

# Citizens' Participation

**ICELAND**

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# Voting Rights

- Voting right at national level
  - All Icelandic citizens who have reached the age of 18 at the time of a general election and who are domiciled in Iceland have the right to vote
  - Icelandic citizens who have reached the age of 18 and who have been domiciled in Iceland, have the right to vote:
    - a. For eight years after transferring their domicile from Iceland
    - b. After the eight years, providing they have applied for it
- Voting right at local level
  - Icelandic nationals with residence in the municipality
  - Nordic nationals with permanent residency in the municipality can vote after 3 years – Other foreign nationals after 5 years.
  - 18+ years old

# At the national level

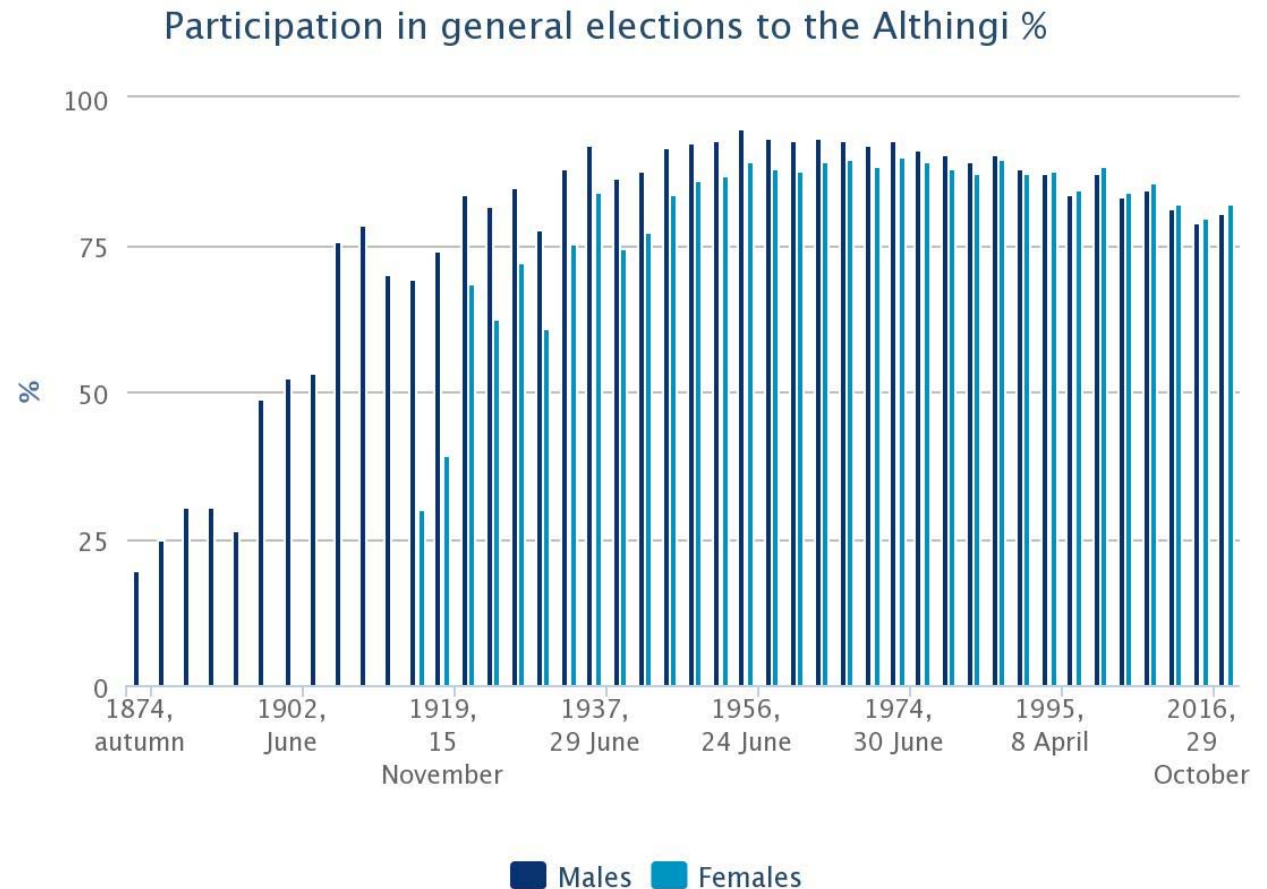
- National level
  - 63 Members of Parliament (*Alpingsi*) elected in six constituents
    - Four-year term
    - Proportional election system in the six constituencies
    - 5 per cent threshold for all political parties to gain seats in Parliament
    - The Prime Minister is appointed by the President based on election results and possibility of forming a government
    - The Prime Minister selects his cabinet and the President formally appoints them
    - No direct elections to Parliament but voters can cross out candidates on the voting ballot

## At the national level

- For each respective electoral district, six seats shall be allocated in accordance with the outcome of elections within that district.
- Seats other than those allocated to the electoral districts shall be distributed within each respective electoral district with the purpose of providing individual political parties with representation reflecting to the fullest possible extent each party's total number of votes. However, only political parties having received at least five per cent of all valid votes cast nation-wide shall be eligible for such distribution.

# Voter turnout in national elections

Participation of voters in the general elections in 2017 was 201,792 or 81.2% of the total number of voters on the electoral roll. Participation of female voters was slightly higher than that of male voters or 82.1% women compared with 80.3% men. The participation varied by age - it was lower among young voters.

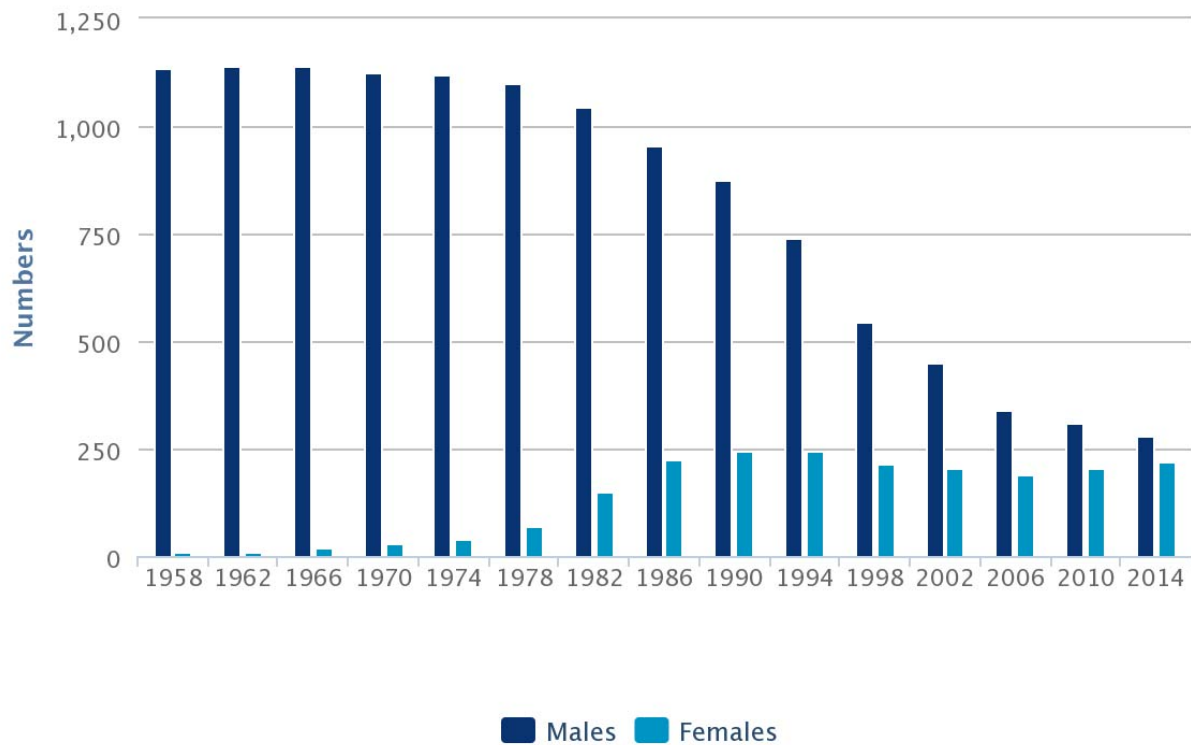


# At the regional level

- Regional level
  - There are currently 69 municipalities in Iceland
  - Many municipalities have merged recently
  - In 1950 the municipalities were 229
  - Four year terms
  - In Reykjavik, the city council members are currently 23
  - The smallest municipality (Árneshreppur) has only 5 town council members. However, the total number of residents is 42.

# Local election results

### Representatives in local government elections by sex



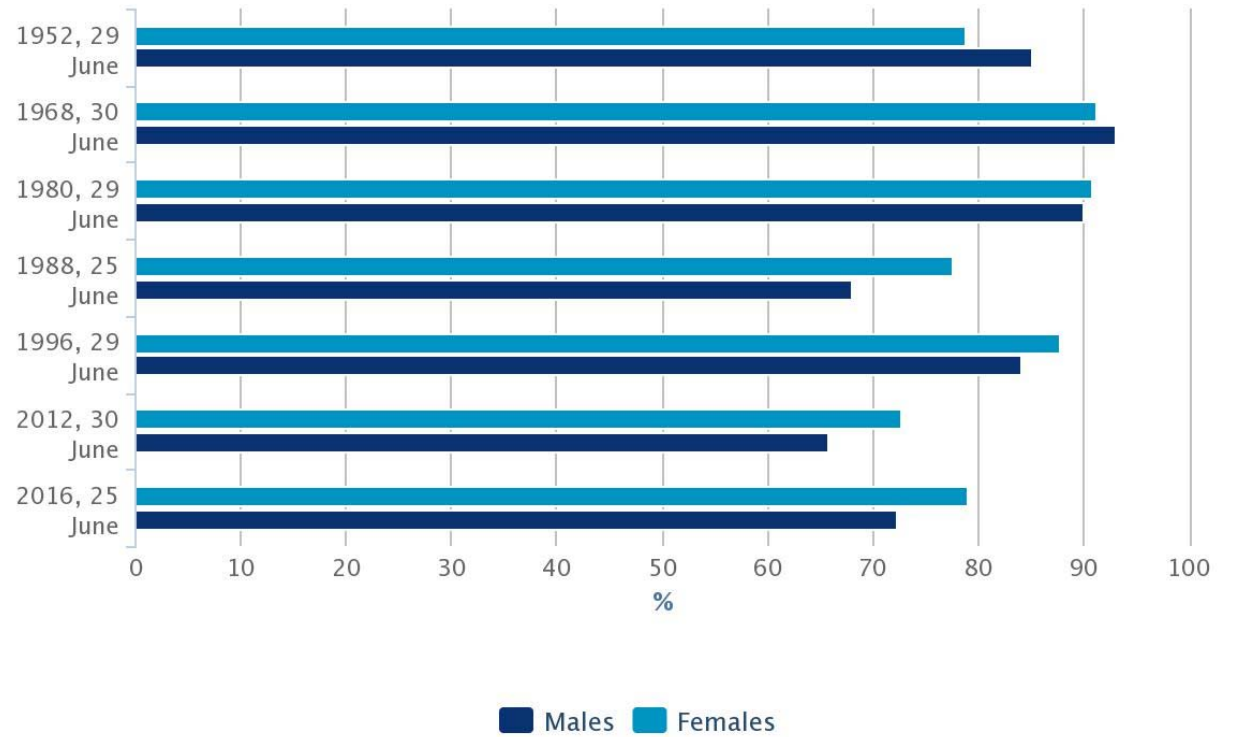
# Presidential elections

- The President is elected by direct, secret ballot of those who are eligible to vote in elections to Althingi. A presidential candidate shall be proposed by not less than 1500 voters and not more than 3000.
  - The candidate, if there is more than one, who receives the most votes is duly elected President. If there is only one candidate, he is duly elected without a vote.
  - The President entrusts his authority to Ministers.
  - Ministers are accountable for all executive acts.
  - The State Council is composed of the President of the Republic and the Ministers and is presided over by the President.
- Source: <https://www.government.is/Publications/Legislation/Lex/?newsid=89fc6038-fd28-11e7-9423-005056bc4d74>



# Presidential Elections

Participation in presidential elections



# Direct Democracy

- Since 1944, the constitutional provision granting the President of Iceland the right to veto legislation has been invoked three times and has twice led to a national referendum.
- In 2012, an advisory national referendum on a new constitution was called by parliament. In the referendum, 73% voted in favour of a provision enabling 10% of the electorate to demand a national referendum. However, parliament has yet to ratify the constitution bill even though 67% voted in favor of the bill.
- The current government announced a three-year process for reviewing limited aspects of the constitution. The review is supposed to cover the transfer of state powers, national referendums, natural resources and environmental protections. The outcome of this review remains to be seen.

Source: [https://www.sgi-network.org/2020/Iceland/Quality\\_of\\_Democracy](https://www.sgi-network.org/2020/Iceland/Quality_of_Democracy)

# Direct Democracy (I)

- A law on local government affairs was passed by parliament in September 2011. This law contained a new chapter called Consultancy with Citizens (Samráð við íbúa), which includes paragraphs on local referendums and citizen initiatives.
- Under its terms, if at least 20% of the population eligible to vote in a municipality demand a referendum, the local authorities are obliged to hold a referendum within a year.
- However, local councils can decide to increase this threshold to 33% of eligible voters. At the local level, therefore, significant steps have been taken to improve the opportunity for citizen impact between elections.
  - Source: [https://www.sgi-network.org/2020/Iceland/Quality\\_of\\_Democracy](https://www.sgi-network.org/2020/Iceland/Quality_of_Democracy)

# Other forms of citizens' participation

- Better Reykjavik is an online platform for the crowdsourcing of solutions to urban challenges launched by the Icelandic Citizens Foundation in May 2010.
- Multiple democratic functions: Agenda setting, Participatory budgeting, and Policymaking.
- The website gives residents of Reykjavik the opportunity to submit original ideas and solutions to municipal-level issues within the city.
- Over 70,000 people have participated out of a population of 120,000 since the site opened and 30,000 registered users have submitted 10,000 ideas and 21,000 points for and against.
- Close to 700 ideas from citizens have been implemented by the city. Over 450 ideas have been processed through the agenda setting part of Better Reykjavik.
- An education policy project generated 200 ideas and thousands of debate points.
  - Source: <https://www.citizens.is/>

# Media (I)

- Until privatization in 1986, the state had a monopoly over radio and TV broadcasting. Private stations now have a significant role in the media market.
- There is one public television station (RÚV) and three state-owned radio channels (Rás 1, Rás 2 and Rondó). There are also four private national TV channels (Stöð 2, Hringbraut, Síminn, N4) and two national private radio channels, separately owned.
- Morgunblaðið, the second largest newspaper, has long been considered the voice of the Independence Party and is owned primarily by several fishing vessel owners. Since 2009, its chief editor has been the former Prime Minister and Independence Party leader. Other newspapers include DV, Stundin and Kjarninn.
- Given the somewhat broader ownership of TV and radio media combined with several smaller TV broadcasters, radio stations and newspapers, media ownership in Iceland can be considered fairly pluralistic.
  - Source: [https://www.sgi-network.org/2020/Iceland/Quality\\_of\\_Democracy](https://www.sgi-network.org/2020/Iceland/Quality_of_Democracy)

# Media (II)

- Reporters without borders 2021 World Press Freedom Index (<https://rsf.org/en/ranking>)

- Iceland ranked 16
- Has been criticized as too limited
- Political ties to media ownership still remains
- Iceland's legislation protects journalists and freedom of expression, but a lack of funding continues to be the main problem for the media

Source: <https://rsf.org/en/iceland>

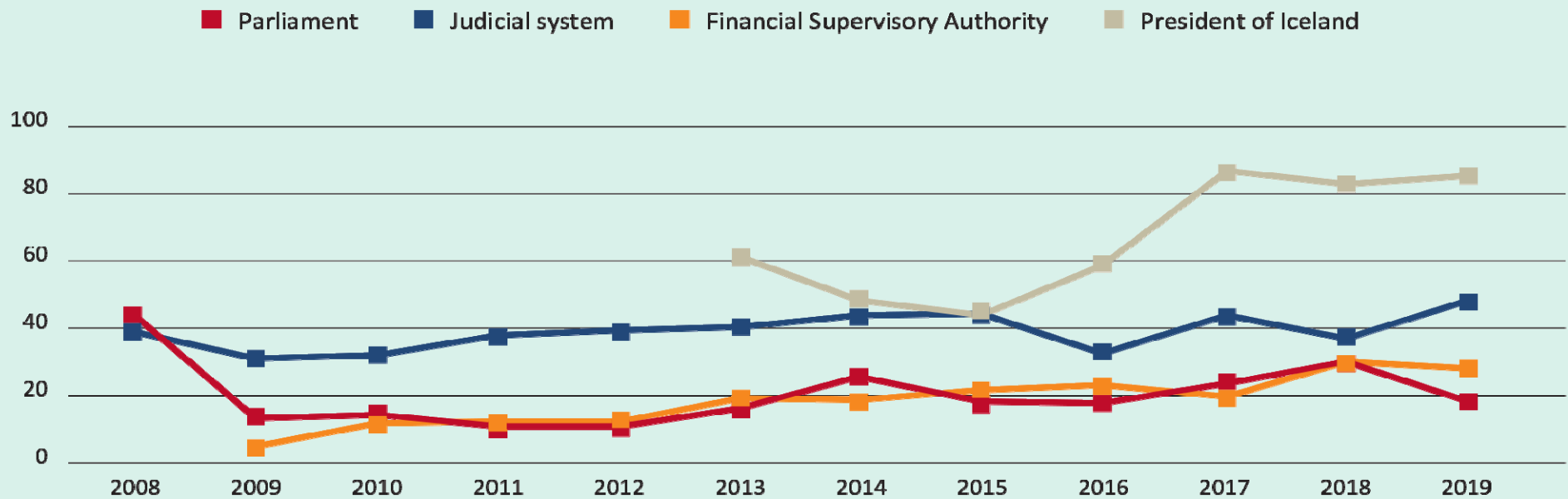
- Trust in mainstream media 66% in recent poll

Source: <https://fjolmidlanefnd.is/2021/05/20/tveir-af-hverjum-thremur-baru-traust-til-islenskra-fjolmidla/>

Ranking	Country
15	Estonia
16	Iceland
20	Luxembourg
23	Liechtenstein
26	Cyprus
39	Andorra
81	Malta
104	Montenegro
-	San Marino

# Faith in the system

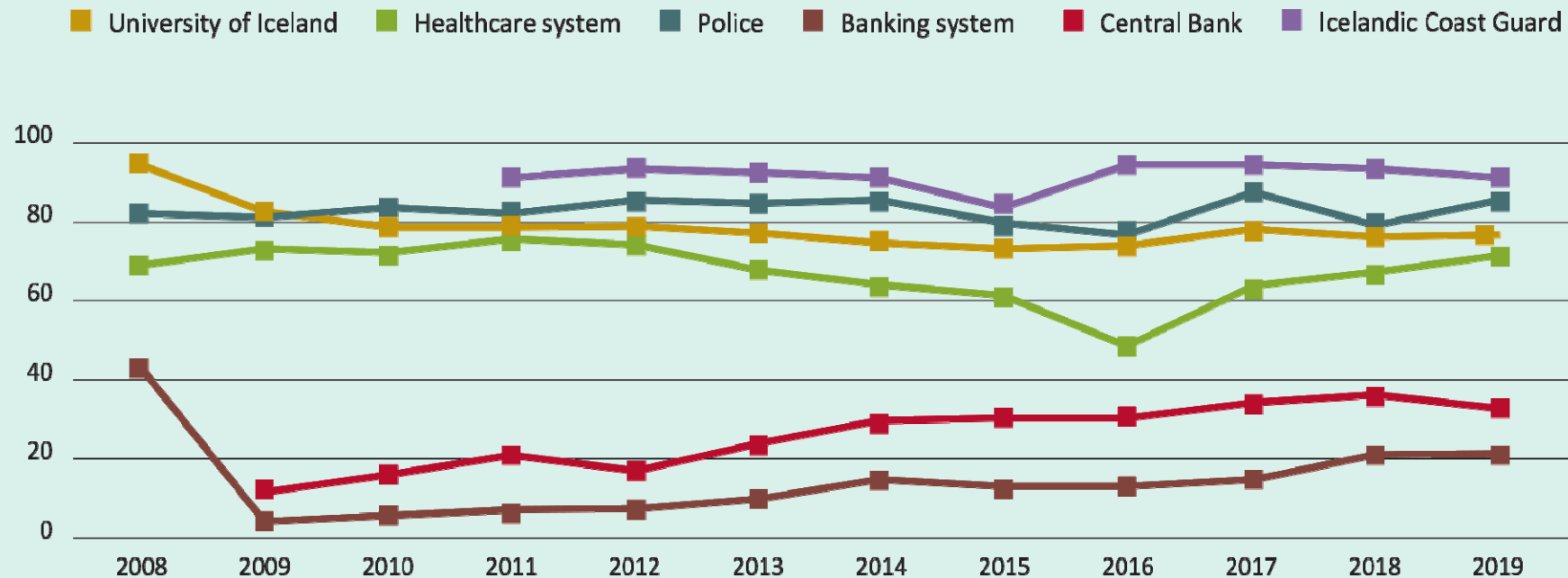
## Level of trust towards government institutions



Source: <https://www.gallup.is/nidurstodur/thjodarpuls/traust-til-stofnana/>

# Faith in the system

## Level of trust towards other government institutions



Source: <https://www.gallup.is/nidurstodur/thjodarpuls/traust-til-stofnana/>



# Conclusion: Lessons and prospects

- Following the bank collapse still a high level of distrust towards the banking system, including financial supervision although a bit more optimistic than in recent years
- Rising trust towards the health care system resonates with support for the measures taken during the pandemic
- Voter turnout decreasing but still rather high overall – younger voters may continue to feel left out and not wanting to participate politically except in specific issues such as fighting climate change
- The aftermath of the pandemic will be challenging – student fallout likely to increase dramatically
- Election results in the fall (September 2021) difficult to predict – may take a long time to form a government
- Covid-19 fatigue could become a factor leading to protests against government measures