# 1.

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

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INTRODUCTION

Most political science research is concerned with the supply side of politics, i. e. the ability of political actors to attract supporters; instead, citizenship research is frequently interested in politics' demand side, i. e. what citizens ask from politicians and to what extent are they satisfied with party supply. The present study addresses the evaluation of political parties and politicians by the Portuguese citizenry on the basis of a longitudinal analysis of post-electoral surveys as well as other quantitative data allowing us to measure to which extent such evaluation fits the features of the "crisis of political representation" described in extant literature (Porras Nadales 1996). Indeed, in a very recent article on the concept of Democracy, the Greek political philosopher and politician Georges Contogeorgis brings the issue of the crisis of political representation into focus, by reminding us that "the initial political regime of classic Athens ceased to be fully democratic when it stopped being "the citizens' assembly" to become increasingly a matter of representation, which is by its composition if not by definition an oligarchic institution distinct from direct participation in the polity. And that was why democracy left Athens in the early 4$^{th}$ century BC" (Contogeorgis 2017).

Representation is therefore at the heart of the full exercise of citizenship in current democracies both when citizens associate and mobilise themselves in order to express their needs and their political will, as well as when they elect their representative parties and leaders to the nation's constitutional bodies. This chapter intends to show how the main rights of political citizenship have been exercised since the beginning of democracy in Portugal in 1974-75, providing at the same time some comparative European data. Its main focus remains, however, the relationship between the citizenry and its political representatives – parties as well as party leaders – in order to show the possible extent of the crisis of political representation in Portugal as one of the most decisive domains of the exercise of citizenship.

Today, voting is a political right internalised in most countries as the main legitimating feature of democracies. Although voting is a citizens' right, it is not compulsory in Portugal and electoral turnout is noticed to have been steadily decreasing since the beginning of democracy in 1974 down to a very significant number of Portuguese electors, near 50% who currently abstain from voting. Abstention is therefore the first sign of some kind of "crisis" concerning the representational process: a gap between the

electorate's interests and convictions and the political parties' actions and proposals voiced by political leaders increasingly concerned with their own image in media-centred political communication environments saturated by information as well as misinformation. New communication technologies, such as social media, make these communication environments even more complex and challenging for democracy (for an analysis of the challenges of the new political communication environments to democracy, see for example Aelst et al. 2017; and for details on the direct links between news media and politics in Portugal, see Salgado 2018a).

The empirical "anomaly" that triggered our research was observed in the first academic post-electoral survey carried out in Portugal soon after the 2002 parliamentary election (Freire, Lobo and Magalhães 2007). The first item of the questionnaire asked the respondents whether they had voted in that election: only 23.7% said "no"; however, we know from official statistics that 38.52% had in fact abstained (Viegas and Faria 2007, 152). Therefore, almost 15% of respondents were not truthful in the survey about their actual voting behaviour: given the internalisation of voting as a democratic rule confirmed by several surveys in Portugal, one presumes that those who abstained acted out of the knowledge that they had failed to comply with their political duty.

Even more puzzling, the second question asked the respondents who had declared to have voted for which party they had done so. Amazingly or not, those declaring to have voted for the Socialist Party (PS) were in greater numbers than those who actually voted for the winning party, the Social Democratic Party (PSD).[1] One interpretation might be that PS supporters who were led to believe by the opinion polls and the media that their party was going to lose the election decided not to turn out at the polls, fulfilling as it were the prophecy of opinion polls, somehow along the lines of Noelle-Neuman's "spiral of silence" (1974).

In addition to the increasing rate of abstention in Portugal (as in several other countries), pointing to some kind of "crisis of political representation", the aforementioned post-electoral study contained two significant batteries of fourteen plus eight items aimed at measuring not just generic relationships between the Portuguese electorate and political parties and leaders, such as social trust, but specific relationships that we categorised into four evaluative

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1   The official results are available at: http://eleicoes.cne.pt/raster/detalhe.cfm?eleicao=ar&dia=17&mes=03&ano=2002&codreg=0&local=0.

dimensions: normative, affective, performance, and relational. The quantitative analysis of those two batteries, together with the similar items measured in the post electoral surveys that followed until 2015, allowed us to conclude that, if anything, the gap between demand and supply of political goods in Portugal, to use Jon Elster's (1986) metaphor of "the market and the forum", has not ceased to exist and, depending on different political junctures, it has been increasing instead.

This chapter contains three sections, plus this Introduction and a Conclusion. In the first section, we discuss the contents of the "crisis of political representation" and clarify the origins of the concept. In the second section, we explain our empirical approach to the crisis of political representation, detailing our model and presenting the results of the analysis of the Portuguese case, based on the results of the 2002 post electoral survey. The third section is dedicated to the analysis of the Portuguese case over time until 2015 and to the discussion of the potential consequences of such a gap between representatives and represented on Portuguese politics.

## CRISIS OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION: THE CONCEPT

Long before Contogeorgis, Bernard Manin (1995) had already acknowledged, in his study *Principles of Representative Government*, that "what is today referred to as a crisis of political representation appears in a different light if we remember that representative government was conceived in explicit opposition to government by the people, and that its central institutions have remained unchanged". Moreover, "the relationship between representatives and those they represent is today perceived as democratic, whereas it was originally seen as undemocratic" (Manin 2010, 232-236). The French author seems to have been, indeed, among the first to realise the existence of a permanent risk of a "crisis of representation" due to the gap existing between the demand and the supply of political participation, in other words, an enduring gap between citizens and political parties as well as their leaders.

Such systemic crisis manifests itself with more or less frequency and relevance according to the specific characteristics of different polities and political systems, as well as specific societal conditions and their local evolution. Having said that, the so-called crisis of representation has somehow changed its nature and weight as the representative function performed in different electoral/

political systems has evolved first from "notables" to "hommes d'appareil" and, more recently, from the latter to the "élites politico-médiatiques" as Manin calls them in French. According to him, "plus que la substitution d'un type d'élite à un autre, c'est le maintien, voire l'accroissement de l'écart entre les gouvernés et l'élite gouvernante qui provoque un sentiment de crise"; and he concludes that: "les évolutions présentes apportent un démenti à la croyance que le lien représentatif était destiné à avancer toujours vers plus d'identité ou d'identification entre gouvernés et gouvernants"[2] (Manin 1995, 300).

From a descriptive point of view, one of the most comprehensive studies on the crisis of political representation was published in Spain under the editing of Porras Nadales (1996), virtually at the same time as Manin's essay. Historically, the current notion of such a crisis can be factually linked to the beginnings of the contemporary globalisation spread from 1971 onwards (Cabral 2016, 152 note 1) and to the rise of the "democratic third wave" in the mid-1970s (Huntington 1991), from then up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the implosion of the Soviet empire in the 1990s, when the crisis spread worldwide and deepened in several new liberal democratic countries (Cabral 2004; 2016, 151-162).

The cultural critical turn which occurred in the aftermath of the "events of May' 68" in Paris seems to have provided the "rationale" for the increasingly militant anti-authoritarian movement that followed and which questioned the alleged authority of traditional political parties, namely left-wing ones. In turn, such parties witnessed the gradual blurring of several of their previous social class and ideological differences as they moved from mass-parties to catch-all parties at the same time that they became increasingly dependent on the mass media. The so-called "legitimation crisis" argued then by Jürgen Habermas (1973) as a manifestation of demotivation towards the standard political life in "late capitalism", may have been the first critical theory of what we are now referring to as "the crisis of representation".

Crises of political representation are not something entirely new in democratic systems. Indeed, according to several authors (Manin 1995; Porras Nadales 1996; Taggart 2004; Mair 2013; just to provide a few examples), the gap is permanent. Such gap undergoes changes in the nature of its manifestations and in intensity, but it remains an inherent part of the double nature of representative democracy, i. e. democratic as far as universal free vote

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2    The English translation does not include this exact paragraph; so, we used the French edition (1996).

decides who rules each time it is called to, and oligarchic in so far as there is an unbridgeable social and power distance between the elected representatives and those they are supposed to represent (Manin 1995; Hofstede 1980; for Portugal, Cabral 2016).

There are also references to similar crises in the classical theories of democracy (see for example, Vieira and Runciman 2008; Aurélio 2009). However, our focus is on the framing and the features of the crises of political representation that emerged as a response to the increasingly important role of mass and catch-all parties, as well as to the wide spreading expansion of the "welfare state" and its growing economic weight. Party programmes became more vague and similar to each other, which has led to some ideological and sociological homogeneity and to an increasing lack of political identity. The loss of centrality of most nation-states in the political decision-making processes in a growingly globalised economy is also directly related to this blurring of political alternatives.

Today, due to globalisation, global crises, and the growing complexity of most issues (e. g. environmental changes, security, terrorism, health, population ageing, etc.), the national political elites also seem to have lost much of their autonomy and are now accountable not only to those who elected them, but also to other political actors, such as foreign governments and international institutions (IMF, WTO, EU, ECB, etc.). Many political decisions that affect citizens directly are now in the hands of supranational organisations, and often national elites wash their hands from unpopular policies, explaining them as the only possible outcome of international pressures, the so-called "TINA" (There is no alternative). This blurs responsiveness and contributes to discredit the representational nature of current democratic polities (Powell and Whitten 1993; Buhlmann and Fivaz 2016).

The transformations that occurred in professional structures and the erosion of the class system (the alleged middle class effect) in which party democracies were underpinned are also related to these crises. In turn, socio-cultural transformations, including mass education, the increasing amount of information available and the fast development of technology have led to cultural shifts such as the alleged shift from "materialism" to "post-materialism" studied by Inglehart (1989). In this context, notions like "cognitive mobilisation" as a leading factor of political awareness and mobilisation tended to overcome the role of parties and of the political class (Dalton 1984). Those developments have also contributed to what Norris's names as the rise

of the "critical citizen" (Norris 1999), which impacts on the citizen's political attitudes, and increases the citizens' reluctance to accept uncritically mass parties' platforms and the catch-all parties' blurred ideological proposals, often leading to party disaffection and electoral abstention.

On the other hand, the growing influence of the media in politics (process of mediatisation and different types of media effects) is frequently described as being responsible for framing citizens as spectators, rather than as part of the democratic decision-making process, and for portraying politics as a "spectacle" (see for example Debord's *La Societé du spectacle*, published in 1967; and several others after this "seminal pamphlet", as Postman 1985; and more recently Hedges 2009). These specific features of the media logic in politics have also been related in extant literature to low turnouts, political apathy, and overall disinterest in politics leading to a "spiral of cynicism" (Bartels 1996; Cappella and Jamieson 1997).

Against this background, the role of the media and the increasing dependency of politics on the media are of the outmost importance, as news media can contribute to further explain the representative political processes of decision making to citizens, or do exactly the opposite, i.e. contribute to further disengagement, for example, when journalists report politics through superficial and biased approaches. Increasingly, politicians have been developing political communication and media strategies to get media exposure and to control both the media agenda-setting process and the news framing of issues. In fact, today any political success is at least in part media-driven. Moreover, this concern with publicity and propaganda also leads to a redefinition of what is perceived by the public as a skilled politician or a suited public policy, for example.

Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) name the problem as "the crisis of public communication". These authors are concerned with the way politics is communicated to the public, which they see as increasingly disaffected and with a growingly confounded and frustrated ability to make sense of civic problems and political issues. However, in their view, neither politicians nor journalists are to blame for this crisis. The crisis is caused by a complex combination of factors that have made government more difficult, popular support more contingent, and effective communication more vital in these processes. Overall, citizens have now access to more information and are better prepared to understand the political processes than ever, but at the same time – or because of that – they also feel more disengaged and underrepresented

than ever. Over time, democracy seems to have broadened its representation, but it has not deepened it, precisely as Bernard Manin had put it several decades ago.

The process of representation requires a link between the opinions of citizens and the actions of their representatives. In an ideal representative democracy, representatives would be fully responsive to the citizens' opinions and preferences, which would guide the definition of policy (Powell 2004). It is often assumed that political parties should compete on the basis of distinct policy platforms, which, in turn, should respond to the socio-economic interests and ideological beliefs of their supporters (Dalton 2002). But real-life democracies do not usually meet this ideal and there are often differences between the preferences of citizens and the views and actions of politicians. This is what Stephen Whitefield names a representational gap: more or less wide differences between the views and acts of representatives and the preferences of those they claim to represent. The representational system fails when this gap is too large (Whitefield 2006, 733).

Citizens have thus grown more distrustful of politicians and parties, and became more sceptical about allegedly representative institutions as well as about the overall functioning of the democratic process (Dalton 2007; Dalton and Wattenberg 2002). In turn, growing political abstention and apathy do affect representative democracies negatively, in the sense that less citizen participation could lead to a discredit of the representative system. In many situations, politicians are being elected with less and less votes, and become therefore less representative of a large portion of the population, which can also lead to the emergence (or growth) of different forms of populism, or even, in extreme circumstances, to overt anti-democratic political behaviour.

In fact, both the concept of political representation and some kind of crisis of representation lay at the heart of most forms of populism. Similarly to Canovan's (1999) interpretation of populism as a reflection of the limitations of representative political systems, Roberts (2015) sees populism as a response to the discredit of representative institutions, from which a large proportion of citizens feel alienated due to socio-economic and/or cultural alleged exclusion. The representative system presupposes that political elites compete among each other to govern and represent the citizens. Populists are often against the representative system as well as against the mediating structures of the representative model of democracy which they consider not only ineffective, but also inadequate to deal with the citizens' concerns.

## AN EMPIRICAL APPROACH TO THE CRISIS OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

In addition to examining the theoretical and analytical debates that are focused on the concept of political representation and its crises, we are also concerned with analysing how a flawed political representation, or indeed an underlying crisis of political representation, can be captured by post electoral surveys in Portugal.

As noted in the Introduction, electoral turnout in Portugal has been decreasing sharply and consistently since the first elections in 1975, after the 1974 democratic revolution which started the beginning of the "third wave of democratisation" (Huntington, 1991). Turnout at general elections was

| Table 1.1 | | Table 1.2 | | Table 1.3 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Abstention in parliamentary elections in Portugal (percentages)* | | *Abstention in presidential elections in Portugal (percentages)* | | *Abstention in European Parliamentary elections (percentages)* | |
| YEAR | ABSTENTION RATE | YEAR | ABSTENTION RATE | YEAR | ABSTENTION RATE |
| 1975 | 8.34 | 1976 | 24.53 | 1987 | 27.58 |
| 1976 | 16.47 | 1980 | 15.61 | 1989 | 48.90 |
| 1979 | 17.13 | 1986 (1st) | 24.62 | 1994 | 64.46 |
| 1980 | 16.06 | | | 1999 | 60.07 |
| 1983 | 22.21 | 1986 (2nd) | 22.01 | 2004 | 61.40 |
| 1985 | 25.84 | | | 2009 | 63.22 |
| 1987 | 28.43 | 1991 | 37.84 | 2014 | 66.16 |
| 1991 | 32.22 | 1996 | 33.71 | | |
| 1995 | 33.70 | 2001 | 50.29 | | |
| 1999 | 38.91 | 2006 | 38.47 | | |
| 2002 | 38.52 | 2011 | 53.48 | | |
| 2005 | 35.74 | 2016 | 51.34 | | |
| 2009 | 40.32 | | | | |
| 2011 | 41.97 | | | | |
| 2015 | 44.14 | | | | |

around 90% and 80% in the 1970s, but in the last elections, in 2015, turnout had declined to 55%; to that one can add a regular percentage of 3% to 5% null votes. Turnout tends to be even lower in second order elections, especially in European elections, which always had very low voting participation like in many other member countries of the European Union.

Despite of the deteriorating situation over time, there have not been many comprehensive research attempts to understand and explain the precise nature, the characteristics, and the causes of this disillusion with democratic representative politics in Portugal. Is it mainly due to the inability of political leaders to mobilise citizens? Is it caused by the poor link between party programmes and the citizens' main concerns? Or is it more related to the inefficiency of the institutions of representative democracy (what they are and how they work)? It could be related to all of these elements. Our present approach does not provide answers to all these questions, but it intends to draw scholarly attention to this issue and it is an attempt to examine the specific characteristics of the Portuguese citizens' disillusion with representative democratic politics in Portugal.

There are some studies focused specifically on attitudes towards political parties in Portugal, such as Teixeira and Pereira (2011) who investigated the so-called crisis of parties in Portugal and concluded that parties have been criticised for what they do and supported for what they were supposed to do; Teixeira, Tsatsanis and Belchior (2016) also focused on the same issue, but were mainly concerned with understanding how the 2011 bailout had affected the support for political parties in Portugal. Other studies have tried to relate the state of the economy and economic crises in particular, to overall support for democracy (Sousa, Magalhães and Amaral 2014). The issue of abstention has also been a concern of other approaches, such as Magalhães (2001), and Freire and Magalhães (2002), who have analysed the extension and the reasons behind the phenomenon.

Our proposed exploratory approach examines the general feeling of trust/distrust in the representative democratic model, but it is not limited to this aspect. It also aims to better understand the match/mismatch between supply and demand in Portuguese politics (parties, party leaders, policy preferences and priorities). In a previous study, Cabral concluded that, in Portugal, usually "the more involved people are in the political process, the more they feel represented by the system" (Cabral 2007b, 206), but it is difficult to ascertain precisely in which way the order of causality works.

In any case, a European comparative study (Cabral 2007a) allowed the measurement of the class effect on political participation and the satisfaction with the political system, concluding that the higher the respondents' position on the social class ladder, the more involved and satisfied they were. Indeed, involvement and assessment of the representative system effectiveness, as well as the feelings of belonging and of being accurately represented, refer to different aspects of the citizens' social background and to their relation with the democratic system.

We now propose to measure and categorise the citizens' views on whether they feel that they are (or not) adequately represented by parties and other institutions of representative democracy, as well as by politicians in general, thus investigating the different dimensions of the citizens' attitudes towards representative politics. These dimensions concern the different aspects of the citizens' evaluation of democratic politics, namely: (1) the "normative" dimension refers to the formal agreement or disagreement of citizens with the representative democratic system in a broad sense and with its institutions, in particular political parties; (2) the "affective" dimension denotes the degree of support and identification with a given political party or political leader; (3) the "performance" dimension is related to the assessment that citizens make of their actual political system, and in particular of the political parties' and the political leaders' actions and proposals; (4) and finally the "relational" dimension, which refers to the concrete mutual connections between representatives and citizens being represented, allows for the evaluation of the representative system as it is directly experienced by citizens.

The 2002 post electoral survey was our starting point as it included several relevant questions to investigate this topic in its different dimensions. For example, concerning the "normative dimension": "Are political parties necessary in democracy?"; the "affective dimension": "Closeness of citizens to a political party"; the "performance dimension": "Political parties care about what citizens think?"; and finally the "relational dimension": "Have you been contacted by any political party?".

In total, the 2002 post electoral survey included fourteen questions specifically related to representation by political parties and eight questions focused on representation by the political elite in general. If fully replicated in the following elections these survey questions could have been used in a longitudinal comparative approach; however, due to budget restrictions, the post-electoral surveys that were carried out in the elections that followed

(2005, 2009, 2011, 2015) changed their set of queries and several of the 2002 questions were not replicated. In any case, the 2002 post electoral survey functioned as our basis to develop an analytical model, which allowed the further empirical de-construction of several different dimensions of political representation and some specific characteristics of its alleged crisis in Portugal.

MODEL AND ANALYSIS

The data that resulted from the post-electoral survey was organised into the four dimensions mentioned above: (1) normative; (2) affective; (3) performance; (4) relational. We have attributed equal value/weight to each survey question related with the issue of political representation. This means that the final value might vary according to the number of questions that were actually considered and included in the analysis. In this way, and considering the 2002 post electoral survey, a total of 1,400 positive points (14 items 100 points each) were considered in the case of political parties, and a total of 800 in the case of the role of political elites in general.

With this quite straightforward approach we noted that, in 2002, political parties received a total of 523 positive points out of 1400, just over 37%. However, when we de-construct the scores considering the different dimensions, the score is even less favourable.

Responses have been valued as positive or negative taking into account the manner in which the survey questions were posed and according to whether they were favourable or unfavourable to political parties and to politicians. We can therefore observe that the highest positive scores were found precisely when the normative dimension (1) was considered (three items: 204 points). In other words, it is neither the political parties' performance nor the level of sympathy that citizens' may have for political parties that is being assessed. What is actually being measured in the normative dimension is the respondents' formal agreement with the supposed role of political parties in the representative system: "There is no democracy without parties", "Political parties are essential for citizen participation", and "Political parties are a requisite for democracy". A majority of 69% of citizens thus seem to have internalised the norm according to which the existence and the role of political parties in the representational system are crucial to the legitimation of democracy.

Together, political parties only scored 319 positive points (29%) in the remaining three dimensions. Examining the affective dimension (2), which

**Table 1.4**   *Political representation and political parties (%)*

|  | POSITIVE | NEGATIVE | NIM/NR |
|---|---|---|---|
| Political parties are necessary (1) | 67 | 12 | 21 |
| Political parties are vital for citizens' political participation (1) | 72 | 14 | 14 |
| Without political parties, there cannot be a democracy (1) | 69 | 16 | 15 |
| Citizens' closeness to a political party (2) | 52 | 48 | — |
| Identification of the party to which the citizen feels closest (2) | 47 | 53 | — |
| Feels close to a party or just sympathiser (2) | 27 | 73 | — |
| Political parties represent citizens' opinions (2) | 50 | 39 | 11 |
| Political parties only serve to divide the people (3) | 7 | 93 | — |
| Political parties care about what citizens think (3) | 16 | 84 | — |
| Political parties are all alike (3) | 24 | 73 | 3 |
| Did you try to convince others to vote for a given party? (4) | 43 | 47 | 10 |
| Have you shown support for a party? (4) | 18 | 56 | 26 |
| Have you been contacted by any party? (4) | 21 | 71 | 8 |
| Do you trust political parties? (4) | 10 | 90 | — |

refers to the level of identification with the supply side (the existing political parties) and to the feeling of being adequately represented by a given political party, the survey respondents only attributed 176 positive points (44%) in a total of 400, which is similar to the percentage of citizens who declared their sympathy to a given political party in the early 1990s (Cabral 2000). The respondents' evaluation of the political parties' performance (3) was much less favourable: only 106 positive points (26.5%) in a total score of 400. And finally, the relational dimension (4) that refers to actual relationships between parties and the electorate, i.e. behaviours that indicate proactivity and actions in favour of a given political party, or party actions towards the citizens, the positive score was even lower: 33 in a maximum of 300 points (only 11% of favourable responses).

With this simple measurement exercise and assessment of the various types of relationships between citizens and political parties, it is possible to observe that, although respondents seem to have internalised the necessity of having political parties in a representative system for the functioning of democracy,

the actual link between citizens and political parties in Portugal is extremely weak. In other words, the citizens' opinions and patterns of behaviour clearly show their detachment from the existing supply of political parties. In sum, respondents have displayed an average level of identification with the existing political parties (44%), but have showed considerable reluctance in expressing their specific party preferences. In addition, respondents have displayed very low levels of trust in political parties and have evaluated their performance mostly in a negative way (only 26.5% of favourable opinions). Finally, there are not many active and reciprocal relationships between citizens and parties, as respondents only provided 11% of positive responses.

Regarding political elites, the span of issues dealt with is smaller (eight items) and there are only two queries related with the normative dimension and none measuring the affective dimension. Altogether, the battery resulted in 215 points of positive evaluations out of 800; thus, 457 points of negative evaluations and 128 points of no responses, i.e. a much larger share of no answers: a total of 16% against 7% concerning political parties, which might indicate that respondents felt a greater uneasiness to evaluate leaders than parties.

The **normative dimension (1)** with two items produced an average of 40% of positive answers, 41.5% negative and 18,5% of no responses. The remaining six items can be divided in two groups: four items assessing the parties' **performance (3)** with 23% positive responses on average, 62.5% negative, and 29.5% no answers; and finally, two **relational (4)** items with on average 26.5% positive, 62% negative, and 16% no answers. Altogether and not accounting

**Table 1.5**    *Political representation and the political elite (%)*

|  | POSITIVE | NEGATIVE | NIM/NR |
|---|---|---|---|
| Political leaders represent their views (1) | 52 | 36 | 12 |
| Citizens are interested in politicians' views (2) | 37 | 33 | 30 |
| Politicians' opinions reflect voters' opinions (3) | 28 | 47 | 25 |
| Politicians are not interested in what common citizens think (3) | 21 | 69 | 10 |
| Politicians are only interested in winning votes and elections (3) | 12 | 79 | 9 |
| Corruption practices are diffused among politicians (3) | 27 | 56 | 17 |
| Politicians know what common citizens think (3) | 32 | 45 | 23 |
| Contacts with politicians (4) | 6 | 92 | 2 |

for no answers, the citizens' evaluation of political leaders only included 27% positive opinions (please see Table 1.3, for further details). In other words, in terms of political evaluation, political leaders do not seem to make a positive difference in the citizens' feeling of being well represented by in the representative system.

## THE PORTUGUESE CRISIS OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OVER TIME

Although the exact same items were not available in the post electoral surveys that followed, the ones that were incorporated in the subsequent surveys allow a general overview of how the crisis has evolved over time, from 2002 to 2015. So, how has this crisis of political representation evolved over time in Portugal?

It is important to note that during the period from 2002 to 2015, both the Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Party won parliamentary elections. In 2002, the PSD led by José Manuel Durão Barroso (and later by Pedro Santana Lopes) won the election, but in the next two elections (2005 and 2009) it was

**Table 1.6**   *Political representation and political parties over time (2002-2015)*

| | POLITICAL PARTIES – DEVELOPMENT OVER TIME (PERCENTAGES) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | 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 closest | 47 | 53 | | 39.3 | 60.7 | | 42.3 | 53.2 | | 48.4 | 51.6 | | 37.1 | 59 | |
| Feels close to a party or just sympathiser | 27 | 73 | | 21.6 | 41.8 | | 19.7 | 50.1 | | 23.4 | 76.4 | | 22.9 | 76.7 | |
| Have you been 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 | | | | |

the PS led by José Sócrates that won, first with a full majority and later with a relative majority. The next election, in 2011, followed the bailout request and was won by the PSD led by Pedro Passos Coelho who made an alliance with CDS-PP in order to command a parliamentary majority. In coalition with CDS-PP, PSD came first again in the 2015 election, but without a majority in parliament. So, those two parties did not manage to form a stable government and the left-wing parties (CDU: the Communist Party – PCP – together with the Green Party – PEV – and the Left Block – BE) negotiated an agreement of parliamentary support to enable a minority PS government led by António Costa, who became prime minister.

There are some indicators that point to a deterioration of the crisis of political representation in Portugal. However, it is interesting to note that the normative dimension does improve over time, which shows that even though citizens have become less satisfied with the existing supply of political parties, they seem to increasingly believe that political parties should have a central role in a representative system. Indeed, this view became stronger, from 2002 to 2009, from 69% to near 80% (there is no data for 2011 and 2015). These results also suggest that the crisis of political representation might not be fully undermining the legitimacy of the democratic system in itself, which adds to explain the recent levels of voting support for mainstream parties in the 2015 election (nearly 70%) and the little success of populist (including anti-system and anti-establishment) political actors in Portugal (for a development on this issue, see Salgado 2018b).

Conversely, it is possible that the continuation of virtually the same party system since the first election in 1975, with the same alternation of the two leading parties on top of the vote (PS and PSD) and with no basic change of the parties alternating in office alone or in coalition before the latest election in 2015, has led in about forty years to the electorate's discouragement in the face of such electoral predictability, which the "spiral of silence" behind any electoral surveys rightly replicates (Noelle-Neumann 1983).

In the meantime, Portuguese society has greatly changed from the times of authoritarian rule and colonial war, but this change was not accompanied by relevant constitutional changes after the Constitution adopted in 1976, with the exception of the "demilitarisation" of the presidency and the reduction of the president's powers in 1982 and, above all, the economic liberalisation in 1989 in order to accelerate the process of European integration. Otherwise, the 1976 Constitution and its changes over time were never put to a popular

vote, including the membership of the EU and its successive treaties. Instead, none of the three referenda carried out about issues (regionalisation and voluntary termination of pregnancy) with more of a cultural content rather than a political one, reached 50% of voting participation.

Along those 40 years, the educational and professional structure of Portugal's social composition changed very significantly while the population became much older. These profound societal changes, alongside the electoral register's lack of systematic updating which has led to the inexistence for several years of accurate numbers of registered voters, might also account for an increasingly low turnout among both the elderly (2 million over 65 years old) and younger people born after 1974. The electoral system itself, despite several public debates occasionally carried out by the ruling parties, has not changed and the districts' demography has not been updated as frequently as it should; the virtual absence of change applies also to the very few political parties that have been seating in parliament ever since.

The d'Hondt system that converts district votes into seats in parliament is not entirely proportional, but has made it all the same quite difficult for parties to reach full majorities (only three times in fifteen elections, which have resulted in twelve years of majoritarian government; only one of the other twenty governments finished its mandate). Among other consequences, this absence of long-term stability has hampered parliamentary agreements for relevant constitutional changes with the necessary two-thirds of seats. Such features of the Portuguese electoral and party systems, together with international dramatic political changes, like the financial crisis that unfolded in 2007-8, may have been contributing to enlarge the gap between political parties and citizens.

Looking at the quantitative outcome of our research, it is indeed striking that contacts between the citizenry and parties occur so infrequently in a western European country: only ten percent of voters said that they have been in contact with politicians and politicians with them. We have found a similar mechanism in an earlier research (Cabral 2007b) which showed that there was then – and probably there is still today – a very high correlation between a citizens' decision to take action in order to obtain a given political gain and the previous expectation of success: the lower the latter, the lower the former; unless it is the other way around. Manin (1995) also concludes that social distance between voters and representatives prevents them to keep mutual, frequent and successful contacts.

In turn, the EU has been repeatedly blamed for increasing voting abstention, notably at the European Parliamentary elections, due to an increase of the "power distance" already felt in each country. A survey specifically conducted on citizenship in 2004 did indeed confirm that different social classes, such as the elites and the working class, accounting together for more than half of the population of each country, evaluate their national political systems quite differently: the elites are more satisfied with democracy in every country and evaluate the performance of their parties and politicians more positively than the working class; elite members also have a greater interest and understanding of politics than manual workers, as well as possessing higher indicators of the exercise of citizenship, including association membership and self-mobilization. It is as if national elites have co-opted their political systems, hence the EU. The same study also shows that Portugal has lower indicators when compared with the European average. Besides the class effect, there is also a societal effect in operation affecting political attitudes and behaviour, which can be measured by the fact that the Portuguese elites possess a lower "social capital" than, for example, the Swedish working class. Such combination

| Table 1.7 | *Elites and the Working Class concerning politics, in Portugal and the EU (averages)* |
|---|---|

| | PORTUGAL | | | EUROPEAN UNION (18) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | EL | WC | MN | EL | WC | MEU-18 |
| Interpersonal Trust | 4.40 | 4.39 | 4.45 | 5.29 | 4.52 | 4.86 |
| Trust in Institutions | 5.00 | 4.61 | 4.82 | 5.46 | 4.83 | 5.18 |
| Trust in Politicians | 3.16 | 2.51 | 2.82 | 3.96 | 3.17 | 3.60 |
| Political Interest | 2.58 | 1.89 | 2.12 | 2.76 | 2.19 | 2.38 |
| Political Understanding | 3.26 | 2.47 | 2.71 | 3.17 | 2.66 | 2.83 |
| Responsiveness | 1.52 | 1.37 | 1.40 | 1.48 | 1.60 | 1.53 |
| Party Identification | 2.81 | 2.71 | 2.74 | 2.85 | 2.79 | 2.84 |
| Satisfaction with Democracy | 4.52 | 4.49 | 4.56 | 5.50 | 4.89 | 5.20 |
| Left-Right Orientation | 5.18 | 4.89 | 5.08 | 4.92 | 4.78 | 4.93 |
| Association Membership | 0.17 | 0.07 | 0.09 | 0.32 | 0.14 | 0.21 |
| Mobilisation | 0.81 | 0.30 | 0.41 | 1.55 | .67 | 1.02 |

*Note:* EL = Elite; WC= Working Class; $M_N$ = National Average; $M_{EU-18}$ = European Union average-18.

of class and societal effects operating in Portugal may account for a larger gap between citizens and their political representatives than in most European countries (Cabral 2007b).

## CONCLUSION

Most democratic nations face similar problems today: decreasing political participation, loss of citizens' confidence in political parties and politicians in general, loosening of party ties and affiliations. Depending on electoral systems, there seems to be a growing mismatch between political supply and demand. This is all the more important that the deeper the crisis of political representation, the more it translates into further alienation as well as an increasing distance between the purely legal aspects of constitutional democracies and the actual legitimacy of the system.

Our approach to the crisis of political representation in Portugal was focused on both the theoretical and analytical discussion of the concept together with an empirical approach to examine the nature and some of the specific characteristics of such crises. We investigated Portugal through post electoral surveys and our proposal can be replicated in other countries, provided that relevant and comparable surveys are available. We analysed the Portuguese crisis through the citizens' behaviours and opinions about the representative system. Thus, low levels of turnout in elections and citizens' responses to the post electoral surveys combined to support of the idea that such a crisis is profound and has not diminished over time; rather the opposite.

Bernard Manin seems therefore to be right when he concludes that the deepening of such crisis of political representation may occur at the same time that the franchise has been democratised and the population is more educated than ever. Precisely because of that, citizens are today more aware of the gap between what they demand and what parties are able or willing to supply. By contrast, Peter Mair (2003) tends to confine parties to the procedural roles of staff recruitment and of policy formulation, instead of focusing mainly on the role of actual representatives of the citizenry. Along with other authors quoted by Mair, from Schumpeter to Sartori, they all find "naïf" to believe that politicians are the citizen's advocates, as established philosophical theories of representation do (Pitkin 1967).

According to Mair' synthesis, parties' decline affects affiliation and mobilisation, as well as identification, and we have noted how low Portuguese citizens do score in those dimensions. Parties tend to become increasingly distant from society and closer to the government and become "almost official parts" of the State; they are synonyms of the parties in parliament and in government. In such a context, party identity tends to evaporate and parties are reduced to the leaders in office or in wait. Public policies become less politicised and politicians increasingly dependent on specialists. Eventually, representative political functions decline and/or are taken up by other organisations and corporations. Party identities have thus become blurred. The end result of the different authors' views is not that different: actual political representation is indeed a philosophical fiction. However, it needs to be preserved and nourished and no professional politician will deny this fact. Otherwise, the box of successful populism will not remain closed in Portugal.

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