

**The crisis of political
representation:
the Portuguese case (2002-2015)**

Manuel Villaverde Cabral

and

Susana Salgado

Instituto de Ciências Sociais – Universidade de Lisboa

Portugal: decreasing turnout

| Year | Electoral abstention |
|------|----------------------|
| 1975 | 8,34% |
| 1976 | 16,47% |
| 1979 | 17,13% |
| 1980 | 16,06% |
| 1983 | 22,21% |
| 1985 | 25,84% |
| 1987 | 28,43% |
| 1991 | 32,22% |
| 1995 | 33,70% |
| 1999 | 38,91% |
| 2002 | 38,52% |
| 2005 | 35,74% |
| 2009 | 40,32% |
| 2011 | 41,97% |
| 2015 | 44,14% |

Our approach

- Using data from post electoral surveys:
 - Examine the general feeling of trust/distrust in the representative democratic regime system
 - Understand the match/mismatch between supply and demand in Portuguese politics (political parties, party leaders, political elite in general)
- De-construction of political representation in four different evaluative dimensions:
 - 1- Normative
 - 2- Affective
 - 3- Performance
 - 4- Relational

Political parties (2002)

| | | | |
|---|----|----|----|
| Feels close to a party or just sympatizer (2) | 27 | 73 | |
| Political parties care about what citizens think (4) | 18 | 56 | 26 |
| Political parties are necessary (1) | 67 | 12 | 21 |
| Did you try to convince others to vote for a party (3) | 10 | 90 | - |
| Have you shown support to a party (3) | 7 | 93 | - |
| Were you contacted by any party (3) | 16 | 84 | - |
| Political parties represent their opinions (2) | 50 | 39 | 11 |
| Do you trust in political parties (4) | 24 | 73 | 3 |
| Political parties are vital for citizens' political participation | 72 | 14 | 14 |
| ⁽¹⁾ Political parties only serve to divide the people (4) | 43 | 47 | 10 |

Political parties: crisis of political representation

- Citizens: average level of identification with the existing political parties and considerable reluctance in expressing their specific party preferences (44% of favourable opinions);
- Citizens have very low levels of trust in political parties and evaluate their performance mostly in a negative way (only 26.5% of favourable opinions);
- There is not much active relationship between citizens and parties (both ways) (11%).

Political elite in general (2002)

| | Positive | Negative | NIM/NR |
|--|----------|----------|--------|
| Politicians know what common citizens think (4) | 32 | 45 | 23 |
| Contacts with politicians (3) | 6 | 92 | 2 |
| Political leaders should represent the citizens' views (1) | 52 | 36 | 12 |
| MPs' opinions reflect voters' opinions (4) | 28 | 47 | 25 |
| Citizens' interest by politicians' views (2) | 37 | 33 | 30 |
| Politicians are not interested in what citizens think (4) | 21 | 69 | 10 |
| Politicians are only interested in winning votes and elections (4) | 12 | 79 | 9 |

Political parties over time (2002-2015)

| | 2002 | | | 2005 | | | 2009 | | | 2011 | | | 2015 | | |
|---|------|----|----|------|------|----|------|------|----|------|------|----|------|------|----|
| | Yes | No | NA | Yes | No | NA | Yes | No | NA | Yes | No | NA | Yes | No | NA |
| Closeness to a political party | 52 | 48 | | 43,6 | 53,6 | | 46,8 | 52,4 | | 40,6 | 57,5 | | 41 | 56,6 | |
| Identification of the party to which the citizen feels closer | 47 | 53 | | 39,3 | 60,7 | | 42,3 | 53,2 | | 48,4 | 51,6 | | 37,1 | 59 | |
| Feels close to a party or just sympatizer | 27 | 73 | | 21,6 | 41,8 | | 19,7 | 50,1 | | 23,4 | 76,4 | | 22,9 | 76,7 | |
| Were you contacted by any party | 16 | 84 | | 4,6 | 29,6 | | | | | | | | 6,2 | 93 | |
| Political parties only serve to divide the people | 43 | 47 | | 32,2 | 48,4 | | 46,8 | 36,8 | | | | | | | |
| Without political parties there cannot be democracy | 69 | 16 | | 78,9 | 9,5 | | 79,6 | 9,9 | | | | | | | |
| Political parties are all alike | 21 | 71 | | | | | 15,3 | 76,6 | | 31,8 | 58 | | | | |