to the European Parliament in the UK is 32 per cent, while the average for national parliamentary elections is 75 per cent.

