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Portuguese civic culture: voter's attitudes and perceptions on politics

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Abstract

The general objective of this current analysis is to characterize voters' attitudes and perceptions on key political structures and issues, relating to the time period of the Portuguese Parliamentary elections in 2002 and 2005. The aim is to analyse The evolution of voters' perception attitudes to politics, between the two above mentioned election periods, on several key issues about society and about politics. These are 'Catholicism', 'authority', 'profit' or 'trade unions', which are important symbolic elements of a considered civic culture. In methodological terms, a multidimensional scale procedure and analysis has been used, based on two post-electoral polls applied to the urban area of Lisbon's eight councils. This paper seeks to contribute to the analysis of voters' perceptions about several key structural and infrastructural elements, this knowledge will reflect upon the voters' involvement in their civic culture.

1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to analyze a set of key themes, concerning the structural areas of a democratic society, such as economics, health, security and education and it is based upon a survey conducted within the area of the eight major councils of the Lisbon district. The specific objectives of the study are, on the one hand, to focus on key concepts and areas that are relevant to the community of electoral citizens from the urban Lisbon area. On the other hand, there are serious and urgent constraints as well as important opportunities to be analyzed and interpreted, that are based in this survey. These areas and tendencies will be contextualized in relation to Portuguese urban political culture, in particular focusing upon the Portuguese democratization process, initialized from the mid-seventies on, more precisely and specifically after the revolution in April 1974. Furthermore the proposed objectives must be seen as a result of the global challenges, answers and problems which have been experienced in a concrete way by citizens, and are seen as an inevitable common backdrop to the wider global issues. In methodological terms this contribution is based upon an inquiry, supported by a questionnaire, applied through a

representative sampling of the Lisbon electorate in question. The expected results point to a set of political and social tendencies based on the electors view about several key structures of the political system and, though, the results seeks to contribute for a better knowledge of the Portuguese urban civic culture.

The concept of civic culture is inherent in the present analysis and is meant as a symptomatic and peculiar perception of each individual and community regarding both its symbolic patterns and values, generated from key aspects and structures of daily life. Traditionally, the concept of civic culture has been very practical and functional not only as a peculiar aspect of the individual's perception about politics and society but also in the analysis of political culture (Almond, Verba, 1980). Although the purpose of learning more about civic culture is a traditional and a fundamental topic in political science studies (eg. Tocqueville, 1835), its modern application is greatly indebted to the important developments made by Almond (1956), in his pioneer article about political culture as well as in his further relevant and multiple developments (eg. Almond, Powell Jr., StrØm, Dalton, 2000; Wiarda, Mott, 2001; Almond, Dalton, Powell, Jr., 2002). Almond's starting point was to begin with a wide application of the concept, always maintaining, as a common denominator, the symbolic and non-material characteristics persistently and profoundly supported and promoted by both the individuals and the structures of each system (Beck, 1998; Espírito Santo, 2006; Faulks, 1999; Hirst, Thompson, 1996; Linklater, 1998; Lloyd, Thomas, 1998; Fulga, 2005; Haynes, 2005; Miheljak in Klingemann, Fuchs, Zielonka, 2006). Some other fundamental contributions served to enhance the importance of the inner perspective of each individual regarding State political values and symbols as a fundamental symptom needing to be learned in order to understand the prevalent traits of a specific political culture (Boy, Mayer, 1997; Putnam, 1993; Putnam, 2000).

This analysis will focus upon the attitudes and perceptions of voters as a basis to understand the most prevalent symbolic features of a selected urban area, as a means to finding a possible pattern of evolution concerning a set of specific key aspects of Portuguese civic culture. Specifically, we consider that voters' attitudes and perceptions regarding politics and elections can be symbolically enhanced and characterized if we consider a set of

values, such as 'catholicism', 'authority', 'profit' or 'trade unionism', among others, which are important symbolic elements of a considered political system and of each civic culture. We mean to place and organize these key aspects so that we can relate to and enhance their importance. We put forward, as a hypothesis, that considering the principal political Portuguese urban area, within the period from 2002 to 2005, voters tended to place importance upon conservative values, in relation to key symbolic political and social structures and issues.

2. Methodological aspects

Methodologically, this work is based on the application of a *multidimensional scaling* (MDS), the aim of which is to represent and to place the distances between quantitative variables, within a numeric scale, on a perceptual map, in order to allow the analysis and interpretation of the relative positioning between those variables. We have used the MDS procedure in order to analyse proximities and distances between quantitative variables, as represented on a perceptual map. Specifically, the idea behind constructing this type of variable was the comparison of positions in four spatial squares, organized within several structuring areas of Portuguese politics, as a way of interpreting the proximity, the distance and the conceptual grouping between the considerable variables. The description of the present positioning between variables was made based upon two objectives: to interpret the compared positions, in terms of grouping variables, on the one hand, and, on the other to interpret the positions of each variable, considering two dimensions. Each dimension has a positive and a negative attitudinal position, in order to find an approach to interpret the meaning of its spatial distribution. It is worth noting that we should take into consideration that the stress measures indicate the adjustment of the spatial model. The low value of the normalized raw stress indicates a high level of adequacy between the considered dimensions. The set of the stress measure values in each table indicates the usefulness of the model.

In methodological terms, the study was applied using as a basis two different elections for Parliament. The two polls were applied to the urban area around the capital,

Lisbon, referred to as "the Greater Lisbon area", which includes eight district councils and may be considered as an important context in political, social and dimensional terms, at a national level. In its entirety, the urban area in question has over 1,500 million voters[1]. The eight councils are: Amadora, Cascais, Lisboa, Loures, Odivelas, Oeiras, Sintra and Vila Franca de Xira. The area includes these voter's councils', according to the official residential list, updated annually by STAPE[2], which is the official Portuguese body responsible for organizing electoral data. The data from the two opinion polls was gathered about one month after the Parliamentary elections had taken place (17th March 2002 and the 20th February 2005[3], respectively. The considered variables in this study are part of a wider questionnaire focused upon voters' attitudes and behaviour. We have the present variables of this questionnaire as they focused upon several issues and areas that are frequently debated during elections.

The design and implementation of the sampling plan was based upon probabilistic basis sampling of 600 individuals (voters), from each poll, combined with a random route itinerary and a quota sampling method selection of the individuals at home[4], segmentation by sex and age was also used, based upon the last 2001 Portuguese population census. The sampling error would be ± 4%, for a 95% level of confidence, if it were considered a strictly probabilistic sampling plan.

3. Voters' attitudes and perceptions on politics

In this section we have analyzed voters' attitudes and perceptions towards structural areas and aspects of politics, in order for them to reflect upon their own perception of Portuguese civic culture. With this objective in mind, we asked individuals to place their

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[1] In 2002, the electorate consisted of 1,559,986 individuals, according to the current electoral census. In 2005 the electorate consisted of 1,679,706 voters. Data from STAPE (Secretariado Técnico para os Assuntos do Processo Eleitoral).

[2] See note above.

[3] For 2002, the data was gathered during the weekend of the 20th and 21st of April, about one month after elections. For 2005 the data was collected during the weekend of the 16th and 17th of April, after the 20th of February elections.

[4] The interviewers' teams were composed by university students, of the Communication Studies' course, of ISCSP (Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas)/UTL (Universidade Técnica de Lisboa), from 2001/2002 and 2004/2005 courses.

opinion in terms of importance, on a scale from 1 to 10 (from 'very important' to 'not important at all'), considering each variable.

In relation to data for the legislative elections in 2002 and 2005, the areas presented and the data referred to in the MDS application, we verify the following:

In 2002, we have found proximities between security, finance and health and education, which fall within dimension 1, and are prime needs for citizens. In 2005, we have also found proximities between finance, health and education (security does not show a close proximity), which are within dimension 1.

'Immigration', 'external relations' and 'sports' are also to be found in the same dimension 1, in 2002. These are expectable variables, in terms of proximity. This tendency is maintained in 2005, 'defence', however, is also next to this spatial grouping.

Another tendency is that 'defence' and 'security' are not in the same dimension, whether in 2002 or in 2005. This may be interpreted with an individual sampling connection between 'defence' has an image of internationalization and, therefore, distance. 'Security' seems to generate a higher proximity and appears to be as common and as necessary as finance, which are also somewhat close to security.

The spatial square that includes 'sports', 'culture' and 'environment' (in 2002) underlines a set of similar social concerns in terms of importance. However, the most important square in this spatial representation indicates that 'education' and 'health' are found together in terms of importance and are given a higher level of importance. The same occurs in 2005, where these two categories are also found together, which shows congruence and, perhaps, a tendency that will be confirmed in further research. 'Finance' and 'security' are also seem together in both the 2002 and 2005 surveys, though in secondary spatial squares.

We consider there is consistency between the data of both surveys, as the most sensitive topics appear together, though in different square spaces. In our opinion this different allocation can be explained by the composition of the variables. It includes ten attitudinal positions which are suitable in statistical terms but may not be quite so acknowledged on the part of the interviewees.

Another observation, based upon the MDS treatment, is presently focused on the individuals' positioning towards key political aspects. The positive or negative construction of these concept images allowed for the reading of distances and proximities, made through the MDS analysis, permitting clearer inferences about positioning on the perceptual map.

Prior to the perceptual analysis, a descriptive statistical analysis allowed us to conclude that the concepts which generated a positive image, in the 2002 and 2005 post-electoral polls, are authority, 'trade unionism', profit, equality, solidarity, feminism, Catholicism and private education. Solidarity as well as equality registered the biggest score as a positive value. Profit witnessed a greater importance in 2005, certainly due to conjunctural reasons as it was a year of economic growth and, consequently, of hope and confidence in economic terms. In relation to the negative image variables, the most salient variable is Islam which generated a proportion of about 81% voters who considered Islam displayed a negative image.

Attitudes towards structural areas of national politics - 2002
Multidimensional scaling (MDS)

Table 1 - Final Coordinates

	Dimension	
	1	2
SECURIT	,495	-,567
FINANCES	,593	-,176
IMMIGRATION	-,432	-,563
ENVIRONMENT	-,085	,194
HEALTH	,856	,245
CULTURE	-,210	,514
EDUCATION	,485	,397
EXT.REL	-,646	-,099
DEFENCE	-,234	-,261
SPORTS	-,823	,317

Table 2 - Goodness of fit, stress and fit measures

| Normalized Raw Stress	,03985
Stress-I	,19962
Stress-II	,54509
S-Stress	,07825
Dispersion Accounted For (D.A.F.)	,96015
Tucker's Coefficient of Congruence	,97987

NOTES:
PROXSCAL minimizes Normalized Raw Stress.
a. Optimal scaling factor = 1,042.
b. Optimal scaling factor = ,939

Figure 1 – Attitudes towards structural areas of national politics - 2002
Multidimensional scaling (MDS)
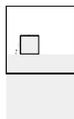
NOTES:
1. This set of variables has a quantitative scale represented between 1 and 10, respectively from totally important to not important at all
2. The answers don't know and did not answer were recoded as missing cases.

Attitudes towards structural areas of national politics - 2005
Multidimensional scaling (MDS)

Table 3 - Final Coordinates

	Dimension	
	1	2
SECURITY	-,241	,513
FINANCES	-,704	,308
IMMIGRATION1	,400	,696
ENVIRONMENT	-,072	,027
HEALTH	-,721	-,310
CULTURE	-,003	-,451
EDUCATION	-,477	-,361
EXT.REL	,554	,257
DEFENCE	,529	-,111
SPORTS	,735	-,567

Table 4 - Goodness of Fit, Stress and Fit Measures

Normalized Raw Stress	,05136
Stress-I	,22663
Stress-II	,63325
S-Stress	,11785
Dispersion Accounted For (D.A.F.)	,94864
Tucker's Coefficient of Congruence	,97398

NOTES:
PROXSCAL minimizes Normalized Raw Stress.
 a. Optimal scaling factor = 1,054
 b. Optimal scaling factor = ,926.

Figure 2 – Attitudes towards structural areas of national politics - 2005
Multidimensional scaling (MDS)

NOTES:
1. This set of variables has a quantitative scale represented between 1 and 10, respectively from totally important to not important at all.
2. The answers don't know and did not answer were recoded as missing cases.

The concepts that did not allow clear image constructions based on this description were privatization, nationalization and immigration. The values regarding the variable 'abortion' as is the case with the 'USA' in 2002, did not allow clear positive or negative image to be defined. However, in 2005, there was a clearer definition whether in a negative sense for the 'USA' image, or in a positive sense for 'abortion'. In relation to the USA , we should bear in mind that when the 2002 pool was applied, it was six months after the 11th September, attack on the Twin Towers. In March 2004, the USA was involved in the Iraq invasion, which was not accepted favorably by the general public. When considering 'abortion' what must be born in mind is it is a very sensitive topic for Portuguese society. In fact, there was a referendum on the right of abortion in 1999 which resulted in a 'no' result. In February 2006, the second Portuguese referendum about the non-penalization took place,

resulting in a victory for the "yes" vote. In terms of the evolution of opinions about the two elections in question, generally, most variables show a very stable tendency, with regard to the individuals' attitude towards them.

Taking into account this set of political culture references may allow us to draw inferences about the tendencies and dominant values, within the Lisbon context. If we associate this data to the observation afforded by the MDS application, we gain clearer insights, even if it is not always possible with some variables to define more concrete tendencies.

Table 5 – Positioning towards key political aspects

	2002			2005		
	Frequency	Percent of Cases		Frequency	Percent of Cases	
		Positive	Negative		Positive	Negative
Authority	435	**76,0**	24,0	401	**71,5**	28,5
Trade Unionism	418	**74,5**	25,5	408	**75,7**	24,3
Profit	432	**76,9**	23,1	540	**90,0**	10,0
Privitization	283	54,1	45,9	227	47,6	52,4
Nationalization	282	54,2	45,8	238	50,4	49,6
Immigration	266	47,1	52,5	269	49,4	50,6
Equality	530	**92,7**	7,3	540	**94,1**	5,9
Private education	332	59,6	40,4	308	58,8	41,2
Solidarity	551	**96,2**	3,8	567	**96,9**	3,1
Feminism	385	69,0	31,0	350	65,8	34,2
Catholicism	397	**72,1**	27,9	376	**72,9**	27,1
Abortion	285	51,5	48,5	298	57,8	42,2
Homosexuality	210	38,8	61,2	202	43,5	56,5
The USA	248	46,0	54,0	170	34,9	65,1
Islam	104	19,9	**80,1**	84	19,4	**80,6**

NOTES:
1. The original variable was recoded from four to two attitudinal positions (positive *versus* negative).
2. The answers don't know and did not answer were recoded as missing cases.

As a result to the several areas presented, we have the following:

We discovered that 'equality' and 'solidarity' are together, in the same dimension, in both the 2002 and 2005 surveys. Also, for both surveys, in dimension 1 and within the same spatial square, we have found that 'Catholicism', 'authority' and 'profit' have a close level of proximity. In relation to these variables we should stress that 'Catholicism' is the most important and traditional religion, in Portugal. According to the last Portuguese census in 2001, about 80% in individuals declared that they did in fact identify themselves with this religion. Also, curiously, according to the data, 'Catholicism' is as important as 'profit', in terms of position on this perceptual map. This association may be interpreted as a sign of an evolution in mentality, which allows for different theoretical values to coexist, passively, and positively, in a predominant catholic culture, such as the Portuguese one. Associated to these two variables, we find that 'solidarity', as a value, may be used as a counterpoint between the latter concepts as well as functioning as a regulator of such differing doctrinarian positions. 'Authority' also appears in the same square as the previous variables, which is considered both as a conservative and an important value in this analysis.

In both studies, we have seen that the categories 'Islam' and the 'USA' are together, since it was their perception portrayed by the world's media stage that kept them together during this time period. The same has occurred with private education and privatization concepts. This late grouping may indicate a clear organization and ranking, in terms of importance, within the so called education as an economic culture.

In the lower spatial squares there are also curious readings in evidence. 'Trade Unionism' and 'equality' are variables with a high proximity, which is not difficult to infer because of their social and economic roles. We have also discovered in the lower spatial squares two variables, 'homosexuality' and 'abortion'. If we consider the variables nationalization and immigration variables, we have not been able to find a clear tendency in both surveys, in terms of positioning.

We may say that in the higher spatial squares, we have found a set of variables that because of their majority may be associated with a more conservative and right wing position. What is more, in the lower squares, we have seen the variables that indicate change and social intervention, identified with left wing and ideological principles, such as 'trade unionism' and 'equality'.

Positioning towards key political aspects - 2002
Multidimensional scaling (MDS)

Table 6- Final Coordinates

	Dimension	
	1	2
AUTHORITY	,316	,306
SINDICALISM	,316	-,329
PROFIT	,437	,082
PRIVITIZATION	-,138	,263
NATIONALIZATION	-,214	-,272
IMMIGRATION	-,477	-,066
EQUALITY	,843	-,275
PRIVATE.SCHOOLS	-,111	,571
SOLIDARITY	,944	,074
FEMINISM	,159	-,571
CATHOLICISM	,322	,622
ABORTION	-,287	-,734
HOMOSEXUALITY	-,715	-,412
THE USA	-,523	,502
ISLAM	-,872	,238

Table 7- Goodness of Fit, Stress and Fit Measures

Normalized Raw Stress	,06488
Stress-I	,25471(a)
Stress-II	,66968(a)
S-Stress	,13130(b)
Dispersion Accounted For (D.A.F.)	,93512
Tucker's Coefficient of Congruence	,96702

NOTES:
PROXSCAL minimizes Normalized Raw Stress.
a. Optimal scaling factor = 1,069.
b. Optimal scaling factor = ,915.

Figure 3 – Positioning towards key political aspects - 2002
Multidimensional scaling (MDS)

NOTES:
1. The original variable with its four attitudinal positions was used
2. The answers don't know and did not answer were recoded as missing cases.

Positioning towards key political aspects - 2005
Multidimensional scaling (MDS)

Table 8- Final Coordinates

	Dimension	
	1	2
AUTHORITY	-,480	,499
SYNDICALISM	-,236	-,115
PROFIT	-,655	,054
PRIVITIZATION	,474	,186
NATIONALIZATION	-,045	-,794
IMMIGRATION	,633	-,267
EQUALITY	-,638	-,079
PRIVATE.EDUCATION	,201	,463
SOLIDARITY	-,599	,096
FEMINISM	-,384	-,524
CATHOLICISM	-,206	,635
ABORTION	,117	-,376
HOMOSEXUALITY	,453	-,598
USA	,477	,672
ISLAM	,888	,148

Table 9- Goodness of Fit, Stress and Fit Measures

Normalized Raw Stress	,07772
Stress-I	,27877
Stress-II	,73746
S-Stress	,17786
Dispersion Accounted For (D.A.F.)	,92228
Tucker's Coefficient of Congruence	,96036

NOTES:
   PROXSCAL minimizes Normalized Raw Stress.
a. Optimal scaling factor = 1,069.
b. Optimal scaling factor = ,915.

Figure 4 – Positioning towards key political aspects - 2005
Multidimensional scaling (MDS)
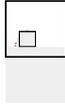
NOTES:
1. The original variable with its four attitudinal positions was used
2. The answers don't know and did not answer were recoded as missing cases.

From the above analysis in terms of association consequent to the positioning organization we have concluded that there is a focus on the variables 'education' and 'health', as priority values. Another example of prior placing is 'finance' and 'security', which demonstrate an isolated and evident association. Also, 'sports', 'culture', 'environment', on one side, and 'external relations' and 'defence', on the other, appear in autonomous spatial squares, but are less evident in terms of importance. Among the political values that have proximities and are quite eminent, according to the statistical treatment in question, we find Catholicism', 'authority', 'profit' and 'solidarity'. Furthermore we see 'equality', 'trade unionism' and 'feminism' are together in a separate spatial square. We also underline that if we intend to extend these conclusions to a national scale we would need comparable data which has yet to be produced.

5. Conclusion

Some prevalent lines have been observed from the analysis undertaken which was focused upon two different elections for the Portuguese Parliament (2002 and 2005). From a deep, complex set of connected motives, we have seen that 'Catholicism' was detached, as were 'profit', 'trade unionism', 'solidarity' and 'equality'. We may interpret this tendency as characteristic of an urban culture, with a conservative cultural support, implanted, in religious terms, within both the secular importance and roots of the Catholic Church, such is the Portuguese culture. Also, this culture is, simultaneously, characterized by a propensity towards a reformist nature, as is suggested by the importance placed upon 'trade unionism' and 'equality'. Further to this, we have found that there is a striking set of priorities, strictly connected that place values such as health and education as being quite important, both in political and in social systemic terms. The values of 'finance' and 'security' should be added, as evident aspects, that should be read as causing some public apprehension as a result of a period of economic uncertainty (between 2002 and 2005) is confirmed. This means that considering the principal political Portuguese urban area, within the period from 2002 to 2005, voters distinguished and clearly put together a priority set of political and social areas and issues.

6. References

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