

Chapter 3 – The law of curvilinear disparity revisited: The case of portuguese political parties¹

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ABSTRACT

May's law of curvilinear disparity (1973), which argues the intermediate leadership strata in parties assume more radical political positions compared to both the party leaders and the electorate, has been tested in diverse contexts, often repeated and mainly refuted. However, of these tests of the law not one has included a profound and comparative analysis of the Portuguese political parties. The aim of this article is to fill this lacuna and to ascertain to what extent May's law is valid for understanding the ideological and political representation of the two main Portuguese parties: the Socialist Party (PS – Partido Socialista) and the Social Democratic Party (PSD – Partido Social Democrata). In both cases the positions of deputies in the national parliament and their respective electorate are compared with an intermediate stratum of political activists. We will see, first, that the law is almost entirely applicable when it is used as an indicator of self-positioning on the left-right scale. Second, that the Law has greater applicability in terms of this political division than it does in relation to socio-economic issues or to "new politics" issues. Third, in the case of socio-economic issues, the law's applicability is much greater within the PS, while in the case of "new politics" it is more applicable within the PSD.

Keywords: May's law; ideological and political representation; deputies; activists; voters.

¹ Translation by Stewart Lloyd-Jones.

1. INTRODUCTION

The divisions and ideological conflicts within the internal structures of parties is a classic theme in the study of party organisations. In this context, May's law is one of the most important contributions. Initially formulated in 1973, the law of curvilinear disparity states that the voters and party leaders tend to adopt more moderate ideological stances than the intermediate elite. Because their strategy is to obtain the greatest number of votes, the top party leaders tend to adjust their position to that of the electorate. In contrast, as those at the intermediate leadership level are not subjected to the same electoral constraints as the top leaders, they are able to adopt more radical positions. May's law considers this defence of relatively radical programmes by leaders at the intermediate level, and the influence they have within the party and on the choice of party leaders, to be the compensation individuals at this level accept for their mainly voluntary and otherwise unrewarded – either materially or politically – involvement and party activism. This intra-party hierarchy and the differing underlying political incentives are at the root of what is called the *curvilinear disparity*, which involves three key assumptions: first, that voters tend to place themselves close to the ideological centre; second, that the intermediate strata tend to adopt more radical positions; and third, that the party's top leaders will assume a position that is equidistant from each of them.

May's rule, as Norris (1995) more correctly believes it should be called, is based on the pioneering studies of party organisation by those, such as Michels (2009 [1911]) and Ostrogorski (1902), which explore the relationships between the different intra-party strata. It also highlights the contribution made by Duverger (1994 [1951]), which distinguishes party members based on the level of their participation and its implications, noting the impact the disparities between party leaders and the electorate may have on the party's internal democracy. It is also inspired by the theory of rational choice, which argues the electorate prefer those parties that better represent their political preferences, while the parties are also seeking to maximise their electoral support. Consequently, the top leaders tend to be closer ideologically to (their) electorate (Downs, 1957). Other authors note that, according to rational choice theory, the parties tend to adopt more extreme positions than their electorate (Rabinowitz, MacDonald and Listhaug, 1991: 148-57; 2003: 3-5). As the "directional model" elaborated by Rabinowitz and MacDonald, which is also supported by some empirical evidence, demonstrates (Rabinowitz, MacDonald and Listhaug, 1991; 2003; Valen and Narud, 2007: 300), voters supposedly choose the most intense version of their political preferences, and because of this they appear comparatively much closer to the centre of the political spectrum than the party leaders. According to this argument, the parties' intermediate leadership are divorced from the strategy of winning the people's

votes. As a result, they assume more ideologically extreme positions: that is to say, positions that are more radical than those assumed by the party leaders.

This article seeks to test the validity of the law for the Portuguese party system. There are very few studies that have analysed the polarisation, factionalism, conflict or activism that exists within the Portuguese parties. One of the few such works is by Jalali and Lobo (2007), who study the internal organisation of the PS and the respective internal ideological polarisation. They note the weakness of Portuguese party organisations since they emerged following the transition to democracy, particularly in respect of their membership: unlike in most other European democracies, and in common with Spain and Greece, the Portuguese party system has not witnessed a sharp decline in the number of party members. This is due to the fact that none of these parties, and particularly the PS and the PSD, has ever had a large number of paid members; with the result their reduction is less obvious. They conclude that activists within the PS (defined as delegates to the party conference) have different, but not necessarily more radical, positions from those of the voters, which in this case indicates May's law is not verified.

This article is divided into three parts. First we review the literature relating to the May law to find out what has been tested, in what contexts, with what results and discover what are the main critical analyses. We then introduce the sources and data used and the methodology adopted in the analysis that follows. Finally, we present and discuss the results of the empirical analysis.

2. THE STATE OF THE ART: REVIEW

The tendency of the elite to adopt positions that are ideologically more extreme than those of their electorate is largely corroborated in the literature (e.g. Dalton, 1985; Converse and Pierce, 1986: 128; Holmberg, 1989: 19-23; Iversen 1994: 168-75; Barras, Barberà and Barrio, 2007: 11-12; Belchior, 2010; Freire and Belchior, 2009; Belchior and Freire, 2009). The lower political sophistication and ideological anchorage of the electorate compared to the elite has been proposed as one of the main explanations for this difference. Consequently, this component of the May law's explanation is rather uncontroversial.

There is no such consensus on the radicalising role of party activists, however, with the research pointing in many directions. For example, Butler (1960) claims there is more radicalism among the most loyal and devoted followers of British political parties compared to the party leaders and, to an even greater extent, in relation to the party's voters. Méndez and Santamaria (2001: 48), analyse the left-right positioning of Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE – Partido Socialista Obrero Español) delegates, and also conclude that the delegates tend to be more extreme than both

the party leadership and the voters. They compare the delegates and voters of several parties, and conclude that the delegates are closer to those who vote for more radical parties (in the case of PSOE delegates versus Left Union [IU – Izquierda Unida] voters).

Jalali and Lobo (2007) conduct a similar study, focusing on the PS and comparing its conference delegates with its electorate. While recognising the value May's law has for an understanding of the party organisation, they are unable to find any unambiguous standard: the delegates are further to the left on such questions as abortion, while they are further to the right on economic matters.

Through a review of the literature on the British party system, Norris also concludes there is no clear tendency to an increased level of radicalism among party activists. That is, the majority of the empirical evidence does not confirm May's law: through a variety of subjects related to public policy options (position issues), Norris (1995) concludes that, in the United Kingdom, the top party leaders tend to be the most radical group within the party, while the intermediate level leaders normally place themselves at a point between the party leaders and the voters.

Similarly, Holmberg (1989: 20-1) concludes that the opinion structure within Swedish parties does not correspond with that described by May's law: the leaders are not closer than the activists to the voters; rather, the activists are closer than the leaders.

In the case of the Belgian green parties (the Flemish AGALEV [Anders Gaan Leven] and the francophone ECOLO [Écologistes Confédérés pour l'organisation de luttes originales]), Kitschelt (1989) finds empirical evidence supporting May's law for the former, but not for the latter. Many other authors have also failed to uncover sufficient evidence to support May's thesis (Whiteley et al., 1993: 89-90; Iversen, 1994; Herrera and Taylor, 1994; Narud and Skare, 1999; Barras, Barberà and Barrio, 2007). In summary, independently of the type of party, and regardless of whether we are dealing with bi-party or multi-party systems, there is little empirical support for May's law. While the majority of these studies recognise the theory's importance for obtaining an understanding of intra-party relations, and even accept its validity in certain circumstances, there is not sufficient evidence to entirely corroborate the theory.

The lack of empirical support for May's law has caused many authors to criticise its theoretical conception. One of the strongest criticisms relates to the institutional nature of the political system: the level of conflict associated with the structure of cleavages and the degree of party competition. Kitschelt (1989: 407-8) argues that May's law does not take due account of these factors when it argues the dependent variable, ideological radicalism, that can be explained by the structural conditions of the party system. This author suggests that, if the political regime responds to

the public properly, then the parties will not be dominated by ideologues or pragmatists (that is, by radicals or moderates), but would rather include both. The ideologues, according to Kitschelt, will tend to dominate relative majority systems (plurality) in which there is little competition. However, more than the systematic characteristics, it is the party organisation that tends to determine the curvilinear disparity of the political visions: the weakest organisations are those that tend to have the most radical intermediate leaderships, since these organisations also tend to be loosely coupled leading to the proportional representation of each political tendency (Kitschelt 1989: 409-10; Narud and Skare, 1999: 48-51).

Some of the criticisms of May's law have also been directed at the improbable homogeneity of the party strata. The law presupposes that the different party strata have different motivations, and it is this that explains their differences in their ideological positions. However, Pippa Norris contends that «party leaders and sub-leaders have mixed incentives, both ideological and electoralist, to participate in politics» (1995: 43). While the activists are not guided only by ideology and party principles, neither are the party leaders driven only by the need to win votes. Similarly, Kitschelt argues that «leaders and followers are not internally homogeneous groups, but comprise individuals with highly diverse motivations and aspirations, rendering it questionable whether any single dominant motivation can be attributed to each group» (1989: 403). May's suggestion is, therefore, considered reductionist in its explanation of what motivates actors, particularly in relation to that group of activist that do not constitute a homogeneous whole, as presumed by May, but who rather represent a heterogeneous group with many different motivations (as shown by several authors, including Whitley et al, 1993; Scarrow, 2000: 95-8; Whiteley, 2007).

Kitschelt claims May's law has only survived so long, despite its theoretical and empirical fragilities, because the majority of studies of party activists make use of British and American data, which are the two cases in which May's law receives its greatest empirical support: both these countries have highly competitive two-party systems that encourage the admission of ideological radicals into the parties, and both have weak and decentralised party organisations (1989: 420-1). For this reason, the Portuguese party system is an interesting case study. On the one hand, both the PS and the PSD are relatively weak organisations (Lopes, 2004; Lobo, 2003; Lisi, 2009; Jalali, 2007), just the type of party Kitschelt claims middle-level activists involved in national party affairs are more radical: such organisations also tend to be loosely coupled leading to the proportional representation of each political tendency. Moreover, while the electoral system is (somewhat) proportional and remains substantially unchanged since 1975-6, the truth is that during the period 1987-2009 the party system has tended towards bipartisanship (Freire, 2005; 2010), which may provide May's law with greater applicability. Nevertheless, there are also factors that, in some manner, can operate in the opposite direction: in particu-

lar, the centralist nature of these parties on such matters as recruitment – although this is truer of the PS than of the PSD (Freire, 2003; Lobo, 2003; Teixeira, 2009; Lisi, 2009; Jalali, 2007). Still, any centralisation has been much less than in a typical mass party, leading Jalali and Lobo (2007) to claim that within the Portuguese party system the differences between leaders, middle-level activists and voters should be more apparent in the catch-all parties (PS and PSD), since, despite them having undergone some centralisation, they are quite distinct from the model of mass parties (for more on this, see also Lopes, 2004; Jalali, 2007).

For these reasons, and in association with the dominant tendency in the literature on the validity of May's law, we would expect to encounter mixed results, with it being valid for some political issues, and not for others. However, given the nuances that can be introduced by the many aspects of the party system, particularly in relation to the existence of political cleavages, and noted by Narud and Skare (1999: 51), the curvilinear disparities encountered within the Portuguese centrist parties should, in principle, be more apparent on matters related with the socio-economic left-right division, since this is the dimension that best characterises the cleavages mobilised by these parties. The central hypothesis rests, therefore, on the expectation of the existence of curvilinear disparities between the PS and PSD leadership and their voters, and to verify whether they tend to be more present in respect of matters connected with the economic left-right (socio-economic issues and left-right self-placement).

3. DATA AND METHOD

This article is based on data from two surveys, one of voters ($N = 1350$) and the other of deputies ($N = 142$), which were conducted in 2008 as part of the project *Os deputados portugueses em perspectiva comparada: eleições, liderança e representação política* [Portuguese deputies in comparative perspective: elections, leadership and political representations].² The data is available in Freire, Viegas and Seiceira (2009).

The survey of voters was based on a multi-stage probabilistic sample of Portuguese citizens aged 18 and over and resident in continental Portugal ($N = 1350$). In order to ensure the sample mirrored the population structure as closely as possible, the data was weighted in terms of age, gender and education. The fieldwork was conducted by TNS-Portugal under the scientific co-ordination of the project team.

² PTDC/CPO/64469/2006, 2008-10, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, ISCTE-IUL, CIES, André Freire and José Manuel Leite Viegas co-ordinators.

A very similar questionnaire on the same topics was produced for the survey of Portuguese deputies. Fieldwork was carried out by post-graduate social science students, under the supervision of the research project co-ordinators. Both questionnaires largely reflected the comparative surveys produced by the research networks to which the project is related (the Comparative Candidate Survey and PARENEL [Parliamentary Representation at the European and National Levels]).³

Given that the rate of response to the survey of deputies ($143/230 = 62.2$ per cent), the sample was weighted by party and gender in order to improve its representativeness.

We should also note that many of the more important questions were asked to both the deputies and the voters in such a way as to enable the study of political representation through an examination of the congruence in the attitudes and preferences of the elites and of the voters.

With respect to the identification of three segments of the party hierarchy, previous work on this topic have faced particular difficulties in relation to the operationalisation of the intermediate elite. May divides the party hierarchy into three groups: the party leaders, the mid-level leaders and the non-leaders. Party leaders are “members of the government, legislators, candidates for elected office, or convention delegates, among others”; mid-level leaders include “regional and local party office-holders, constituency activists, passive grassroots members and voting supporters”; while the non-leaders consist of “occasional and lukewarm party supporters” (May, 1973: 135-69).

Some studies (Narud and Skare, 1999; Méndez and Santamaria, 2001; Jalali and Lobo, 2007) regard party conference delegates to be mid-level leaders, although some members of this group often occupy positions within the party that are closer to party leadership roles than the intermediate level. However, Kitschelt asserts that “the key middle-level position in a contemporary party is that of a participant in regional or national party conferences” (1989: 409).

Other authors adopt solutions with greater internal divisions. For example, Norris divides the members of British parties into four categories defined by the position of the groups within the party power structure. First there are the Members of Parliament (MPs) and prospective MPs, then there are the “elected party officers in local constituencies”, followed by the “party members who attend meetings but [are] without office”, and finally, the “voters” (1995). In their study of the Democratic and Republican parties in the United States, Herrera and Taylor use a typology with five categories: first, “members of the House of Representatives”, then the

³ See www.comparativecandidates.org/ and the German Candidate Survey at www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/gcs/homepage_e.html. See also spirit.sciencespobordeaux.fr/Parenel.htm

“party delegates”, followed by “campaign activists”, then “primary voters” and, finally, “partisan voters” (1994).

In order to test May’s law there has to be at least a tripartite division so that we can ascertain if the leaders (which here means top party leaders) are closer to the voters, if they are more moderate than the third group, and if the mid-level leaders are indeed the most ideologically radical group. For this reason, and taking the available data into account, we have divided the members of the Portuguese parties into three groups: the leaders, which are measured through the opinions of the deputies; the mid-level leaders, for which we use a proxy that is commonly used in the literature, i.e., the very active party voters; and finally, the non-leaders, who are non-active party supporters. The operationalisation of the mid-level leaders thus corresponds with those individuals who are “very” much “connected to the party” (party identification) and who take part in, or who are willing to take part in, political meetings.⁴ Non-leaders are those individuals who are only party sympathisers.⁵

The dependent variable is ideological “extremism”, one of the possibilities Kitschelt identified for operationalising “ideological radicalism” (1989: 405). The more extreme an individual’s position on the left-right scale or on the corresponding scale of each of the 17 political issues, the more radical their ideological viewpoint is considered to be.⁶

In order to measure the degree of extremism in the hierarchies of these two parties, we used a set of 17 items linked to issues related to public policies and with self-placement on the left-right scale (see the complete questions in Freire, Viegas and Seiceira, 2009). These items correspond to political affairs that are important in the national political debate, including matters associated with the left-right economic dimension, in relation to which there is some expectation of detecting curvilinear disparities between the party leaders and the voters, just as there are matters associated with the so-called division between libertarians and authoritarians (Flanagan, 1987; Flanagan and Lee, 2003; Freire, 2006; Kitschelt, 1994).

In order to assess the position of each stratum within the parties, Norris uses the Percentage Difference Index (PDI), which measures the proportion of individuals within each strata that support the most left-wing position, less the proportion of those in each strata that support the most right-wing position. A negative value represents an opinion that is aligned predominantly with the right, while a positive value represents predominantly left-wing opinion. Here we shall also use PDI in the following analysis.

⁴ Variables: E18 and L39_16, segmented by party: N43.

⁵ Variables: E18, segmented by party: N43.

⁶ The recodification of their self-positioning on the left-right scale was as follows: 1+1+2 = left; 3+4 = centre-left; 5 = centre; 6+7 = centre-right; 8+9+10 = right.

4. RESULTS

To test May's law in the two main Portuguese parties (in the case of the Left Bloc, Portuguese Communist Party/Democratic Union Coalition and the Social Democratic Centre-Popular Party, this type of analysis was not recommended because of the number of segmentations that would be required and the low samples sizes for each political group), we began by analysing left-right self positioning.

In the case of the self-positioning of deputies (leaders), activists (mid-level leaders) and voters (non-leaders) on the left-right scale we were able to note the following: whether using percentages (and PDI) or using averages (and the respective median differences), May's law is clearly proved both in the PS and in the PSD (although in terms of averages there is a partial exception in the PS). Our first note is that opinion among the socialists is quite clearly aligned with the left and that the dominant opinion within the PSD is on the right: the PDI data is clearly positive in relation to the former and negative in relation to the latter (see Table 1.1). The analysis that is based on averages points in the same direction: the median within the PS (leaders and non-leaders) is always below 5.5 – the average, the centre of the centre (which is always below 4.10) – within the PSD it is always above 5.21 (leaders) and 6.91 (mid-level leaders and non-leaders) (See Table 1.2).

Our second observation is that, as we have already noted elsewhere, deputies are always to the left of their electorate (Freire and Belchior, 2009). Our third observation is that, in the PDI analysis, May's law is proven completely: mid-level leaders in both the PS and, especially, the PSD are ideologically more radical, while the leaders (deputies) and the non-leaders (voters) are more moderate. However, when we analyse by average, May's law is only proven in the case of the PSD. Mid-level leaders (activists) in the PSD align themselves on the right, while the deputies (leaders) are less right-wing than the voters (non-leaders), who themselves are more to the left than the mid-level leaders. Consequently, the mid-level leaders are shown to be more ideologically radical. However, May's law is not proven in the case of the PS. On average, the PS electorate is to the right of both the activists and deputies, and the deputies are the most left-wing. This deviation could be the result of the greater dispersion in the distribution of activists and the greater homogeneity of the deputies: the average is a measure that is very sensitive to extreme values. Nevertheless, overall in terms of self-positioning on the left-right scale we can say that May's law is almost entirely applicable within the two main Portuguese parties. However, there are partial exceptions – not in terms of the mid-level leaders being the most radical and the leaders being at the centre, but because the non-leaders are not always the least radical. It is not always the case that the mid-level leaders are always the most radical, the non-leaders the least radical and the leaders somewhere in between the two. We are not dealing with a situation in which the mid-level lead-

ers are not always the most radical, because indeed generally they are, but of their position in relation to the other two groups simultaneously.

Table 1.1 – Curvilinear disparity within the main Portuguese parties: position on the left-right scale (%)

Left-right scale	PS (centre-left)			PSD (centre-right)		
	D	A	V	D	A	V
Left	16,0	37,5	10,5	0	0	0
Centre-left	70,3	37,5	53,5	27,7	0	5,6
Centre	8,0	8,3	27,0	44,3	8,3	11,2
Centre-right	4,6	8,4	8,0	22,4	20,8	52,8
Right	1,1	8,3	1,0	5,5	70,8	30,5
PDI	14,9	29,2	9,5	-5,5	-70,8	-30,5
<i>N</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>161</i>

PDI = Percentage Difference Index, which measures, for each group, the difference between the group most aligned to the left and the group most aligned to the right (negative values = opinion most aligned to the right; positive values = opinions most aligned to the left); D = Deputies; A = Activists; V = Voters.

Source: Viegas and Seiceira (Eds.) (2009).

Table 1.2 – Curvilinear disparity within the main Portuguese parties: position on the left-right scale (averages)

	PS (centre-left)					PSD (centre-right)				
	A	B	C	B-A	B-C	A	B	C	B-A	B-C
Left (1) – right (10)	3,46	3,81	4,09	0,35	-0,28	5,22	7,67	6,92	2,45	0,75
N	<i>70</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>197</i>	–	–	<i>35</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>170</i>	–	–

A = Deputies; B = Activists; C = Voters.

Source: See Table 1.1.

We now carry out the same analysis, but this time based on attitudes towards different political issues rather than on self-positioning on the left-right scale. We begin with socio-economic issues (see Tables 2.1.1 to 2.1.30), where we note the applicability of May’s law is significantly reduced: in the case of the PS, from a total of eight socio-economic items the law is applicable in only four cases (50 per cent: “stable social security”, “distribution of wealth”, “system of education above all controlled by the state” and “health – the national health service – should be controlled by the state”), and even then the applicability is not complete (we will return

to this point); in the case of the PSD, the law only applies in two cases (“stable social security” and “reduce inequalities”), 25 per cent, and in one of these only partially. We also consider the situations in which the law is only partially applicable. For example, for the item “stable social security” in the case of the PS, despite the PDI showing that the mid-level leaders (activists) are the most ideologically radical, when we verify the modal category we see that the deputies (leaders) are slightly more extreme (82.9 per cent agree, compared to 80 per cent of activists). For the PSD there is a partial confirmation of the law for the item “reduce inequalities”, in which the activists are the most extreme (95.9 PDI), however, the deputies (leaders) are closer to the mid-level leaders (activists) than they are to the voters (non-leaders).

Table 2.1.1 – Curvilinear disparity within the main Portuguese parties: socioeconomic issues (I) (%)

	PS (Centre-left)			PSD (Centre-right)		
	D	A	V	D	A	V
Government’s main objective: Create a stable social security network						
Agree (more to the left)	82,9	80,0	79,3	72,3	92,0	75,9
Neutral	6,8	16,0	13,0	16,6	4,0	16,7
Disagree (more to the right)	10,2	4,0	7,7	11,1	4,0	7,5
PDI	72,7	76	71,6	61,2	88,0	68,4
Wealth must be distributed among the citizens						
Agree (more to the left)	86,3	80,0	74,5	88,9	75,0	72,7
Neutral	4,6	20	20,7	5,5	25,0	21,6
Disagree (more to the right)	9,1	0	4,8	5,5	0	5,7
PDI	77,2	80	69,7	83,4	75,0	67
Education should be controlled by the state						
Agree (more to the left)	89,9	95,9	88,5	27,7	96,0	89,8
Neutral	4,5	4,2	9,6	22,2	4,0	9,6
Disagree (more to the right)	5,6	0	1,9	50,1	0	0,6
PDI	84,3	95,9	86,6	-22,4	96,0	89,2

PDI: see Table 1.1.; D = Deputies; A = Activists; V = Voters.

Source: See Table 1.1.

In the area of issues of political conflict of a socio-economic nature an additional note is necessary: unlike with left-right self positioning, in which there is a clear separation between the various segments on the left (PS) and the right (PSD), in respect of the several socio-economic issues there is a clear predominance of opinions more aligned to the left, just as we have seen in other works (for example, Freire and Belchior, 2009; Belchior and Freire, 2009). This may be related to the existence of party-political supply that is very similar ideologically, especially at the centre (the PS versus the PSD), which is clearly reflected in a public opinion that is poorly structured in terms of notions of the right and the left (Freire, 2008; Freire and Belchior, 2011). Generally speaking, both PSD deputies and activists are aligned to the left – although less so than their PS counterparts – particularly in relation to the goals of governance. It is only in relation to the instruments of governance (the role of the state in the provision of education and health care) that we come across a few deputies (but not activists or voters) who are aligned more to the right, particularly in relation to the state’s role in the provision of education.

Table 2.1.2 – Curvilinear disparity within the main Portuguese parties: socio-economic issues (II) (%)

	PS (Centre-left)			PSD (Centre-right)		
	D	A	V	D	A	V
Health should be controlled by the state						
Agree (more to the left)	93,3	100	91,4	38,7	84,0	88,3
Neutral	5,6	0	6,7	16,6	8,0	9,5
Disagree (more to the right)	1,1	0	1,9	44,6	8,0	2,2
PDI	92,2	100	89,5	-5,9	76,0	86,1
(Maintain) social protection v. (even with more) taxes						
Agree (more to the left)	88,6	68	43,8	53,1	45,9	39,7
Neutral	2,3	28	27,3	17,6	45,8	22,5
Disagree (more to the right)	9,1	4	28,9	29,3	8,4	37,9
PDI	79,5	64	14,9	23,8	37,5	1,8
Reduce inequalities						
Agree (more to the left)	98,9	92	87,5	94,5	95,9	77,1
Neutral	0	8	12,0	5,5	4,2	21,8
Disagree (more to the right)	1,1	0	0,5	0	0	1,1
PDI	97,8	92	87	94,5	95,9	76,0

PDI: see Table 1.1.; D = Deputies; A = Activists; V = Voters.

Source: See Table 1.1.

Table 2.1.3 – Curvilinear disparities within the two main Portuguese parties: socioeconomic issues (III) (%)

	PS (Centre-left)			PSD (Centre-right)		
	D	A	V	D	A	V
Economic growth v. Budget (first priority v. second)						
Agree (more to the left)	51	56	65,6	100	86,9	66,9
Neutral	25,5	32	27,2	0	13,0	26,2
Disagree (more to the right)	23,4	12	7,2	0	0	6,9
PDI	27,6	44	58,4	100	86,9	60,0
Politicians should not interfere in the economy – inverted scale						
Disagree (more to the left)	92,1	52,5	46,6	82,4	50,0	45,7
Neutral	3,3	20,8	37,7	5,9	36,4	40,4
Agree (more to the right)	4,5	16,7	15,7	11,7	13,6	13,9
PDI	87,6	35,8	30,9	70,7	36,4	31,8

PDI: see Table 1.1.; D = Deputies; A = Activists; V = Voters.

Source: See Table 1.1.

Moving on to the same analysis, but this time addressing specific libertarian and authoritarian issues (see Tables 2.2.1 to 2.2.3) (Flanagan, 1987; Flangan e Lee, 2003; Kitschelt, 1994), we see that the applicability of May's law is significantly reduced, especially in the case of the PS where the law is verified in only one item from nine ("Breaking the law: more severe/heavier penalties", although the activists position themselves to the right, and not to the left as one might expect). In the PSD there are four items from nine in which May's law is either completely or partially applicable ("abortion", although the deputies are not more radical than the voters and do not position themselves on the right, as may be expected; "gay marriage", where, despite the greater extremism of the activists, this is not followed by the second greatest extremism of the deputies (but before the voters); "breaking the law" and "torturing prisoners", in which May's law is verified, although in the latter case it again denotes alignment on the left). However, even in these cases the applicability of the law is, as we shall see, often partial. Nevertheless, as expected, it is especially true in the case of socio-economic issues that May's law is applicable, although even here it is only true for the PS. In relation to "new politics", libertarian versus authoritarian values, the law is applicable to a much lesser extent, and then almost only in the PSD.

Table 2.2.1 – Curvilinear disparity within the two main Portuguese parties: libertarian-authoritarian issues (I) (%)

	PS (Centre-left)			PSD (Centre-right)		
	D	A	V	D	A	V
Support stronger environmental protection measures						
Agree (more to the left)	97,7	91,3	76,5	100	84,0	80,9
Neutral	2,3	8,7	21,6	0	8,0	17,4
Disagree (more to the right)	0	0	1,9	0	8,0	1,7
PDI	97,7	91,3	74,6	100	76,0	79,2
Women should receive preferential treatment (employment/career)						
Agree (more to the left)	2,2	26,1	20,8	5,5	24,0	30,9
Neutral	6,7	43,5	33,7	11,1	56,0	37,2
Disagree (more to the right)	91	30,4	45,6	83,4	20,0	32
PDI	-88,8	-4,3	-24,8	-77,9	4,0	-1,1
Immigrants benefit the country						
Agree (more to the left)	95,3	79,1	48,4	100	65,2	51,8
Neutral	3,5	12,5	39,9	0	8,7	37,1
Disagree (more to the right)	1,2	8,3	11,6	0	26,0	11,2
PDI	94,1	70,8	36,8	100	39,2	40,6

PDI: see Table 1.1.

Table 2.2.2 – Curvilinear disparity within the two main Portuguese parties: libertarian-authoritarian issues (II) (%)

	PS (Centre-left)			PSD (Centre-right)		
	D	A	V	D	A	V
Freedom of choice on abortion						
Agree (more to the left)	91	88,0	70	61,2	56,0	60,4
Neutral	5,6	8	21,9	0	32,0	21,8
Disagree (more to the right)	3,3	4	8,1	38,8	12,0	17,8
PDI	87,7	84	61,9	22,4	44,0	42,6
Torturing prisoners can never be justified. even if it can prevent a terrorist act						
Agree (more to the left)	87,5	56,5	63,9	64,8	78,3	56,9
Neutral	3,5	34,8	24,9	17,6	21,7	30,0
Disagree (more to the right)	9,1	8,6	11,2	17,6	0	13,1
PDI	78,4	47,9	52,7	47,2	78,3	43,8
Immigrants must adopt the country's customs – inverted scale						
Disagree (more to the left)	79,7	47,8	26,5	64,8	16,7	19,7
Neutral	11,3	43,5	42,3	11,7	54,2	45,2
Agree (more to the right)	9,0	8,7	31,1	23,5	29,2	35,0
PDI	70,7	39,1	-4,6	41,3	-12,5	-15,3

PDI: see Table 1.1. Source: See Table 1.1.

Table 2.2.3 – Curvilinear disparity within the two main Portuguese parties: libertarian-authoritarian issues (III) (%)

	PS (Centre-left)			PSD (Centre-right)		
	D	A	V	D	A	V
Gay marriages should be banned – inverted scale						
Disagree (more to the left)	78,5	29,1	21,6	46,9	12,5	18,3
Neutral	9,2	25	32,2	17,6	20,8	22,9
Agree (more to the right)	12,4	45,9	46,2	35,5	66,6	58,8
PDI	66,1	-16,8	-24,6	11,4	-54,1	-40,5
Law breaking: sentences should be heavier/more severe						
Disagree (more to the left)	62,3	0	26,3	22,4	4,0	27,2
Neutral	18,2	16,7	65,1	38,8	24,0	57,4
Agree (more to the right)	19,5	83,3	8,6	38,7	72,0	15,3
PDI	42,8	-83,3	17,7	-16,3	-68,0	11,9
Providing military assistance to the war against terrorism						
Disagree (more to the left)	20,9	17,4	13,8	5,5	22,7	15,7
Neutral	15,3	26,1	28,7	11,1	31,8	43,1
Agree (more to the right)	63,7	56,5	57,5	83,4	45,5	41,2
PDI	-42,8	-39,1	-43,7	-77,9	-22,8	-25,5
N	70	23	197	35	25	170

PDI: see Table 1.1. Source: See Table 1.1.

One final note. While public opinion (as well as that of the political leaders) is aligned more to the left in socio-economic issues, on matters of “new politics” there is a greater predominance of right-wing opinions (“gay marriage”, “law breaking”, “assisting terrorism”), and in the latter type of issues the elites either share the voters’ views or are themselves more extreme. We have seen that, unlike socio-economic issues in which the parties of the left are more in alignment with the electorate, the opposite is true with respect to “new politics” issues, in which the PSD is more in alignment with the conservatism of the voters – at least in respect of some issues (Freire and Belchior, 2009; 2011). These discrepancies within the different groups of issues could also be behind – or help explain – the greater applicability of May’s law on the left in relation to socio-economic issues, and on the right on libertarian *versus* authoritarian issues.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

May's law of curvilinear disparity states that mid-level party leaders assume ideological positions that are more radical than those assumed by either the party leaders or the voters. However, the law has often been tested and in most cases refuted. Nevertheless, none of these tests has included any detailed analysis of the Portuguese parties. Consequently, this article has sought to fill this lacuna by empirically testing the applicability of May's law in the two main Portuguese parties: the PS and the PSD. The positions adopted by parliamentary deputies (leaders) of both parties were compared to the positions assumed by their respective voters (non-leaders) and with an intermediate stratum made up of "active voters" (mid-level leaders). The variables used in these tests were: self-positioning on the left-right scale and positioning in relation to a set of 17 political subjects. The study made use of two surveys: that of the deputies of all parties with seats in parliament (2008); the other of a representative sample of the Portuguese population (2008).

Kitschelt claims that, despite its theoretical and empirical weaknesses, May's law has survived for so long because the majority of studies on party activists use British and American data, which are the two cases in which May's law finds its greatest empirical support: both countries have highly competitive bipartisan systems that encourage the inclusion of ideological radicals in the parties, and both have weak and decentralised party organisations. Based on existing literature, we note that the Portuguese party system represents an interesting case study. On the one hand, both the PS and the PSD are relatively weak organisations, which thus should tend to have more radical mid-level leaders. On the other hand, while the electoral system may be proportional, it is a fact that during the period 1987-2009 the party system has tended towards bipartisan. However, there are also factors that can, in some way, act in the opposite direction, particularly the tendency towards centralisation within the parties in matters such as recruitment – which is truer of the PS than of the PSD.

We obtained the following general results. First, May's law is applicable, almost in its entirety, in both the PS and the PSD when we use the self-positioning of deputies, activists and voters on the left-right scale (except in terms of the degree of radicalism: in these cases there were some differences in respect of positions assumed by deputies and voters, with the activists always being the most radical). As we know, this is a political "super-issue" that largely shapes political competition in modern Western societies, including Portugal. Second, the importance of the left-right division could be behind the greater applicability of May's law in the case of this political cleavage than in either socio-economic or "new politics" issues. Third, we note that in socio-economic matters, the applicability of May's law is much greater for the PS (four items from eight) than for the PSD (two from eight), while the reverse is true in respect of new politics, in which the law's applicability

is greater for the PSD (four items from nine) than for the PS (one from nine). We believe this difference can be related to the fact that in Portugal the parties of the left are more in tune ideologically with the electorate in socio-economic matters, on which public opinion is predominantly inclined to the left; however, the reverse is true in respect of libertarian-authoritarian matters, where the parties of the right, and particularly the PSD, are more in tune with a public opinion that has a tendency to be more conservative. Nevertheless, this interpretation will have to be examined in more detail in future transnational comparative studies.

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