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Title: «Independents and citizen's groups in Portuguese municipalities»<sup>1</sup>.

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## 1. Introduction

Portugal has been living in Democracy for the last three decades. After the revolution of April 25<sup>th</sup> 1974, and a two year transition period, democratic institutions have begun to function with some regularity, towards a multi-party system. There have been four major parties in Portugal since 1974/1975: the Socialist Party (PS), the Social Democrat Party (PSD), the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Popular Party (former CDS – Social Democrat Centre, now CDS-PP), on the right wing (see analysis of statutes in Lobo, 2003: 253-261). The two major parties, the Socialist Party (PS – centre left) and the Social Democrat Party (PSD – centre right), usually alternate in the control of central government, sometimes in coalition to other parties. This two-party system characterizes most democracies nowadays.

The first democratic elections were held on the first anniversary of the revolution and they were destined to form a Parliament whose main goal was to write and approve a new Constitution, which established democratic principles. As for results, the Socialist Party won with 38 percent of the votes, and the Communist Party, which assumed it held a revolutionary legitimacy to impose its model, had only a 12 percent result. These first elections were held under an electoral law which established for the first time universal suffrage<sup>3</sup> and total gender equality<sup>4</sup>, just as many other laws were written in those days to pave the way towards political, social and civic rights equality.

1975 Was one of the most troubling years of Portugal's history: there were bank, industry and land occupations and nationalizations (Almeida 2006a), and a few aborted revolutionary movements. Finally, on April 25<sup>th</sup> 1976, elections were held to form a new Parliament and the first constitutional government. Two months later the first president was democratically elected and, in December of the same year, local elections were held to vote for mayors and members of municipal councils.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper presented at the Conference *Independent Local Lists: A Comparative Perspective*, Martin-Luther-University, Halle-Wittenberg, 13-14 April, 2007. I appreciate the questions and comments made during the conference, which were used extensively to improve this article.

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<sup>3</sup> According to article 116<sup>th</sup> of the 1976 Portuguese Constitution, elections are direct, free, secret, regular and universal, based on the system of proportional representation.

<sup>4</sup> Decree number 621-A/74, November 15<sup>th</sup> 1974.

The first democratic Constitution, approved on April 1976, took measures to enforce local democracy. After a very centralized regime, which deprived municipalities of its centuries' old tradition of autonomy, the goal of the new legislators was to create a safety net of several layers of government in order to protect the citizens from the return of another potentially authoritarian regime (Phillips, 1996: 23). The decision to decentralise and strengthen local government at the municipal level was quite easily accepted by all political forces at the time (Pereira, 1991: 134). The Constitution established a representative democracy, mediated by political parties, which definitely monopolise political representation on the different levels of government. It is within the parties that political elites are chosen, both central and locally: each party has a convention that elects a leader and each one proposes a closed list of candidates to the parliament and municipalities. This is a rather centralized and informal process (Freire, 2003: 181): the intervention of the bases of each party is possible mostly as voters on conventions. Lists of candidates depend on party leaders, who definitely control political careers (Freire, 2001: 147-149).

Independent candidacies for parliament and municipalities have been allowed since 1976, but only within party lists<sup>5</sup>. Citizen's groups could run at the lowest level of local government: the civil parishes, called *freguesias*<sup>6</sup>, since 1976. It is only since the 1997 revision of the Constitution that non-partisan lists may present candidacies for municipalities, called *câmaras*<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, the 2001 local election was the first one to elect mayors and councillors who were not included in party lists. Has this challenged the Portuguese party system?

Without any doubt, in most European political systems, parties are a basic element of representative democracy and the main, through not only, vehicle through which political representation is secured. Parties are responsible for political recruitment, providing political experience in organising and campaigning, selecting candidates and contesting elections at all levels, and for delivering the party's policies in local government. Portugal is no exception. However, in some countries a distinctly anti-party mood has developed at the sub-national level. Has this happened in Portugal? What is the impact of independent or citizen's groups' candidacies? Does it reveal a decline of party politics (Mair, 1997; Mair, Biezen, 2001; Mair, 2003), combined with the increasing disenchantment and alienation within the established national parties?

These are important issues which may help us to assess the importance of political parties in each level of government. One of our main hypotheses is that the higher the place

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<sup>5</sup> Articles 151<sup>st</sup> and 239<sup>th</sup> of the Portuguese Constitution.

<sup>6</sup> Decree n. 701-A/76, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1976.

<sup>7</sup> Portuguese Constitution, article 239<sup>th</sup>, n. 4, put in practice by Law 1/2001, August 14<sup>th</sup> 2001, article 16<sup>th</sup>.

within the political hierarchy, the most important is the role of the parties and the less important is the presence of independent candidates.

In order to answer these working questions, the case study method was applied. After a synthesised description of the Portuguese political system, its rules and regulations, I present the data of the 2001 election and analyse it. I worked on citizen's groups, independent candidacies, and independent candidates associated with a political party. Since citizen's groups' candidacies are a very recent phenomenon in Portugal, the numbers of elected councillors are quite diminutive. Anyway, it is possible to reach some conclusions regarding the types of municipalities which have elected them, especially considering their regional importance, size and spatial location. As for the cohesiveness of their organisational form – from short-lived, loose associations which only collect signatures for the proposed candidates, up to durable organizations with their own statute, programme and formal membership, it is too early to reach for results. But it is already possible to find some of the reasons for their creation, and for the types of interests they represent, namely whether or not they ran against the political parties, or even against the political system itself. Another possibility is a personalised candidacy (within a citizen's group) or a candidacy against another person. Available data also provides information about social background, education, professional characteristics, age and residence of elected councillors.

## **2. Historical background**

To the general population and to voters, mayors and local councillors are the most visible aspect of government and they represent the political group that is most present in people's lives, opposite to members of parliament and ministers, who work, live and act within an unreachable ground for the common citizen. Since the middle ages, municipalities have assumed a leading role in people's lives, and were granted actual powers, consecrated in royal documents dated as early as the thirteenth century, which provided them with autonomy from landlords and noblemen. Neighbours and the "good men" of the *Concelhos* actually ruled the municipalities in a rather "democratic" way, which took into consideration income and education in order to get elected for President of the Council (Mayor) and councillor. And local elections did take place on a regular basis through regime changes: from the Monarchy to the Republic (in 1910) and up to the 1926 Revolution, which paved the way to Salazar's Estado Novo. That is when everything changed, when the dictatorial regime imposed total centralization and a reorganization of the local government.

With the 1936 law, that ruled most of the Estado Novo regime, mayors were appointed by the government (the minister of the interior), upon proposal of the districts' civil

governors (whose powers increased), and were given simply administrative and police roles. The legislation specifically refers that they were to be chosen among local economic and social elites, people who possessed social and symbolic capitals, preferably with a university degree. They did not receive payment<sup>8</sup>, therefore they had to have their own incomes and pursue their professional careers in parallel. Local councillors were elected on three year periods by a municipal council, composed of the mayor itself, representatives of the civil parishes and corporative local institutions and citizens with the largest incomes in the municipalities.

After the revolution of April 25<sup>th</sup> 1974, old mayors were dismissed by decree and administrative commissions were appointed for each municipality. These commissions were supposed to be composed of “independent personalities or groups and political currents which identify themselves with the Movement of Armed Forces”<sup>9</sup>, and should function until the first democratic local elections took place. In most cases, local citizen comities affiliated to the Communist Party presented a list of commission members to the Ministry of Interior and were immediately approved. The role of Communist Party local leaders was fundamental to the attraction and mobilization process of the people, who actively participated in the replacement of the local councils and all the presidents of economic and corporative institutions. There was an almost complete replacement of the local political and economic elites. Traditional elites were mostly landowners, especially on the southern latifundium region. Nowadays those groups don’t even run for local elections. And economic power is no longer a way of conquering local political leadership. New professions emerged in the group that controls political jobs. Economic elites based on landownership are completely and deliberately absent from local politics. Also, political jobs are no longer interesting to these groups, whose professional activities either in agriculture or others are increasingly more time consuming and provide them with incomes that are by far more appealing than a mayor’s salary or the amount of work it requires.

The first democratic local elections took place on December 12<sup>th</sup> 1976 and since then there have been eight more elections, initially for three year terms, and, since 1985, for four year terms<sup>10</sup>. After over half a century of mayors being appointed by the central government, from that date on mayors and local councillors were elected by the people, mediated by the political parties. Recruitment criteria for these political jobs were definitely modified. During the Estado Novo, mayors and councillors were selected among the local economical and social elites. With the democratic regime, people started getting elected for different reasons

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<sup>8</sup> Except for the mayors of Lisbon, Oporto, and other important towns, which represent only 8.6 percent of the municipalities.

<sup>9</sup> Decree n. 236/74, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1974.

<sup>10</sup> After decree n. 100/84, March 29<sup>th</sup> 1984.

such as the direct relation between the candidates' professional and social background and the social and demographic characteristics of the region, or the social work done, instead of the social capital possessed. And personal sympathy, another new and very important factor, opposed to fear and respect, which people generally felt for mayors before 1974 (Almeida, 2006b). With the regime's transition, less than three percent of the old mayors were elected afterwards.

Local governments are elected by direct universal suffrage under a closed lists system of proportional representation (Hondt method). This system was introduced because in 1976 Portugal lived a period of party dissemination through society, after a 48 year party absence during the authoritarian regime. In order to build their local structures, parties needed a social and political anchor in local communities. The compulsory list system and the proportional number of councillors was a way to give all parties access to local government, regardless of size and majorities, and to introduce them into the lives of citizens and their habits of political representation, as references of the multi-party democratic system. In sum, the introduction of parties in local government was a school for democratic learning, both for voters and for the parties themselves<sup>11</sup>. Right from the beginning of the Portuguese transition to Democracy, citizens became very much politicised, and clearly defined their positions within the political supply<sup>12</sup>. And parties were the only ways they had to express themselves.

### **3. Institutional framework**

Nowadays, continental Portugal is divided into 18 districts. Each one has a civil governor, appointed by the central government and acting as its representative, whose functions include making sure all acts practiced by local authorities and institutions abide by the law, authorizing street assemblies and civil demonstrations, scheduling extraordinary local elections, and taking appropriate measures in case of catastrophes<sup>13</sup>. There are also two autonomous regions, with autonomous governments, on the Atlantic islands of the Madeira and the Azores<sup>14</sup>. Each district is divided into municipalities. In 1976 municipalities were established as democratic local governments, but the pre-1974 boundaries have

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<sup>11</sup> "It was considered, in 1976, that, with the young multi-party system, there was an advantage for democracy and for local government itself to introduce and consolidate political parties locally, as references of the democratic system", MP Artur Torres Pereira (PSD), Parliament's Journal (Diário da Assembleia da República), July 30<sup>th</sup> 1997, 3915-3925. Available at <http://debates.parlamento.pt/?pid=r3>.

<sup>12</sup> This is the contrary of what has happened with Eastern European countries' transition in the nineties, where political definition has not yet been achieved and political parties are having a hard time establishing themselves and conquering majorities.

<sup>13</sup> Portuguese Constitution, revised in 1997, article 291<sup>st</sup>, n. 3, Decree n. 399-B/84, December 28<sup>th</sup> 1984, and decree n. 252/92, November 19<sup>th</sup> 1992. Law 1/2001, August 14<sup>th</sup> 2001, article 50<sup>rd</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Portuguese Constitution, 1976, articles 225<sup>th</sup> to 229<sup>th</sup>.

remained. There was no reorganization of the local administration since the nineteenth century, mostly because of the people's attachment to their municipalities and the existing historical and traditional links. The average size of the Portuguese municipalities is more than 32.000 people and 301 square kilometres. At present there are 308 municipalities (four were added since 1979 for demographic reasons, resulting from the split of a previous one), governed by an elected group of councillors, whose president (the mayor) is the head of the winning list. The territory of each municipality is made up of civil parishes which are institutionally represented in the organic structure of their respective municipal assembly (Pereira, 1991: 135-136).

It is important to define and understand the Portuguese local government political organization:

The Constitution of 1976 defined the purpose of administrative decentralisation and contains many innovatory principles concerning local government. It is recognised the principle of local government autonomy<sup>15</sup> (see Almeida, 1991a: 498). As fundamental bases of decentralisation, the Constitution established four important principles relating to local government: the autonomy of local units of administration; the existence of local government as part of the democratic organisation of the state; the financial and patrimonial autonomy of local authorities; and local government's self-regulatory capacity (Pereira, 1991: 134). Municipalities are in fact local authorities integrated into the democratic organization of the state. They have financial autonomy through their own resources and assets<sup>16</sup>, and democratic autonomy through assemblies composed of freely elected members<sup>17</sup>.

The representative bodies of the municipalities are elected separately but simultaneously by resident citizens on a same election day throughout the entire country, for a four year mandate:

- The municipal assembly is the deliberative body, composed of the elected representatives of the citizens and the chairmen of the executive bodies of the various parishes;
- The municipal executive (the executive body) is normally comprised of between five and eleven members, *vereadores*, councillors or aldermen

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<sup>15</sup> *Idem*, article 237<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Portuguese Constitution, 1976, article 254<sup>th</sup>. Their resources are: local taxes and transfers from the state (a provision from the state budget). In 1979 a Financial Equalisation Fund was created to reduce local inequalities between municipalities of the same level and to provide for a fair distribution of public resources between the state and local government. There is also the possibility of discretionary transfers from the state: central government may take extraordinary financial measures in cases of public emergency or extraordinary expenses. In Portugal, local expenditure represents 2.5 percent of the Gross National Product and 7 percent of the total public expenditure. The Financial Equalisation Fund represents 6 percent of the state budget.

<sup>17</sup> Portuguese Constitution, article 238<sup>th</sup>. Law 42/98, August 6<sup>th</sup> 1998, established the financial regime and discipline of municipalities and civil parishes, with their own incomes and state budget funds transfers.

(except for Lisbon, where there are 17, and Oporto, 13), one of them being the president, who is a powerful mayor (as in France).

Each voter has one vote for each body<sup>18</sup>. Lists may be presented by political parties (which may include independent candidates), by political parties' coalitions and (since 2001) by voters associations<sup>19</sup>. The winner list elects the mayor and the number of councillors for each party is proportional to the electoral results. There is in fact a strong hierarchy in the Portuguese municipal councils<sup>20</sup> and the first name on the lists always runs to be mayor. At the same time, the body of councillors is multi-partied and they all have to work together and run the municipality, even if it implies discussion and opposition within the councils.

After the elections, the councillors meet to distribute competences among themselves. Each one is given a field of action and has to provide a service. Usually the mayor gets the most important roles, especially the ones related to real estate and construction. Under the Constitution, the municipalities have a general competence for matters of purely local interest<sup>21</sup>. Local elected representatives operate in an increasingly complex legal, financial and technical context. Full time members of the executive body have a general obligation to reveal all their sources of income before the beginning and at the end of their terms. They must also declare pecuniary or individual interests. Mayors and councillors may perform their duties on a full-time or part-time basis, with a corresponding remuneration, which represents a real income. The remuneration varies according to the population of the municipality, but there are paid officeholders in all of them. There are also travel and expense allowances. Of course, the ones who get the best electoral results are the ones who get full time jobs. The smallest parties and the last councillors on the lists usually are not even attributed a function and do not receive a salary.

Municipal elected representatives have an automatic right to be absent from their employment for attendance at official meetings and for the exercise of their terms. All costs and expenses are met by the municipality. The law gives local elected representatives protection during their term of office as regards job security and career prospects in their original employment. In Portugal there is statutory provision for assistance in returning to professional life. Full-time members are entitled to a retirement pension and their time on the

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<sup>18</sup> Law 1/2001, August 14<sup>th</sup>, article 11<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Law 1/2001, August 14<sup>th</sup>, article 16<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Reinforced by decree n. 100/84, March 29<sup>th</sup> 1984.

<sup>21</sup> Such as: management of real property, land purchases; management of physical assets; water, gas and electric supplies; rural and urban facilities, such as streets and roads, fairs and markets, cemeteries, fire prevention and control; sewerage; public transportation; education and culture (pre-school and primary school equipments, museums, libraries, theatres); subsidised housing; sports facilities; natural parks, recreational areas; town planning; health care. Law 159/99, September 14<sup>th</sup> 1999, established administrative decentralization and local government autonomy in several new areas, such as planning, management, investment and licensing in rural and urban equipments, natural and cultural heritage, culture and science, environment, consumer's rights, urban planning, municipal police and others.

representative office counts twice for pension purposes. Each local authority enjoys local autonomy and is accordingly free to approve the staffing structure, and to recruit its own personnel. However, rates of payment, area of selection, norms of recruitment, qualifications for promotion, conditions of service, retirement allowances and pensions, and so on, are standardised throughout the country.

The municipal executive body (the council) in fact runs the municipalities on a daily basis and then presents proposals to the municipal assembly, which has ultimate responsibility for the approval of the most important matters, such as the annual plan, the budget, the annual report and accounts, the municipal master plan, local taxes, personnel framework, and others.

As for the civil parishes, they have a president and a council, which are also elected on the same day. There are more than 4.200 *freguesias*, with an average territory of about 20 square kilometres, with a population between 500 and 2.000 inhabitants. Their elected members look after the interests of their inhabitants; they take care of markets, cemeteries, recreational and sports facilities, and promote local tourism.

There is also the possibility of direct participation of citizens in the management of local public affairs. Every citizen is able to influence and follow up policy decision-making, by voting in local elections, participating in political parties, by using their freedom of speech and direct intervention, especially by the possibility to intervene during municipal meetings. It is also recognized in the Constitution another form of political participation: neighbourhood organizations or associations, in areas smaller than the parishes<sup>22</sup>. Also according to the Constitution, two or more municipalities may form voluntary associations in order to carry out tasks of common interest and to use common technical, human and financial resources<sup>23</sup>. A national association of municipalities exists in the form of the Portuguese Association of Local Authorities: it is a private organization for co-operation and services which advises and assists municipalities in legal, financial, administrative and technical matters. It also acts as a vehicle of opinion and spokesperson for local government (Almeida, 1991a: 501-507).

These elections introduced a new factor in municipal suffrages: citizen groups could present candidate lists in the municipalities, a reverse trend from northern European countries, where local independent lists have a long tradition and are under the attack of parties<sup>24</sup>. In 1997, during Guterres' Socialist Government, there was a revision of the Portuguese Constitution, under the proposal of the Socialist Party. The introduction of this

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<sup>22</sup> Portuguese Constitution, 1976, article 263<sup>rd</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> *Idem*, article 253<sup>rd</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> In regards to politics, Portugal has always had a centralized policy, which is now reversing to decentralization, whereas in northern European countries the tradition of local politics is in fact much stronger. These countries are now going through an attempt of nationalization of local government, which is contrary to the Portuguese trend.

particular item was also proposed by the Socialist Party, with the argument that the local government system had proved to be the right one for the early days of democracy, but it had become too strict, because of the selection criteria within the party system, in which members of local councillors were nominated by central political elites and not by local interests. After twenty years of party control of local politics, this situation was no longer considered to be of the best interest of citizens: the socialist Member of Parliament who presented this case argued that choosing candidates because of their party careers and performances was not the best criterion for local government. Instead, the new selection factors should include political responsibility and independence. Therefore, the executive body of municipalities should become more flexible and not subject to party interests<sup>25</sup>. This new item was added to the Constitution without much further discussion and was considered by all parties as a natural evolution in a stable democracy. Law 1/2001 introduced the requisites for the presentation of candidacies by voter's associations: there has to be a proposal by a number of local voters, which is proportional to the total number of voters in the municipality or the parish (about 6,7 percent of the voters). The proponents may be no lesser than 250 and no more than 4.000 in the municipalities, and no lesser than 50 and no more than 2.000 in the civil parishes. Also, the proponents and the candidates must be voters in that same municipality or parish (which implies residence). The lists have to include name and identification, but they do not need statutes<sup>26</sup>. In regards to financing, voter's associations have the same rights as political parties: they all receive a state subsidy, a part of which is fixed and another is proportional to results, as long as they get at least 2 percent of the votes<sup>27</sup>.

#### **4. The 2001 local election**

In order to test the initial hypothesis that the higher the place within the political hierarchy, the most important is the role of the parties and the less important is the presence of independent candidates, so that we can verify how the party system really works, we can compare two different levels of hierarchy: elected councillors within the municipalities and their hierarchy in the lists of candidates and in the councils themselves (there is a higher percentage of independent councillors than there is of independent mayors), and we can compare municipalities and civil parishes (there are more independent elected individuals in the parishes than in the municipalities). So here is the data:

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<sup>25</sup> Parliament's journal (Diário da Assembleia da República), July 30<sup>th</sup> 1997, 3915-3925. Available at <http://debates.parlamento.pt/?pid=r3>.

<sup>26</sup> Law 1/2001, August 14<sup>th</sup> 2001, articles 19<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> *Idem*, annex, article 29<sup>th</sup>.

On December 16<sup>th</sup> 2001 there were local elections in Portugal. There had been socialist governments since 1995 and the victory of the Social Democrat Party in these elections caused the fall of Prime-Minister António Guterres (he went on to be appointed the president of the Socialist International, from 1999 to 2005, and then High Commissioner of the United Nations to the refugees). National elections were held three months later and a new government was formed, led by Social Democrat Durão Barroso (later the President of the European Commission, since 2004). Therefore, in this case, local elections were considered to mirror discontent with central government's options and actions. Anyway, local elections do not usually match national election results, because there are more personalised factors who contribute to local results.

**Table I: 2001 local elections' results. [HERE](#)**

The performance of citizen's groups in civil parishes was studied by Manuel Meirinho Martins: on the 2001 election, 311 individuals were elected president of the parish as leaders of a citizen's group list. On 4252 *freguesias*, they represent 7,3 percent (Martins, 2003: 18). As for municipalities, there were 30 citizen's group lists candidacies and only 5 of them won local elections (3 citizen's groups and 2 independent candidacies). On 308 municipalities, this is a 1,62 percent result. It is confirmed a really low performance of citizen's groups in local elections; it is also possible to verify a larger presence in the parishes than in the municipalities and a probable lesser investment of parties in the lower levels of local government.

Concerning local councillors, 2.044 individuals were elected in Portugal in 2001, 173 of them as independents (8,46 percent). There is a distinction to be made: of these 173, only 36 (1,76 percent) were elected in non-partisan lists. The other 137 were elected as independents within party lists. On table II we can see that the two major parties in Portugal, PS and PSD are the ones that better accept independent candidates in their lists. One can verify that the type and the sociological characteristics of the party actually influence the behaviour and the weight of party politics within the parties: the largest parties do accept more independent candidacies, as smaller parties have them in lesser numbers.

**Table II: Independent councillors in party lists. [HERE](#)**

Also, in the lists of candidates there is a hierarchy which is revealed in these results: of 137 independent councillors elected, there were only 16 (9 with the PSD and 7 with the PS) that were elected president, which means they were heads of party lists. There were two more, both heads of Social Democrat Party's lists, who were candidates in municipalities where the Socialist Party won. Therefore they were in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> place in their respective councils' hierarchies. As a result, on 308 municipalities, only the two major parties invested

in independents as party list heads and in only 5,8 percent of the municipalities. The other 119 councillors (86,9 percent) were placed in secondary positions in party lists and assumed the following places in the councils' hierarchies: 17,4 percent on second place, 33,9 percent on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> places, 47,1 percent on 5<sup>th</sup> to last positions. It is a clear majority of independents which is thrown to the least important places of the list, usually the ones without functions or salary. Anyway, these elected officers have an important job: because they are not subject to party discipline, many times their job is to denounce irregularities, insert debate, in sum, to introduce an inspection role to party actions, by publicising and exposing all the council's actions to the media. Their function, by doing so, is to make all councillors accountable for their actions. This is an element to revitalize democracy and avoid (as much as possible) local vices and corruption (Phillips, 1996: 20), with a big help from the press and the judicial system.

These candidates were elected mostly in small municipalities: only one won in a city that is head of a district, and a rather unpopulated, rural one. In total, only 4 councillors were elected in heads of districts and 97,7 percent of them were elected in municipalities that are quite small, rural and far away from Lisbon, the geographical and political centre of Portugal. In 2005 this phenomenon has hit Lisbon, with the election for mayor of an Independent within the Social Democrat Party's list, and also the election for councillor of a highly mediatised Independent, associated with the Left Block, whose main job for the last few years has been to denounce enormous corruption scandals, with the precious help of the press. He has even managed to put to risk the Lisbon Council and asked for early elections.

And now for the 36 local councillors in citizens' groups lists: from the 30 lists that applied for the 2001 election, 10 of them were able to elect councillors. There were 10 councillors who were elected in independents' lists, and two of them won the elections, therefore they were presidents of the council (mayors). There were 9 lists with different names, but mostly with the word "independent" in it. One of them is the Earth Party Movement, which is an actual party, but it does not run for parliament and is only involved in a few local elections. Its president and affiliates are all members of the Portuguese Parliament in the Social Democrat Party's lists and locally its candidates are usually dissidents of other parties. In 2001 it elected 4 councillors in two municipalities of the northern mountains; one of them was a mayor who had already won two elections with the Socialist Party.

That is a general characteristic of citizen's groups in Portugal: they are usually created against the party system, their candidates are mostly party dissidents, due to discontent and also, in quite a few situations, due to expulsion from the party ranks. The

case with civil parishes is very similar<sup>28</sup>. Just as some independents join party lists in order to avoid the trouble and the risk of creating a new independent list, the leaders of citizen's groups create them when they know that they already have a support structure and a considerable percentage of sure voters. For example, in Ponte de Lima, a small northern town, there was a mayor who had been elected since 1993 with the right wing Popular Party. He wanted to promote a cheese factory and ask grants for it. His party did not support him, so he formed a citizen's group to show how powerful he was locally and he won. On the next election, in 2005, he made up with the Popular Party and won the elections again within his traditional party. Also in Alcanena, the independent mayor elected in 2001 had already been a mayor since 1996, with the Socialist Party. With his new group, called "Independents for Alcanena", he was able to elect himself and 4 other councillors. In Montemor-o-Novo, there were 3 councillors elected within a group called a "Civic Movement for Montemor", but they were not re-elected in 2005. There was also a very personalized list in Famalicão: a "Movement Agostinho Fernandes", made to elect a person called precisely Agostinho Fernandes. He was also a Socialist Party dissident, and he was the mayor since 1982. He lost his bet, when he believed the people would vote for him when he left the party. A coalition of the Social Democrat Party and the Popular Party won the elections and Agostinho Fernandes was only elected councillor, with other two members of his list. The 5<sup>th</sup> citizen's group mayor, in Penamacor, had been a councillor for 8 years with the Socialist Party. In 2001 he won the election as an independent, but, in 2005, he was re-elected mayor again with the Socialist Party.

The 2005 elections had the same type of independent candidates: there were five long time mayors who were expelled from their parties, due to judicial cases associated with corruption. They all ran again as independents and heads of citizen's group, because, as mentioned before, the first name on the lists always runs to be mayor. Four of them actually won<sup>29</sup>, even though one had escaped to Brazil in order not to get arrested. The one that did not win made a bad bet, by switching municipalities. They are all presently involved in trials that may put in them in jail for many years, but they are cherished by the people and they believe they are immune to the judicial system. We shall have to wait and see the results.

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<sup>28</sup> Law 1/2001, August 14<sup>th</sup> 2001, allows members of citizen's groups to be affiliated to a party, article 23<sup>rd</sup>. Martins (2003) has made inquiries in civil parishes and has verified that 43% of people elected in citizens' groups list were or had been members of a party, and most of them kept a relationship with a party. They were mostly associated with the Socialist Party and the Social Democrat Party, 127-128. See also Zbyszewski, 2006: 100. This author says that these people are not even independents, but only act for their self interest, especially for their economic benefit in real estate businesses and others. That is also the reason why they get support for their candidacies from local economic elites associated with these interests.

<sup>29</sup> In 2005 there were 21 independent candidacies and 6 of them won: Alcanena, Felgueiras, Gondomar, Oeiras, Redondo, Sabrosa.

This is the image of local citizen's groups in Portugal. Their councillors (like independents in party lists) were elected mostly in small rural towns, away from the centre: there is not even one district capital among their ranks. Also in civil parishes there is a concentration of these candidacies in the northern and more rural parts of the country (Martins, 2003: 47-53). Apart from the 5 mayors, the other 31 councillors, just like independent councillors, performed poorly in the elections and were placed in the last positions in the councils' hierarchy (defined by election results): 29 percent on second place, 25,8 percent on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> places, and 45,2 percent on 5<sup>th</sup> to last positions.

There are only two women on this group of 36 people (5,6 percent, see Almeida, 2006b: 11-14), none of them mayors and both of them in the last positions of their respective councils. The group has an average 46 years of age. Professionally, they occupy the top positions in their municipalities' social and economic hierarchy: 68 percent of them are university graduates and have intellectual and scientific professions. There is a majority of teachers (32,4 percent), followed by managers (14,7 percent), medical doctors, agronomic engineers (very important in rural areas), sociologists, lawyers, pharmacists and architects. There are also 4 technicians, one bank clerk and one civil servant. These values, used to describe the social characteristics of citizen's groups, are very close to the ones of local elites in general (Almeida, 2006b: 9), and of central elites (Magone, 2000, Freire, 2001). Civil parishes' results are not very different, but these lower levels of government have higher percentages of civil servants, retired farmers and factory workers and they generally possess lower academic degrees (Martins, 2003: 58).

They all live in the same municipality; 12,1 percent were born on another municipality in the same district, and 27,3 percent of them were born on another district. There are many teachers from other municipalities who go there to work and decide to participate in the local political life. And there are others who were born there, have lived their professional lives elsewhere, specially in Lisbon, and, after retirement, go back to where they were born and engage in a political career. Their previous political activities include: one was a Member of Parliament and 12 of them were mayors (both before and after the 2001 election), five of them the ones that were elected mayor in this election.

This question of mobility between levels of government is a growing factor in Portuguese politics. There is an increasing number of Members of Parliament who have had experience in local councils. In fact, "local councillor and parliamentary experience are the two main factors of political professionalization of Portuguese members of parliament" and, from 1987 on, over fifty percent of them have had that experience, which is similar to the European average (Freire, 2001: 115-118). But the other way around is also a reality, because 12,3 percent of all Portuguese mayors since 1976 have had experience as

Members of the Portuguese Parliament, and 1,1 percent have been Members of the European Parliament, both before, during and after their job as presidents of local councils.

There have been 1.170 elected mayors from 1976 to 2005. Their job had an average 8 years length. 144 Mayors were Members of Parliament<sup>30</sup>, and, in this group, 36,9 percent of them were MP before being a mayor, 29,5 percent after, and 33,5 percent during (until the 2001 law change, that forbade them to accumulate offices).

These political elites are becoming professional politicians and the transition between levels of government no longer respects the usual upwards hierarchy. Also, professional skills are becoming increasingly important, especially with the growing complexities of local government, so the early revolutionaries no longer have a place in a political system that requires technocrats and specialists (Weber, 1959; Guérin, Kerrouche, 2006).

## **5. The case of Lisbon**

The capital of the Portuguese Republic is a special case, because it has revealed to be an important political path for its councillors and mayors. Traditionally, the mayor of Lisbon is a high ranking party affiliate, with a long career in parliament and government, both previously and afterwards. The former President of the Republic Jorge Sampaio (1995-2005), had previously been the mayor of Lisbon for six years, and had been a member of parliament throughout the entire democratic regime. He was succeeded, as mayor, by two long term members of parliament and party leaders. In 2004, when Social Democrat Party leader Pedro Santana Lopes, the mayor of Lisbon, was appointed prime-minister (after Durão Barroso, who moved to Brussels, to lead the European Commission), he was replaced by Carmona Rodrigues, an Independent councillor within the Social Democrat Party' lists. This was something new in Lisbon: an independent mayor who was a substitute and went on to win the 2005 election. And he is not a professional politician, like all Lisbon mayors and most of its councillors: even though he is related to a former President of the Republic (from the Estado Novo, 1926-1951), he is a University Professor of Engineering and had not been a member of parliament, nor had he been a member of a political party. He had, however, been the Minister of Public Works, Transports and Communication for two years (2002-2004).

Eventually, there was also a corruption case in the Lisbon council: two councillors were prosecuted with criminal charges and resigned. The case was later dismissed and was not even considered able to be tried in a court of law, but the damage was done. The mayor

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<sup>30</sup> There were also 8 MP that were mayors before 1974, therefore they have made a regime transition.

was also prosecuted (and is still pending trial), with a big help from the Left Block independent councillor. And the Social Democrat Party removed political support to its independent mayor. The council fell and mid-term elections were scheduled to July 15<sup>th</sup> 2007. The major novelty about this election for the Lisbon council was the immediate candidacy of two citizen's groups: one lead by Carmona Rodrigues, the former mayor, with his supporting councillors, called "Lisbon with Carmona"; and another one lead by a long time member of parliament and former mayor of Cascais, who had already switched from the PSD to the PS. This is the case of an Architect, who is presently the leader of the Architect's Guild, who resigned from the Socialist Party and presented a candidacy called "Citizens for Lisbon".

Considering the circumstances of the fall of the Lisbon council by the Social Democrats, the Socialist Party could not lose this chance to regain control of the capital city. And its candidate was none other than António Costa, the Minister of the Interior and the party's number two. He won, even though he could not conquer the majority. With only 29,5 percent and 6 elected councillors out of 17, the Socialist mayor shall have to make alliances in order to run the council. And he still has to deal with a municipal assembly with a Social Democrat majority (the deliberative body was not subject to this mid-term election, nor were the parishes). Carmona Rodrigues' list came second, with 16,7 percent and 3 elected councillors. The Social Democrats were greatly defeated: with 15,7 percent and 3 councillor elected, they made a bad bet, when they chose not to support their former independent candidate (together, Carmona Rodrigues and the Social Democrat Party could have won the election with 32,4 percent). The other citizen's list elected two councillors, the same as the Communist Party, and the Left Block independent candidate was re-elected. Helena Roseta, the leader of "Citizens for Lisbon", considered the election of two councillors a great victory, a "triumph of citizenship against party discipline and strong party structures" (from her speech on the election day).

Anyway, there was a very low turnout in this election: only 37,4 percent of the voters showed up. On a warm Sunday in the middle of the summer vacations, none of the candidates was able to mobilize enough voters and make them change their plans for leisure. Definitely, the beach was considered more important for the citizens of Lisbon, who were mostly disenchanted with politics in general and especially with city politics.

## **6. Final remarks**

In response to the early questions about the role of independent councillors in the Portuguese local political system, there are some results, which may be resumed in the following sentences:

Yes, the 2001 local election has challenged the Portuguese party system, but in a very limited way. Parties are still a basic element of Portugal's representative democracy and they do monopolize local electoral competition and representation. This is still a correct description of the Portuguese local political system, since other forms of political representation are at a very early stage and have very low levels of performance at elections and impact in the political system as a whole. Regarding a possible anti-party mood that could have developed at the sub-national level, the facts do not prove it, because most of the reasons for independent candidacies seem to be much more personalized than real civic movements away from party interests.

The 2005 elections confirmed this trend: the percentage of independently elected mayors dropped to 2,6 (7 on citizen's lists and one as an independent on the Social Democrats' list, in Lisbon), but independent members of parliament also dropped to 4,8 percent. Therefore, their places on the table remain the same.

Did those citizen's lists reveal a decline of party politics, combined with the increasing disenchantment and alienation with the established national parties? No, these cases are rare and do not mean a distance from the party system, but only an occasional distance for some of its members, without continuity in the following elections, because most of them returned to their early parties. And their motives for participation in citizen's groups are too personal to be considered disenchantment and alienation with the established national parties.

Regarding the types of municipalities which have elected councillors from independent and citizen's groups' lists: these lists have succeeded only on small rural areas, of very low economic, social and political importance on the national panorama. This leads us to the conclusion that the party system is hierarchy sensitive, both on the geographical and social levels. In the case of Lisbon there was also a party which removed its confidence in a mayor, even though he was an independently elected mayor, within its lists. And there was also a city whose voters re-elected a councillor even though he was indicted in a criminal process in court. This case has similarities with the early ones, but the differences are: a) it occurred in the countries' capital; b) there were two citizens' group movements who achieved important results; and c) the major party invested its best possible candidate to win the election and regain the council. It was precisely in Lisbon that parties could not allow independent candidacies a chance to win. And voters were conscious that even if an

independent won, he/she would not be allowed to work properly, without the government's support.

Also, since it occurred in the most important council in the country, and with the given results, it was considered that the party system was shaken and suffered a big blow. But not big enough to elect an independent mayor, or remove the traditional parties from the front line. It was also proved that candidates with criminal charges can and are being elected, regardless of the lawsuits they are involved in.

Anyway, there is hope that these groups shall evolve into something more permanent and with a larger political visibility. Citizen's groups are political agents which may revitalize representative democracies and pave the way to a more participatory democracy. They should promote the political development of the people and improve the quality of democracy, as well as they contribute to increase voter's participation, in the case of the parishes (Martins, 2003: 40, 83), but actually not in Lisbon. We shall have to analyse a few more elections in order to access the evolution of this new phenomenon in Portuguese local politics. But also, Portuguese citizens shall have to take a different approach to local politics in order to introduce a real difference in the established party system.

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