

THINNER THAN THIN?

POLITICAL CULTURE AND POLITICAL ACTION IN PORTUGAL

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1. INTRODUCTION

Public and academic debates about Portuguese political culture tend to polarize around two alternative views. The first is a typically pessimistic one, and tends to focus on what is specific about Portugal in comparison with other established democracies. From this point of view, although — by the most conservative estimates — Portugal's democratic regime has become fully consolidated by the early 1980s, its political culture has presumably retained strong elements or pockets of traditionalism, clientelism, corporatism, and authoritarianism (Wiarda, 1993; Wiarda and Mott, 2001). Besides, just by browsing some of the available literature, a true pessimist could always add several other disturbing symptoms. On the one hand, the prevalence among the population of high levels of distrust, discontent, and cynicism vis-à-vis politicians, the institutions they occupy, and politics in general, a syndrome of attitudes frequently associated not only to Portugal, but also its Spanish and Italian neighbors in Southern Europe (Maravall, 1984). On the other hand, very low levels of civic engagement, whose proximate causes seem to deep-rooted attitudes of political apathy and inefficacy (Cabral, 2000), consistent with a long-term historical legacy of a weak civil society (Pinto and Almeida, 2000).

However, an alternative view about Portuguese political culture focuses less on its specificities than on the commonalities with the basic structure of political values and beliefs found in other Western democracies. Several authors have suggested that, by the mid-1980s, one of the very signs that democracy has become consolidated in Portugal — as well as in the new Spanish and Greek democracies — was a high level of attitudinal support for democratic rules and procedures (Bruneau and Macleod, 1986; Morlino and Montero, 1995; Schmitter, 1999), rendering Portugal virtually undistinguishable from other established democracies. And an optimist

would also have no difficulty in finding appraisals that could mitigate the perception of a Portuguese peculiarity in the European context. In many industrialized democracies, the decline of citizens' trust in political institutions and elected officials is now thought to be a generalized trend (Pharr, Putnam, and Dalton, 2000; and Dalton, 2002), and it is not even clear that Portugal has been a part of such a disturbing trend.⁴ And there is no shortage of discussions about the decline or both turnout and civic engagement in the United States and elsewhere (Putnam, 1995a; Pharr and Putnam, 2000), suggesting that Portugal's rising levels of abstention and resilient low levels of political participation, although certainly not encouraging from a normative point of view, puts the country in line with developments found in most other established democratic regimes.

This study confronts some of these contradictory assessments of the basic elements of Portuguese political beliefs, values and attitudes with data collected by the Europe-Asia Survey in 2000. The picture that emerges is, predictably, somewhat more complex than what either a "pessimistic" or an "optimistic" view of Portuguese political culture would suggest. On the one hand, almost three decades after the beginning of its democratic transition, Portuguese political culture and its relation to those of its neighboring countries has been transformed in several important respects. Although feelings of national identity are particularly strong — in what seems to be a basic continuity with the past —, the attachment of Portuguese citizens to the nation-state seems today to be based neither on a "primordial" definition of nationality nor in the exclusion of attachments to other political communities. Besides, there are no signs that significant sectors of Portuguese society hold fundamentally authoritarian

⁴ Data from the *European Values Study* or the *World Values Survey* are lacking for the 1980s, while data from 1999 *European Values Study* suggests that, in the 1990s, trust in most institutions — civil and political — has apparently increased in Portugal, apparently in counter-trend with other Western democracies. See Vala, Cabral, and Ramos (eds.) (2002).

or illiberal values, nor of the resilience of a specifically Southern European syndrome of attitudes of political discontent, distrust or apathy.

Nevertheless, these findings coexist with some Portuguese specificities. In most Western democracies, growing detachment from — and distrust in — traditional agencies of political mobilization has been accompanied by the resort to unconventional forms of civic activism, and use of the full gamut of political citizenship rights. In Portugal, there are no signs that such a transformation is taking place. Like in many other countries, the picture that emerges is one in which a large segment of the Portuguese population is rejecting “conventional” politics. But unlike most established democracies, Portugal remains a singularly demobilized society, where the relationship with the political realm remains mostly individualistic and instrumental, and existing levels of psychological involvement with politics are not converted into significant political collective action.

2. IDENTITY

Students of political culture typically distinguish between three objects of political support: the political community, the political regime, and the political authorities (Fuchs, 1993). Lack of support for the political community, or differential support among different social, ethnic, and linguistic groups, creates problems that are logically and empirically prior to the very problem of regime legitimacy, since they hinge on the very legitimacy of the state as a whole (Linz and Stepan, 1996).

However, “stateness” seems to be one particular challenge to democratic consolidation that Portugal did *not* have to face. Unlike what occurred in Spain and in several new Eastern European democracies, studies of Portuguese political culture have typically stressed the particularly strong feelings of national identity shared more

or less homogeneously by population (Cruz 1989; Reis and Dias, 1993; Pinto and Núñez, 1997). This phenomenon has been attributed both to long-term historical continuity — the preservation of relatively stable borders since at least the late Middle Ages —, the lack of significant ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, and the reinforcement of nationalist feelings by the political discourse of all the political regimes since the liberal movement of the early 1800s, including the authoritarian regime of Oliveira Salazar that ruled the country since the 1930s (Pinto and Núñez, 1997). Besides, although the Portuguese colonial empire had been presented by the Salazar and Caetano's dictatorships as an irrevocable cement of nationhood, its loss in the mid-1970s does not seem to have been accompanied by any serious national identity crisis. Instead, mass surveys conducted since the 1980s have revealed comparatively high and stable levels of national pride among the Portuguese, which were only stronger among practicing Catholics, individuals with lower levels of instruction and income, and those positioned to the right of the ideological spectrum (Cruz, 1989).

The results of the Europe-Asia survey confirm and, to some extent, add to the already existing assessments. By 2000, when the survey was conducted, more than 50 percent of respondents in the survey found their definition as Portuguese to be "extremely important", and the same occurs in what concerns those that are "extremely proud" of being Portuguese.⁵ Among the nine European countries included in the study, only the Greeks and the Irish exhibited stronger feelings of national identity. Besides, contrary to the Greek case, this strong national identity is accompanied by a shared definition of what "being Portuguese" means that tends to

⁵ DK, NA, refusals and all respondents that think themselves as belonging to a non-Portuguese nationality were excluded from this analysis.

rely less on “primordial” ties and traits (Shils, 1957) than it does on socially acquired characteristics. Only a minority (between 30 and 48 per cent) of respondents tends to see religion (Catholicism) and birth as "extremely" or "somewhat" important categories in order to define Portuguese national identity. Instead, formal citizenship rights, "feeling Portuguese," and especially the ability to speak the Portuguese language are seen, by far, as much more important traits, by more than 90 per cent of respondents. In other words, in Portugal, strong feelings of national identity are compatible with a non-exclusionary definition of what belonging to the political community means, something whose significance can be better appreciated if we consider the dramatic surge in immigration from Portuguese-speaking African countries and Brazil that has taken place since the 1980s.

A multivariate analysis of social and attitudinal causes of feelings related to national identity confirms that, today, national attachment and pride have become more socially diffuse attitudes in Portugal than ever before. As Table 2.1 shows, such feelings seem to cut across most social and attitudinal boundaries. Gender, age and educational attainment have no impact whatsoever either on national pride or the importance attached to being Portuguese. Significantly, the same occurs with Catholic religiosity or ethnicity, confirming an evolution towards an increasingly secularized and inclusive view of national identity. Ideological preferences, both in terms of left-right self-placement and of citizens' positioning across a materialist/post-materialist cleavage, also have no impact on individual-level variations in this respect. In the end, only the rural population is somewhat more likely to attribute importance to their definition as Portuguese, while higher levels of media exposure and lower income levels do seem to be somewhat related to weaker national pride. However, the impact

of each of these variables and the overall explanatory power of the models are both extremely low.⁶

Table 2.1. Explaining national attachment and national pride (OLS multiple regression beta weights)

	Importance of being Portuguese	Proud to be Portuguese
Q506. Gender ("Female")	n.s.	n.s.
Q507. Age	n.s.	n.s.
Q509. Educational attainment	n.s.	n.s.
Q516. Living standards (Self-Described)	n.s.	0.10*
Q522. Size of locality	0.07*	n.s.
Q518. Ethnicity ("White")	n.s.	n.s.
Media Exposure	n.s.	-0.11**
Catholic Religiosity	n.s.	n.s.
Q403. Left-Right Self Placement	n.s.	n.s.
"New Politics" Attitudes	n.s.	n.s.
Adjusted R ²	0.00	0.01
Valid N	777	778

Notes:

- 1) *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; n.s. = not significant;
- 2) DK, NA, refusals and all respondents that think of themselves as belonging to non-Portuguese nationality were excluded from the analysis;
- 3) New Politics: mean score of variables Q412b ("good environment more important than economic growth") and Q412c ("a woman's primary role is in the home"). Higher values mean higher support to new politics values. (Q412c: original coding reversed).
- 4) Catholic religiosity: 1-Catholics that attend religious services at least once a month; 0-Others;
- 5) Media Exposure: additive index of variables Q501a (local media), Q501b (national media), and Q501c (foreign media). Higher values mean higher media exposure.

However, a different issue altogether is how and to what extent this strong national identity is able to coexist with other collective identities. In the context of increasing European integration, one of the main questions about citizens' values and attitudes must concern the extent to which the adoption of an "European identity"

⁶ For all regressions we used some of the multicollinearity diagnostics recommended by Gujarati (1995: 338-339). The measure of tolerance is $1 - R^2_j$ and it should not be smaller than 0.1. In all linear regressions used throughout this text, the lowest value of tolerance found for any variable was 0.424.

may become a zero-sum game against other attachments and loyalties, namely, to the nation-state. For some scholars, as social, political and economic elites increasingly gain from European integration, their affective orientations are likely to be displaced from the national level to the supranational level (Haas, 1958; Obradovic, 1996). However, others have argued that national identity and national pride are not incompatible. Citizens can identify themselves as having "multiple and complementary identities" (Linz and Stepan, 1996:35), which can in fact mutually reinforce each other (Smith, 1992). In what concerns national and European identities, the former can even become the "springboard" of the latter, by "providing a model of what it is to belong to a remote political community" (Duchesne and Frogner, 1995:194).

In Portugal, there is no fundamental incompatibility between the attachment to the national and other supranational communities, particularly when that supranational community is "Europe". First, most respondents do think of themselves as being both Portuguese and members of a supranational community. In the overwhelming majority of cases (about 76 percent), that community is "Europe" and of those, about four in every five respondents see their European identity as "somewhat" or "extremely important". This confirms previous researches suggesting that Portugal ranks among the most "Europeanist" countries in the EU in this respect (Duchesne and Frogner, 1995:197).

Furthermore, European, national, and regional identities are not felt as mutually exclusive by the Portuguese. Instead, as we can see in Table 2.2, national identity (measured either in terms of the importance of being Portuguese and national pride) and regional identity are *both* positively (if moderately) associated with the importance given to European identity by citizens. This replicates most of the extant

findings for other European countries in general (Duchesne and Frognier, 1995; Marks, 1999) and Portugal in particular (Reis e Dias, 1993).

Table 2.2 Association Between different levels of identification (Gamma coefficients)

	Importance of being Portuguese	Importance of being European	Regional identity
Importance of being Portuguese	-		
Importance of being European	0.22***	-	
Regional identity	n.s	0.21***	-
National pride	0.68***	0.23***	n.s

1) *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; n.s. = not significant;

2) DK, NA, refusals and all respondents that think of themselves as belonging to non-Portuguese nationality were excluded from the analysis;

3) Importance of being European: recoding of Q10 with lowest value (1) for respondents that do not think of themselves as European and highest value (5) for respondents that answer it is "extremely important" that they are European.

3. DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND POLITICAL (DIS)TRUST

Support to the national community is only one dimension of political support as a whole. Support to the democratic regime itself, to its basic rules, rights, and duties, may remain at very low levels regardless of a strong support to the political community as a whole. And it is also conceivable that voters also provide strong principled support to both democracy and their political community, while holding at the same time generally negative views about political officeholders and the concrete workings of their political system.

According to most observers, by the mid-1980s, Portugal had become a consolidated democratic regime. By then, the perception of the superiority of democracy to other forms of government was generally unquestioned by a large majority of the population in Portugal (Morlino and Montero, 1996). However, changes in political culture — and particularly, the development of pro-democratic attitudes — are thought to be long-term processes, presumably taking several decades. As most of the 20th century in Portugal was spent under the longest-lived dictatorship in Western Europe, the conservative authoritarianism of Oliveira Salazar, several observers others have suggested that a more substantive understanding of the

“democraticness” of Portuguese political culture indicates the lack of a principled support for fundamental democratic rights. Countries such as Spain and Portugal have preserved a political culture that remained fundamentally undemocratic until today or, at least, with significant pockets of corporatist, authoritarian, and illiberal inclinations that distinguish those countries from other democratic regimes (Wiarda, 1993; Wiarda and Mott, 2001).

The Europe-Asia survey does not contain questions allowing direct measurements of support for democracy in comparison with other forms of government, but it does allow us to measure the extent of citizens’ support to the exercise of three basic liberal democratic rights and duties: the importance of the vote as a citizen’s duty, freedom to express minority opinions, and freedom to protest against the government. From this point of view, we have very little signs of the resilience of authoritarian or illiberal values in Portugal. Close to or more than 90 per cent of the Portuguese respondents “agree” or “strongly agree” with the notions that “everyone should have the right to express their opinion even if he or she differs from the majority,” that “citizens have a duty to vote in elections,” and that “people should be allowed to organize public meetings to protest against the government”. Although a relatively recent democracy in the West European context, Portugal displays no symptoms of a lesser allegiance to democratic political rights and duties in comparison with other (older) European democracies. In fact, among the nine consolidated European democracies covered in the Europe-Asia survey, only the Italians expressed similar agreement with voting as a “citizen’s duty” and with “freedom to protest”, while support for “freedom of expression” in Portugal is right on the European average (figures that, by the way, are also above most Asian democracies included in the study).

Nevertheless, at the same time, such strong support to core democratic values coexists with relatively low levels of confidence in political elites and high levels of discontent with the workings of the political system. Research about this particular issue has suggested that the Portuguese have always exhibited very little support for their democratic leaders and perceived the regime to be less than efficacious (Bruneau and Macleod, 1986; Schmitter, 1999; Morlino and Montero, 1995). Today, very little has changed. Majorities or quasi-majorities of respondents in Portugal express the belief that there is “widespread corruption among Portuguese political elites,” that MP’s “stop thinking about the public interest once they are elected,” and that elected officials “do not care what people think.” Furthermore, only about one in every three respondents express “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in political parties and leaders, in contrast with the high levels of trust placed in several civil (big business and the mass media), hierarchical (the military, the civil service, and the police), or international institutions (particularly the European Union and the United Nations).⁷

However, today, these low levels of political trust can hardly be seen as a Portuguese peculiarity. As Table 3.1 shows, levels of political distrust and discontent are relatively high, on average, among Asian and, especially, European nations. In fact, by 2000, Portugal remained together with Spain one of the countries in which such negative attitudes towards the political system reach less outrageous levels.

⁷ The exception in this contrast between “political” (mistrusted) and “state/hierarchical” (trusted) institutions concerns law and courts: they are deemed to be even less trustworthy than government and parliament, in a pattern that replicates previous studies (Freire 2001b).

Table 3.1 Political distrust and discontent

	Portugal	European average*	Asian average**
Distrust in institutions (mean % of “not much” or “none at all” in confidence in parliament, parties, leaders and government)	61	66	44
“There is widespread corruption among those who manage national politics” (% “agree” + “strongly agree”)	50	63	56
“MP’s stop thinking about public interest once elected” (% “agree” + “strongly agree”)	47	53	44
Government officials don’t care about what people like me think” (% “agree” + “strongly agree”)	47	58	48

DK, NA and refusals are included in the total
 *Includes United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Germany, Sweden, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece
 ** Includes Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Philippines

This calls attention to the relevant question of what causes political (dis)trust, and what relation does it have with levels of regime legitimacy and support. Several authors have treated the phenomenon of political distrust as being related to deep socio-structural factors and trends. Its increase has been explained as a consequence of an increasing disconnection of citizens from their extended families, friends, and neighbors, leading to a decline in social capital that, in turn, tends to be highly correlated with a psychological disengagement from politics and government (Putnam, 1995a). Furthermore, the media as a socialization agent, and television in particular, is said to have reinforced these trends, by replacing civic-minded activities by "privatized" and "individualistic" forms of leisure and exposing citizens to predominantly negative portrayals of the political realm (Putnam, 1995b; Brehm and Rahn, 1998). Distrust in institutions has also been linked to a "postmodern" cultural shift, particularly visible among the younger cohorts and the more educated segments of the population. Such shift has de-emphasized "all kinds of authority, whether religious or secular, allowing much wider range for individual autonomy in the pursuit of individual subjective well-being." (Inglehart, 1999: 238; see also Inglehart, 1997). Thus, younger and more educated individuals, as well as those generally

oriented towards post-materialist values and with higher standards of living, should exhibit lower levels of institutional trust.

However, it has also been suggested that political trust is related less with socio-structural factors than with short-term evaluations of governmental performance, and should, in fact, be seen as a measure of specific support for political incumbents (Citrin, 1974; Citrin and Green, 1986; Clarke, Dutt, and Kornberg, 1993; Gabriel, 1995). From this point of view, to the extent that specific support — dictated by government performance and the notion that incumbents favor individuals' interests — may contaminate "trust" or even be undistinguishable from it, we should expect individuals that make a more positive evaluation of government performance also to display greater confidence in all institutions (Miller and Listhaug, 1990). If this is the case, the decline of citizens' trust in political institutions does not necessarily have to be seen as a disturbing phenomenon from the point of view of the resilience and legitimacy of democracy as a whole.

Finally, political distrust and discontent has also been attributed to economic globalization and its consequences. On the one hand, by creating among the most sophisticated audiences the perception that the major problems faced by modern societies have international causes — that cannot be directly attributed to failures of domestic political institutions — they may have increased the leeway available to national governments, allowing them to evade accountability for negative system outputs. However, globalization may have also augmented discontent, by decreasing the perception that governments' are in any way able to meet citizens' demands. While globalization entails actual transfers of power from the nation-state and constrains range of policy choices available to governments, the citizens' diminishing

ability to exert democratic control over governance may result in declining voter confidence and satisfaction (Alesina and Wacziarg, 2000; Katzenstein, 2000).

Tables 3.2 and 3.3 help us ascertaining the plausibility of these different hypotheses as applied to the Portuguese case. First, we correlated several indicators of political distrust and discontent with levels of support for core democratic rights and duties (voting as duty, freedom of expression, and freedom to protest) and the importance attached to being Portuguese. The results show that, although there is a correlation between either institutional trust or distrust in elected officials, on the one hand, and support for basic democratic values and rights, on the other hand, *that relationship is extremely weak*. Thus, there are little reasons to believe that the perception of the untrustworthiness of elected officials and the institutions they occupy is seriously undermining support for democratic values or for the political community in Portugal: while the formers' aggregate levels are relatively high, the latter are even higher, and the individual-level correlation between both sets of attitudes is anything but strong.

Table 3.2 Relationship between political distrust/discontent and importance of being Portuguese and democratic values (correlation coefficients)

	Trust in political institutions	Discontent with elected officials	Satisfaction with politics
Support for democratic rights and duties	0.08*	-0.11***	n.s.
Importance of being Portuguese	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

1) *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; n.s. = not significant;

2)DK, NA and refusals were excluded from the analysis.

3) Trust in political institutions: mean score of Q101a (parliament), Q101b (political parties), Q101c (government), and Q101e (political leaders). Higher levels mean higher trust.

4) Distrust in elected officials: mean score of Q201b (“widespread corruption”), Q201f (“MP’s don’t think about public interest once they are elected”), Q 201g (“don’t care what people thinks”). Higher levels mean higher discontent.

5) Support for democratic rights and duties: mean score of Q201a (“vote as citizen’s duty”), Q208b (“freedom of expression” and Q208c (“freedom to protest”). Higher values mean higher support.

The multivariate analysis of the individual-level causes of trust in political institutions, whose results are displayed in Table 3.2, reinforces the notion that

political distrust in Portugal lacks any fundamental relation to socio-structural factors or, for that matter, cognitive mobilization or ideology. Instead, trust in political institutions seems to be mostly dependent upon both identification with the party controlling the government of the day and the extent to which citizens are satisfied with the government's handling of issues such as crime and unemployment, which are precisely those that the Portuguese rank as the two most important concerns in the country today (about 90 per cent state they are "worried" or "very worried" with crime and unemployment).

Table 3.3. Explaining political trust (OLS multiple regression beta weights)

	Trust in political institutions (Parliament, Government, Leaders, Parties)
SOCIALIZATION	
Gender ("Female")	n.s.
Age	n.s.
Educational attainment	n.s.
Living standards (self-described)	n.s.
Q5081. Living alone	n.s.
Size of locality	-0.14***
Media Exposure	n.s.
IDEOLOGY	
Left-Right Self Placement	n.s.
"New Politics" Attitudes	n.s.
SPECIFIC SUPPORT	
Q206e. Govt. performance ("crime")	0.09*
Q206d. Govt. performance ("unemployment")	0.19***
Q206j. Govt. performance ("environment")	n.s.
Identification with incumbent	0.17***
GLOBALIZATION	
International causes	n.s.
Q306c. What government decides doesn't make much difference	-0.11***
Adjusted R ²	0.16
Valid N	653

Notes:

1) *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; n.s. = not significant;

2) DK, NA and refusals were excluded from the analysis.

3) Identification with incumbent party: recoding of Q409. Incumbent party was at the time the PS (Socialist Party)

4) International causes: mean score of Q207a to Q207c. Higher levels mean that problems in Portugal are more attributed to international rather than domestic causes.

Therefore, in spite of being broadly supportive of basic democratic rights and freedoms, the Portuguese are mostly discontent with politics in general, politicians, and the institutions they occupy. The results suggest that any globalization effects felt at the level of perceptions of state capacity and sources of socio-economic problems seem to work in *disfavor* of trust in domestic political institutions. Portuguese voters that tend to attribute economic and environmental problems to international causes are not more likely to trust their national parliament, government, political leaders or parties. However, the perception of government's powerlessness in relation to the major problems faced in Portuguese society does seem to be one of the factors that increases frustration with domestic politics and undermines political trust.

This pattern of coexistence between high levels of political distrust with strong support for democratic values is not peculiarly Portuguese. It is precisely the same pattern that has been found in most industrialized democracies, at least since the 1990s (Norris, 1999). But what is clear in Portugal is that, contrary to what extant research has suggested about other industrialized democracies, and with the exception of urbanization, not a single social anchors or ideological cause has been found for levels of political trust. Instead, the amount of leeway awarded by the public to elected officials seems to be extremely limited, as the evaluation of the latter is strictly dependent upon partisanship, perceptions of governability, and individual satisfaction with government performance on the major policy issues faced by Portuguese society.

4. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The question of how similar or how different is Portuguese political culture from those prevailing in other Western democracies hinges on another element

besides support for democratic values and political distrust or discontent. In several Western democracies where the rise of “dissatisfied democrats” (Klingeman, 1999) has been visible and where electoral turnout and other traditional, institutionalized, or “elite-directed” forms of political participation have declined, it is also the case that other forms of civic engagement, mainly involving unconventional political action, protest and demonstrations, petitions, and community action have been on the rise (see, for example, Inglehart, 1990 and 1997; Dalton 2002; Norris, 2002).

Already back in 1977, reflecting on the causes for increased mass political participation since the sixties in western democracies, as well as the observed decline in electoral turnout in almost all the same countries, Inglehart had argued that the kind of political participation that was likely to increase was not the one controlled by the political elites, but rather the one directed by the masses and with the purpose of controlling/challenging those elites (Inglehart, 1977: 317-321; see also Inglehart 1990: 375-383; and 1997: 307-315). According to Inglehart, mass political participation in industrial societies is mainly elite-controlled, i.e., through political parties, professional associations, unions, churches, and so on. In such societies, voting is *the* central vehicle for mass political participation, together with actions related to the institutional channels for political participation. On the contrary, in post-industrial societies, the increased educational resources and cognitive mobilization of the masses enable the latter for a much more autonomous political participation, “elite-challenging,” less dependent on external mobilization, or at least from external mobilization conducted by the traditional social and political agents.

Extant research, however, suggests that Portugal may have not yet fit this syndrome. On the one hand, in what regards the most conventional form of political participation, turnout started at very high levels back in the seventies — close to the

average of countries with compulsory voting — but has been decreasing strongly and steadily ever since. The average turnout figure for the nineties is already below the nineties' average for the Western European democracies without compulsory voting (Freire and Magalhães, 2002). On the other hand, most research has shown that other forms of participation have remained at rather low levels. This is true not only of traditional forms of civic activism (belonging to associations or unions) or conventional political participation (party and campaign activities, for example) (Cruz, 1995), but also in what concerns protest politics and social movements (Cabral, 2000; Freire, 2002). In fact, as Inglehart and Catterberg show (2003), resorting to the *World Values Survey* data, Portugal is the only “established democracy” where the percentage of individuals reporting they had “signed a petition” has not increased from 1990 to 2000, and continues to exhibit overall levels of elite-challenging participation closer to Latin American and East European “new democracies” than to those of Western “established democracies”.

The results of the Europe-Asia Survey generally tend to confirm this assessment. As Table 4.1 shows, Portugal displays very low levels of “conventional” participation, often about half of those of the average of the nine European countries in the study. In what concerns protest activities and petitions, the differential is, although important, slightly less disparaging, but spontaneous community action is, again, at much lower levels than most other European nations, and much closer to the Asian average.

Table 4.1 Political participation, except voting (% “have often done” + “have done once or twice”)

	Portugal	European average (nine countries)	Asian average (nine countries)
ÉLITE-DIRECTED PARTICIPATION			
Money contributions for electoral campaigns	4	8	5
Contact an elected politicians about a personal/local problem	10	23	10
Contact an elected politician about a national issue	5	11	6
Actively help a candidate or party at election time	8	11	11
Join a political party	7	10	7
ÉLITE-CHALLENGING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION			
Sign a petition	32	47	16
Attend a protest, march or demonstration	26	31	7
Get together informally to solve local problem	14	25	13

Note: DK, NA, and refusals were excluded from the analysis.

One possible explanation for the differential between Portugal and most other European nations in terms of political participation could be a fundamental lack of attitudes favorable to civic engagement, including subjective interest in politics or feelings of political efficacy. However, such explanation does not seem to apply. As Table 4.2 shows, Portugal exhibits levels of discussion of domestic and international problems and party politics no lower than the European average. It is true that only a minority of the Portuguese declares to be “very” or “fairly” interested in politics, and that citizens seem rather divided in what concerns basic feelings of political efficacy. However, the results show that, at least at the aggregate level, there are no dramatic differences between the Portuguese and the average of nine European countries in the study in terms of these basic attitudes of political interest and efficacy.

Table 4.2 Political interest and political efficacy

	Portugal	European average (nine countries)	Asian average (nine countries)
INTEREST IN POLITICS (% "very" + "fairly interested")	43	46	47
POLITICAL DISCUSSION (% "have often done" + "have done once or twice")	77	75	50
Talk about problems facing country with family and friends	76	73	43
Talk about international or world problems with family and friends	73	67	41
Talk about Portugal's party politics of party leaders with family and friends			
POLITICAL EFFICACY (% "strongly disagree" + "disagree")	36	29	29
"People like me don't have a say in what the government does"			
"Politics and government are so complicated that sometimes I cannot understand what's happening"	20	24	11

DK, NA and refusals are included in the total

However, from an analysis of "who actually participates," some clues about lower levels of participation in Portugal indeed emerge. Starting with electoral turnout (see Campbell et al, 1960; Franklin, 1996, among many others), most theories suggest that the probability of an individual using her right to vote is dependent on her political attitudes, her exposure to media messages, values, level of social integration, and material and economic resources, although the impact of the latter — education and income — seem only to be visible in countries with extremely low turnout levels. In what concerns other forms of political participation, the major determinants seem to be practically the same (Dalton, 1988; Inglehart, 1990 and 1997), although with some differences, especially in the case of "elite-challenging" political participation. In that case, adherence to postmaterialist values is supposed to matter decisively, while party identification is not expected to have the same importance and age is expected to have the opposite effect in relation to voting (with the younger participating more). As for the other variables, differential expectations are perhaps

more related to the strength than to the direction of their effects upon political activities (Dalton, 1988).

Table 4.3 displays the results of a multivariate analysis of the individual-level causes of voting (in parliamentary elections), elite-directed, and elite-challenging political participation. The results show that, predictably, the profiles of the voters and non-voters are very clearly influenced by age and party identification. Since we are dealing with a recall question that asked people *how often* they used to participate in legislative elections, the effects of age are probably somewhat overestimated, but the general finding is in line with what has been found both in Portugal (Magalhães 2001; Freire and Magalhães, 2002; Freire and Baum, 2002) and in most industrialized democracies (Franklin, 1996). Besides, those more committed to democratic rights and duties are also more frequent voters and, somewhat less obviously, educational resources and habitat also have an effect: the more educated and those living in more rural settings tend to vote more.

Table 4.3 Explaining political participation in Portugal (OLS multiple regression beta weights)

	Q406. Voting in parliamentary elections	Elite-directed participation, except voting	Elite-challenging participation
SOCIALIZATION			
Gender ("Female")	n.s.	-0.12***	-0.09*
Age	0.37***	n.s.	n.s.
Educational attainment	0.18***	0.15***	0.19***
Living standards (self-described)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Size of locality	-0.08*	n.s.	n.s.
Q504. Church attendance	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Media Exposure	n.s.	0.13***	0.22***
IDEOLOGY			
Left-Right Self Placement	n.s.	-0.15***	-0.13***
"New Politics" Attitudes	n.s.	n.s.	0.10*
Q409. Party identification	0.13***	0.10**	0.10*
Support for democratic rights and duties	0.16***	0.09*	0.13***
Trust in political institutions	n.s.	0.13***	n.s.
Adjusted R ²	0.14	0.12	0.22
Valid N	751	756	759

Notes:

- 1) *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; n.s. = not significant;
- 2) DK, NA, and Refused were excluded from the analysis;
- 3) Q406 coding reversed. Not qualified to vote were excluded. Higher values mean voting more often.
- 4) Elite directed political participation, except voting: mean score of variables Q405b, Q405e, Q405h, Q405i, and Q405k. Higher values mean more political participation.
- 5) Elite-challenging participation – mean score of variables Q405a, Q405f and Q405j. Higher values mean more political participation.
- 6) Q409: 1-identifies with a party; 0-otherwise.
- 7) Q504: coding reversed. Higher values mean higher church attendance.

However, somewhat more surprising is the fact that the causes of both “elite-directed” and “elite-challenging” participation end up being almost exactly similar. First, party identification and (especially) educational resources have a relatively consistent influence across the board in all forms of civic engagement. Second, women are also less likely to participate both in unconventional and conventional ways (except voting), as are those less exposed to political information through the media. Third, those belonging to the right of the political spectrum are also likely to

participate less both through institutionalized and unconventional channels. Finally, what distinguishes the causes of elite-directed and elite-challenging participation is that, in the former, institutional trust is a very important factor — as individuals with less confidence in parties and political institutions are, understandably, less likely to get involved in party-related activities — but not in the latter. Instead, elite-challenging participation is, higher among those who support "new politics" (postmaterialist) positions.

Without the use of a comparative framework of analysis and on the basis of the available data, we can get only hint at potential explanations for the differential between Portugal and other Western democracies in terms of levels of both elite-directed and elite-challenging political participation. Besides, variations in such levels are likely to be explained not only by political culture, social background or available material or educational resources, but also by available institutional opportunities and constraints, such as those resulting, for example, from the electoral system. However, these results suggest several clues about the comparative lack of civic engagement in Portugal among established democracies.

First, the consistent effect of educational resources in all forms of political participation suggests that low civic engagement in Portugal should be related, first of all, to specific structural societal factors. As a country that experienced belated social modernization and human development in comparison with its European neighbors, and where the first building blocks of a modern welfare state were only placed in the 1970s, Portugal remains one of the West European nations where levels of illiteracy are higher, the workforce less skilled, and overall access to higher education lower.⁸

⁸ By 1999, the average of schooling years by adult in Portugal was 5.9, 4.2 years less than the weighted average of the countries in the World Bank high-income group. Similarly, the gross enrollment ratio in tertiary education was 47.1%, against the 60.2% weighted average in the high-income group (source:

Thus, the frequent finding that education is the one best predictors of civic engagement (Norris, 2002) acquires, in the Portuguese case, an enormous significance in terms of the reproduction of social inequalities in the political realm. This is even more so when we consider that, as van Deth and Elff suggest, Portugal is the *only* EU country where the impact of education in the explanation of political involvement has *increased*, in countertrend with the remaining European countries where the leveling effects of social modernization are being increasingly felt (van Deth & Elff, 2000).

Second, the finding that levels of civic engagement (except voting) are lower among individuals belonging to the ideological right, even after all social background and political attitudes controls are introduced, suggests that a legacy of Portuguese democratization may also play a special role in explaining low participation. The Portuguese transition to democracy, a typical “transition through collapse,” started in 1974, with a military coup led by junior officers. In the following two years, a quasi-revolutionary process took place, in which the option for either a pluralist liberal democracy or a Communist popular democracy remained politically and socially contested, mass mobilization of leftist and extreme-leftist parties reached extremely high levels, and the ideological right remained completely delegitimized. It is therefore conceivable that we are still witnessing the legacy of that revolutionary process, which has created or at least reinforced a political culture of “passivity” and “subordination” among the right (Cruz, 1995) and the enduring demobilization of an entire ideological sector of political society.

Finally, the impact of “new politics” or “postmaterialist” attitudes on unconventional participation, although an entirely predictable phenomenon, calls

World Bank, 2002). Finally, by 2000, Portugal’s illiteracy rate among ages 15 and over was 7.8%. Among *all* European countries, only Malta, Turkey, and Albania had higher illiteracy rates (source: United Nations, 2002).

attention to another potential cause of lower levels of activism in Portugal: the possibility that, unlike what has already occurred in other Western democracies, the shift from materialist to postmaterialist values — potentially crucial for an increase in levels civic engagement — has not yet taken place or remains yet incipient. This is one of the issues we will investigate in the following section.

5. POLITICAL PREFERENCES AND THEIR SOCIAL BASES

In modern industrial societies, left-right political polarization has long been central to political conflict (Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976; Knutsen, 1995; Knutsen and Scarbrough, 1995). What traditionally characterizes the left is an emphasis on economic and social equality, namely in terms of incomes and living conditions, and on the role of the state to promote such equality. On the right side of the political spectrum, there is a symmetric emphasis on the market, instead of the state, as the best instrument to promote economic growth and efficiency (Knutsen, 1995). In those countries, various studies show that the left-right political polarization is mainly related to the class cleavage, but also to the pre industrial state-church cleavage: workers and secularized individuals lean towards the left; employers, self-employed and church goers lean towards the right (Knutsen, 1995; Knutsen and Scarbrough, 1995).

Besides, since the sixties and seventies, a new axis of political cleavage is said to have increasing salience in post-industrial societies (Inglehart, 1971-1997). This new axis of political polarization is said to, cut across the traditional left-right division, complementing while not overshadowing it. It is structured around a value cleavage between materialists, who emphasize issues related to economic growth and law and order, and postmaterialists, who emphasize issues related to the quality of life

(for example, environmental protection, individual self expression, increased citizen participation in political decisions, and so on) and social equality (in terms of gender and sexual orientation, for example).

Table 5.1 Left-right issues and “new politics” issues

	Portugal	European average (nine countries)	Asian average (nine countries)
LEFT-RIGHT ISSUES			
“Competition is good, it stimulates people” (% “disagree” + “strongly disagree”)	2	4	4
“Society is better off when business are completely free to make profits” (% “disagree” + “strongly disagree”)	22	34	20
“Government should be responsible for employment or welfare for all” (% “strongly agree” + “agree”)	90	74	86
“A lot of government intervention is needed to solve economic problems” (% “strongly agree” + “agree”)	75	63	70
“Incomes should be made more equal” (% “strongly agree” + “agree”)	91	77	50
NEW POLITICS ISSUES			
“A good environment is more important than economic growth” (% “strongly agree” + “agree”)	38	58	59
“A woman’s primary role is in the home” (% “disagree” + “strongly disagree”)	74	69	47

DK, NA and refusals are included in the total

Table 5.1 provides a first glimpse about the basic preferences of the Portuguese about both the “left-right” and “new politics” items available in the questionnaire. On the one hand, very large majorities defend that government should be responsible for everybody's welfare, that state intervention is needed to solve economic problems, and that income equalization is needed. In all cases, these values are clearly above the European average. However, on the other hand, very small minorities *disagree* with the notions that competition is a good thing and that business should be completely free to make profits. These values are, in both cases, lower than the European average.

In other words, the political attitudes of the Portuguese show little sign of “constraint” in Converse’s sense (1964), i.e., they seem to be generally inconsistent

and not strongly organized around general and abstract principles (Almeida, 1990; Vala, 1993; Freire, 2002). An impressive measure of that lack of issue consistency is obtained when we identify the respondents that consistently agree with the notions of governmental responsibility for welfare, government intervention, and equalization of incomes and disagree with the benefits of competition and freedom for business, as well as those who disagree with the first three statements and agree with the latter two: taken together, these two sub-groups of “ideologically consistent” respondents comprise an astonishingly low 0.8 percent of the entire sample. This syndrome of contradictory attitudes may very well be a result of a complex mix between an authoritarian legacy (clearly state-centered), a strong catholic heritage (which emphasizes social solidarity), and adherence to a modern liberal influence. But the very strong emphasis of the Portuguese on income equalization can also be related to the high social and economic inequality that characterizes Portuguese society in comparison with its European neighbors (Gunther and Montero, 2001).

In what concerns “new politics” issues, the Portuguese are strongly divided in terms of the dichotomy between economic growth and environment, with a short plurality defending environment, but a very large majority denying a mere domestic role for women. However, we cannot immediately deduce from these results that a post-materialist syndrome is very salient among the Portuguese. First, the percentages of those who deem a “good environment” more important than “economic growth” are quite smaller than the European average, and it also possible that even those results denounce a mix between pre-modern and post-modern predispositions (Vala, 1993; Freire, 2002). Besides, in terms of the role of women, the above mentioned

position can at least partly express a mere adaptation to Portuguese reality in terms of labor market, with an important female participation in comparative terms.⁹

The comparatively lower importance of post-materialist values and concerns in Portugal is also visible when we focus on the issues that seem to concern the Portuguese the most. By late 2000, crime, unemployment, and the economy were the three problems that most concerned the Portuguese, with around 77 to 92 percent of respondents answering they were "somewhat" or "very worried" with these problems. Ranking the European average, although unemployment and crime prevention also rank as the most important concerns on average (see also Inglehart, 1997; and Dalton, 2002) issues such as the condition of the environment, the quality of public services, and human rights are deemed as even more worrisome than "the economy," as a post-materialist syndrome in most developed societies would lead us to predict.

In Table 5.2, we focus on the social and attitudinal anchors of political attitudes concerning left/right and new politics issues. Since prior studies have demonstrated that left-wing voting is usually much higher in large urban areas of Lisbon and Oporto, and in the southern areas of Alentejo (Freire, 2001a), we also included two dummy variables to control for that expected regional effect.

⁹ The World Bank "labor force gender parity index" (the ratio of the percentage of women who are economically active to the percentage of men who are) for Portugal in 2000 was 0.8, above the EU average (0.7).

Table 5.2 Explaining “left-right” and “new politics” preferences (OLS multiple regression beta weights)

	Left/Right Issues	New Politics Issues
Left/Right Self Placement	n.s.	n.s.
Church attendance	n.s.	n.s.
Gender ("Female")	0.08*	0.17***
Age	n.s.	-0.10*
Educational attainment	n.s.	0.17***
Living standards (self-described)	n.s.	0.30***
Size of Locality	n.s.	n.s.
Region 1	n.s.	n.s.
Region 2	n.s.	-0.11***
Adjusted R ²	0.02	0.28
Valid N	818	815

Notes:

- 1) *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; n.s. = not significant;
- 2) DK, NA, and Refused were excluded from the analysis.
- 3) Left/Right Issues – mean score of variables Q306a, Q306b, Q306f, Q306g, and Q412a. Higher values mean higher support to left-wing positions. (Q306a and Q306g: original coding reversed);
- 4) Region 1: 1 – Lisbon and Oporto; 0 – Others;
- 5) Region 2: 1 – South (Alentejo); 0 – Others.

The results confirm, first of all, the remarkable lack of constraint in left-right attitudes in Portugal. The respondents’ self-placement in the left-right scale lacks any statistically significant impact on the way respondents express their preferences around left-right issues. The only variable that has a significant impact — and an extremely modest at that — is gender, with women displaying slightly more economically rightist views. This is not to say that the left-right *idea* has no meaning to the Portuguese: only about 18 percent said that they do not know how to place themselves on the left-right scale, and only 23 percent answer that the left-right idea is "not important at all" for them (plus 11 who "don't know"), values close to the European average. However, the issue seems to be more one of a lack of substantive content for the left and right ideas in Portugal. Two proximate causes for that phenomenon can be advanced. On the one hand, as several studies have noted, Portuguese political parties lack any strong ideological differentiation, a phenomenon related, among other things, with the fact that voting behavior in Portugal tends to be

unanchored in any important social cleavages (Gunther and Montero, 2001). On the other hand, as the results in Table 5.3 also reveal, leftist and rightist attitudes also lack any concrete social constituencies and are, therefore, unrelated any with identifiable social interests. Instead of constituting a "super-issue" structuring political views, the left-right idea seems to function in itself simply as a form of party identification (about this, see Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976).

The picture is reversed in terms of the explanation of political attitudes vis-à-vis "new politics issues." First, the left-right self-placement has got no significant impact on new politics attitudes, suggesting that postmaterialism is a crosscutting cleavage. Second, there is a clear social determination of postmaterialist positions. The impact of gender may be overestimated, considering the weight of the item concerning "woman's role" plays in the index. However, and predictably, the more educated, the better-off, and the younger cohorts are more supportive of "new politics" attitudes. This clearly fits a postmodern syndrome (Inglehart, 1997) although, as we have seen, its presence at the aggregate level is still much less conspicuous than in most other West European democracies.

6. CONCLUSION

The picture that emerges from the previous analysis of Portuguese political values and political action is, predictably, more complex than what the purely "pessimistic" or "optimistic" views sketched in the Introduction might suggest. On the one hand, the pessimistic notion that an "authoritarian" legacy in contemporary Portuguese political culture still prevails will have, in all likelihood, to be abandoned. Any possible remnants of a legacy of exclusionary ethnically or religiously-based forms of nationalist politics are not visible, and support to core democratic values is,

today, widespread among the Portuguese mass public. Moreover, the levels of political distrust, discontent, and cynicism that have long been identified in Portugal or even the whole Southern Europe are, in fact, no longer “Portuguese,” nor do they seem to be “Southern European.” Instead, they are shared by a great number of other established democracies, a process where, at least in Portugal, globalization and the increased perception of domestic government’s powerlessness seems to play an important role. But in any case, for now, such attitudes do not seem to be undermining neither support for core democratic values nor citizens’ identification with the political community.

However, the available data also provide evidence of several Portuguese specificities. As Klingemann (1999) and others have also suggested, this syndrome of “dissatisfied democrats” may very well be “the hope for the future of democratic governance,” by potentially serving “a reforming and enhancing role in their respective democracies.” Nevertheless, in Portugal, such hopes seem, at the moment, unfounded. First, while most other established democracies have compensated their declines in electoral turnout and elite-directed political participation with an explosion of citizens’ involvement in politics through protest activities and involvement with social movements (Norris, 2002), the potential for mobilization for elite-challenging political participation in Portugal — visible in rates of psychological political involvement mobilization that are quite higher than what might be expected — seems yet unfulfilled, as concrete actions of civil engagement remain reserved for a very small minority of the population. Second, Portuguese dissatisfaction with politics bears little relationship with such involvement. Instead, among the major determinants of social activism in Portugal are two features that, precisely, help distinguishing

Portugal from most established democracies: extremely low levels of educational resources and an overwhelming predominance of materialist orientations.

In his book *Strong Democracy* (1985), Benjamin Barber described what he called "thin democracy," where citizens' political role was limited to using a highly individualistic form of political participation (voting) and monitoring the exercise of power by representatives, while the rest of their lives were used in their purely private pursuits as consumers or producers. Although it is not entirely clear whether such "thin democracy" should be discarded — especially if we believe that desires and resources to participate will always be asymmetrically distributed and "strong democracy" might give control of the public agenda to unrepresentative minorities and extreme preferences (Fiorina, 2002) — the current transformation of civic activism in many Western democracies suggests they may be getting somewhat "thicker."

However, in this respect, Portuguese patterns of political values and actions show a society at a curious juncture. On the one hand, the comparative lack of civic engagement in Portugal may simply be a consequence of belated social and economic modernization, a situation that is likely to change as such processes take their course in the long-term. But in the meantime, traditional avenues of political participation are in obvious decay. As it was repeatedly shown in the analysis of most policy attitudes and political preferences, ideological consistency among Portuguese mass publics is extremely low, depriving citizens of accurate cues with which to interpret even the "thin" version of the democratic process. Political attitudes, including "democratic dissatisfaction," lack any kind of social anchors, revealing that potential conversion of that syndrome into opportunities and demands for democratic reform lacks any clear

and identifiable social constituency in Portugal. In this sense, Portuguese democracy is becoming thinner before it gets any thicker.

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