

Sofia Serra-Silva (ICS-ULisboa), Diana Carvalho (CAPP, ISCSP-UL), Júlio Fazendeiro (ICS-ULisboa) | *Unveiling the online response of Portuguese political institutions and actors towards young political apathy*

Several studies published in recent years have revealed a worrying panorama regarding the relationship between the Portuguese electorate and political institutions (Cabral 2000, Freire et al., 2004, Freire and Magalhães 2002 and Lobo 2013). These have shown a picture of weak political citizenship in which the Portuguese, and particularly the young, become less committed and less rewarded. This has been related to general apathy, feelings of inaccessibility to political structures, low confidence in political institutions, but also due to changes in youth transitions patterns and in the circumstances they occur (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). Additionally, it seems the crisis has reinforced the general feeling of political apathy for both the Portuguese population, in general, and as well for the Portuguese young people (Lobo and Sanches, 2015).

As a reaction to these trends, political institutions across the world have undergone considerable reforms over the last two decades by introducing internet channels and tools to promote citizenship and political engagement (IPU, 2012; Hansard Society, 2011; Leston-Bandeira, 2013). This effort can also be observed in Portuguese political institutions. Recently, the Portuguese parliament has developed a parliamentary work group to promote a “Digital Parliament”, which is trying to explore the potential of technology in order to look for innovative forms of communication that contribute to the engagement of citizens with Parliament. Those tools are potentially interesting when addressing the apathy, disaffection and political disengagement of young people since this is the age group that mostly uses internet. Additionally, 94,1% of the Portuguese people between 15 and 24 years use the Internet (OberCom, 2014). This issue has been majorly addressed by looking at the *demand side* (the public), while the *supply side* (as offered by political institutions) has been understudied.

The aim of this chapter is to analyze how institutions, namely the Portuguese parliament and political parties, have been responding and addressing young people’s political apathy, by combining a Political Science and Youth studies’ theoretical framework. In order to do so, institutional websites and social media presence, in this chapter, are both analyzed in ordinary times (when key economic and political variables have not swung too far from their average values) and in extraordinary times (between 2010 and 2012, when Portugal needed to be rescued by sovereign bailout programs).