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Gender and Politics in Portugal

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Abstract: This chapter surveys the literature on gender and politics in Portugal, focusing on explanations for gender differences in political participation and representation. We map trends in women's inclusion in key areas of political life, from conventional and non-conventional political participation to the election of women in parliamentary parties. Putting Portugal in comparative perspective, we highlight the crucial roles of state feminism, women activists within parties, and strategic incentives of parties in progressing gender equality. We suggest several avenues for developing future research which leverages the Portuguese case, including the downstream impacts of political gender quotas, intersectional and non-binary analysis, and the symbolic impact of women's inclusion in public life.

Keywords: gender and politics, participation, representation, gender quotas, state feminism

INTRODUCTION

Women have historically been excluded from political life, especially positions of power, in most democracies. Portugal is no exception; the Portuguese context of 48 years of an uninterrupted authoritarian regime (1926–1974) deeply marred progress towards gender equality in Portuguese society. During the dictatorship, women had very few rights. In fact, the

constitution established the equality of all citizens “except for women, where natural differences and the family good are at stake” (Ferreira 2011, 168). Over time, as the regime began to tilt towards liberalisation, women gained more opportunities in education and the labour market. As a direct consequence of the emigration outbreak and the colonial war, many women took over financial support for their families, increasing the female employment rate considerably (Tavares 2000, 22; Ferreira 2011, 157). But it was only after the transition to democracy in 1974 that true political gains took place. While considerable progress has been made since then – in the first democratic elections in 1975, women constituted 7.6% of the MPs, whereas in 2020 they reached 40% – only one woman has ever served as prime minister (Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo, 1979 – 1980), and there has never been a female president.

This chapter focuses on the path towards political gender equality in Portugal. We concentrate on two critical aspects of political life: participation and representation. Drawing on cross-national datasets, we present trends in Portuguese political participation and representation in comparative perspective, highlighting areas where large gains have been made (women’s descriptive representation) and areas where Portugal has made less progress towards gender equality compared to other countries (women’s turnout). Existing explanations for gender inequality in political participation and representation highlight the important role of factors like modernization, party ideology, women’s movements, and state feminism. After reviewing these common explanations, we turn our attention to how different actors in Portugal (the state, political parties, and women) respond to the challenge of gender equality. We highlight the crucial role of state feminism and women activists within parties in the case of Portugal. Further, we highlight the importance of party-strategic incentives: parties will shift women’s representation and policies when they perceive feasible electoral gains from doing

so. We conclude by offering our perspective on future research agendas which would shed new light on pathways to political gender equality in Portugal.

PARTICIPATION

Citizens do not all have the same propensity to participate in politics. Some sociodemographic groups are significantly less politically active than others. Among these groups are women, who participate less in political life in countries around the world. Several reasons have been offered to explain gender inequality in political participation. Disparities in socioeconomic resources between women and men usually emerge as relevant, especially educational attainment (Burns et al. 2001, 360). But the most consensual group of reasons concerns political attitudes, for which the gender gap is particularly strong. Women are invariably less likely to be politically informed, interested in politics, and to feel politically efficacious (Alexander and Coffé 2018; Fraile and Gomez 2017; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012). Scholars have long attributed the substantial gender differences in political attitudes to an unequal socialisation of girls and boys, a thesis still supported by recent research (Fraile and Sánchez-Vitores 2020). A related field of research highlights the fact that politics remains a masculine world, perceived as such by both women and men (e.g., Clayton 2015).

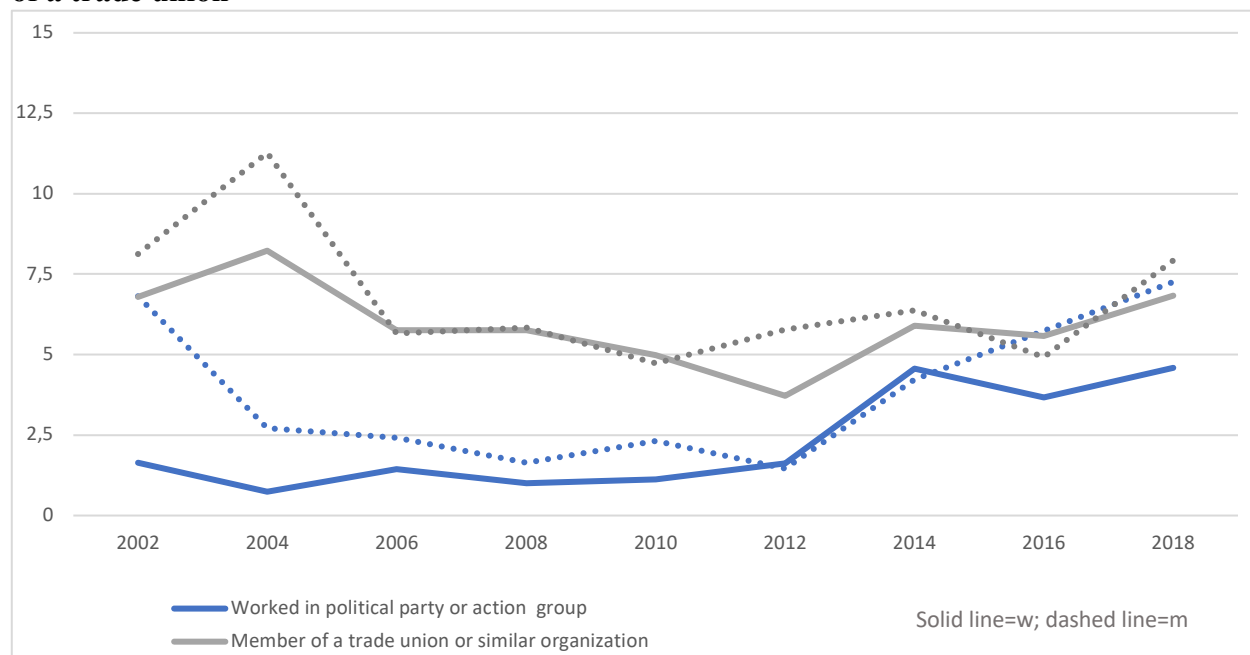
Conventional Political Participation

The international literature finds gender inequality to be particularly pronounced for conventional forms of participation (besides voting), e.g., for party membership and activism (Quaranta and Dotti-Santi 2018; Scarrow and Gezgor 2010). Also in Portugal, men make up the majority of party members, with the partial exception of the left-libertarian party, Left

Block (Lisi 2011, 104). A survey fielded in 2014–2015 to party members of Portuguese political parties confirms the pattern: men constitute between 69% and 83% of the total members of the sample (Espírito Santo et al. 2018, 477). However, when we look at the entire population, instead of just party members, the outcome is different. Whereas in the beginning of the democratic regime, there were considerable differences in party membership, those differences have gradually diminished until vanishing at the end of the 1990s, in contrast to the European level where they have remained (Baum and Espírito-Santo 2007, 136). More recent data (European Values Study, collected in 2020) confirms the trend: less than 1% of the Portuguese sample is affiliated to a party and there is no difference at all between men and women.

The same lack of gender discrepancy also characterises both having worked in a political party or action group in the last 12 months and being member of a trade union throughout the years (see Figure 1). Concerning unionisation, Portugal seems to be following the international tendency for women's and men's rates to converge (Visser 2019). Hence, in Portugal the gender gap in conventional forms of participation (besides voting) is not very pronounced.

Figure 1: Percentage of women and men who have worked for a party and were members of a trade union



Source: European Social Survey. Design weight employed.

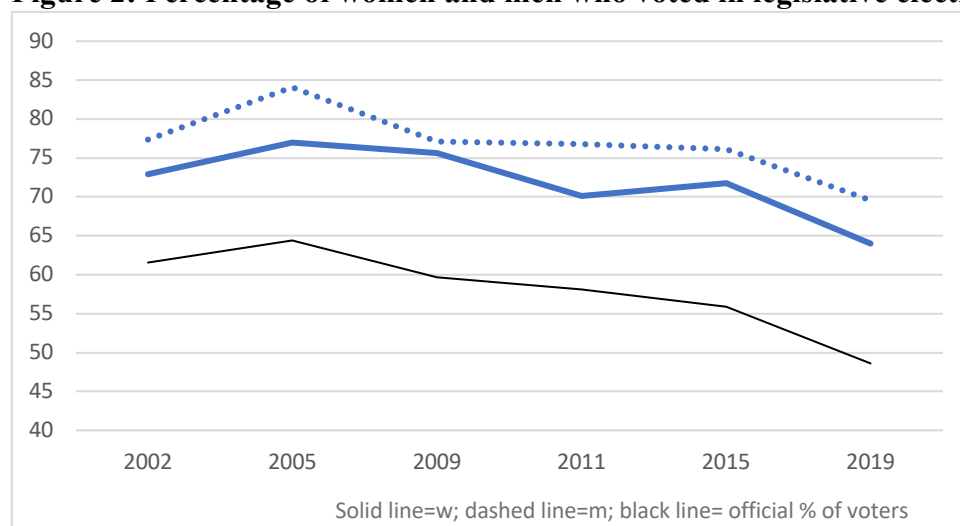
Note: Differences between w/m were significant in the following years: political party: 2002, 2004; trade union: 2004.

There is a consistent finding that, since the 1990s, women in advanced democracies vote at least as much as men do (Alexander and Coffé 2018; Marien et al. 2010; Inglehart and Norris 2003, 105), whereas during the 1960s and 1970s they had a clearly smaller probability of turnout (Duverger 1955; Verba et al. 1978, 267). In fact, several studies from the mid-1990s onwards have even reported a reverse gender gap – with women more likely to go to the polls than men (Burns et al. 2001; Carreras 2018; Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010; Conway et al. 1997). This may have several explanations. Carreras (2018) argues that women are more likely to see their participation in elections as a civic duty, but reasons such as the relatively little time and cognitive resources (Burns et al. 2001) required for voting, the fact that voting is a private action, and that it is non-confrontational (individuals are alone in the ballot box) (Carreras 2018, 43) might well be assets. More recently, the lack of a gender gap in turnout and the

reverse gender gap has been put into question; whereas there is no gender gap in first-order elections, it seems to remain in second-order elections (Kostelka et al. 2019; Dassonneville and Kostelka 2020).

Portugal emerges as an atypical case concerning gender turnout. Between 1983 (the first year for which data are available) and 2002, there were no gender differences in turnout (Baum and Espírito-Santo 2007, 134), in line with the international trend. However, since then women seem to have been following the tendency to abstain slightly more than men, which has been increasingly marking Portuguese elections with a gender gap in turnout (see Figure 2). In fact, since 2005, women have been reporting a somewhat higher tendency to abstain than men (Cancela and Magalhães 2019, 4). That was particularly the case in the 2005 and 2011 elections, as shown in Figure 2 – elections in which the gender gap was statistically significant. Moreover, in Portugal, there have never been signs of a reverse gender gap. Altogether, these results support the new field of research which is revisiting the once well-established non-existence of a gender gap in turnout (Kostelka et al. 2019; Dassonneville and Kostelka 2020).

Figure 2: Percentage of women and men who voted in legislative elections (2002–2019)



Source: Portuguese post-election surveys (available through <https://dados.rcaap.pt/>). Design weight employed except for 2009 and 2011, since it was not available.

Note: Differences between w/m were significant in the following years: 2005 and 2011.

Gender differences in party preferences were never as marked as the classic electoral cleavages, such as class, region or religion (Inglehart and Norris 2003, 75). Yet, before the 1980s women were persistently seen as more conservative than men; after that date in many Western countries a gender dealignment appeared with women shifting their preference to the left, the so called “modern gender gap” (Giger 2009; Inglehart and Norris 2003) and, at present, several studies report that women are significantly underrepresented among radical right voters (for an overview see Coffé 2018). In general, in Portugal gender does not account for much of the electoral behavior. Although between the 1980s and the beginning of the new millennium, there were light signs of a modern gender gap (Giger 2009, 478), since then in most elections, women and men do not distinguish themselves as to their positioning on the left-right scale (Portuguese post-election surveys, data not shown). Similarly, the newly formed radical right-wing party (*Chega*) attracted an equal number of votes from both genders in the 2019

legislative elections¹. However, Portuguese female voters are more favorable to same-sex marriage and abortion – though the latter is only significant before controls are introduced in the model (Prata et al. 2020).

Non-Conventional Political Participation

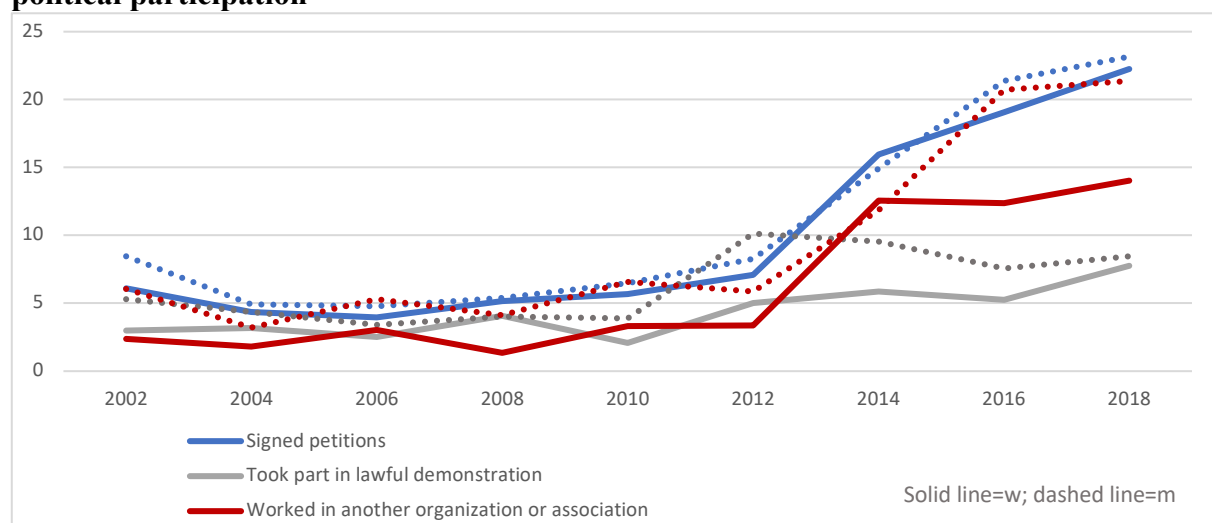
With regards to unconventional forms of participation, the international literature's findings are far from steady. Whereas some authors do show significant differences (Inglehart and Norris 2003, 117), others report that it has disappeared. In fact, a growing field of literature notes that women are more active than men in some specific non-institutionalised forms of political participation, such as signing petitions, donating money and boycotting products (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010; Marien et al. 2010; Stolle and Hooghe 2011). This might be explained because 'non-institutionalised forms of political participation correspond more clearly to the notion of "lifestyle politics", allowing citizens to give a political meaning to day-to-day activities' (Marien et al. 2010, 205). Portugal seems to be following the international scholarship that describes the clearing of the gender gap, but at a slower rate.

Until the end of 1990s, there were substantial disparities in almost all forms of unconventional participation tackled, namely signing a petition or participating in demonstrations, although afterwards, the differences started shrinking considerably (Baum and Espírito-Santo 2007, 143). The tendency towards gender convergence has remained up until today (see Figure 3). With regards to signing petitions, differences are totally non-existent, whereas for participating in a demonstration they are minor, except for the years 2010 and 2012. Nevertheless, when work in another organisation other than a political party is

¹ <https://expresso.pt/opiniao/2020-02-15-Quem-quer-votar-no-Chega-> (accessed 10/1/2020).

considered (see Figure 3), women still emerge as significantly less participative. Moreover, it is not yet evident if women post or share information about politics online less or equally as often as men, since the two European Social Survey rounds where the question was included (2016 and 2018) report dissimilar results. Altogether, female engagement in non-conventional participation in Portugal, although overall on the rise, cannot be taken for granted in every form of participation.

Figure 3: Percentage of women and men who carried out non-institutionalised forms of political participation



Source: European Social Survey. Design weight employed.

Note: Differences between w/m were significant in the following years: petitions: none; demonstration: 2010, 2012; organization: all except for 2004 and 2014.

REPRESENTATION

Political theorists agree that women's inclusion in legislative institutions, processes, and outcomes is essential for democratic legitimacy (Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995). Research on political representation in the gender and politics subfield typically focuses on descriptive or substantive representation, with some recent studies focusing on a third dimension, symbolic representation (e.g., Clayton et al. 2019). In descriptive representation, representatives are seen

to be typical of a larger class of persons whom they “make present”. The idea, applied to gender, is that women in office constitute a “politics of presence” (Phillips 1995), and that women should be equally represented either for pure justice reasons alone (women make up 50% of most populations), or because numbers of women in office could be associated with symbolic of substantive gains for women. Substantive representation refers to the representation of women’s policy demands. Finally, symbolic representation refers to the extent to which representatives can serve as symbols, inspiring citizens’ feelings and attitudes about, for example, how fair and effective politics and government is (Pitkin 1967).

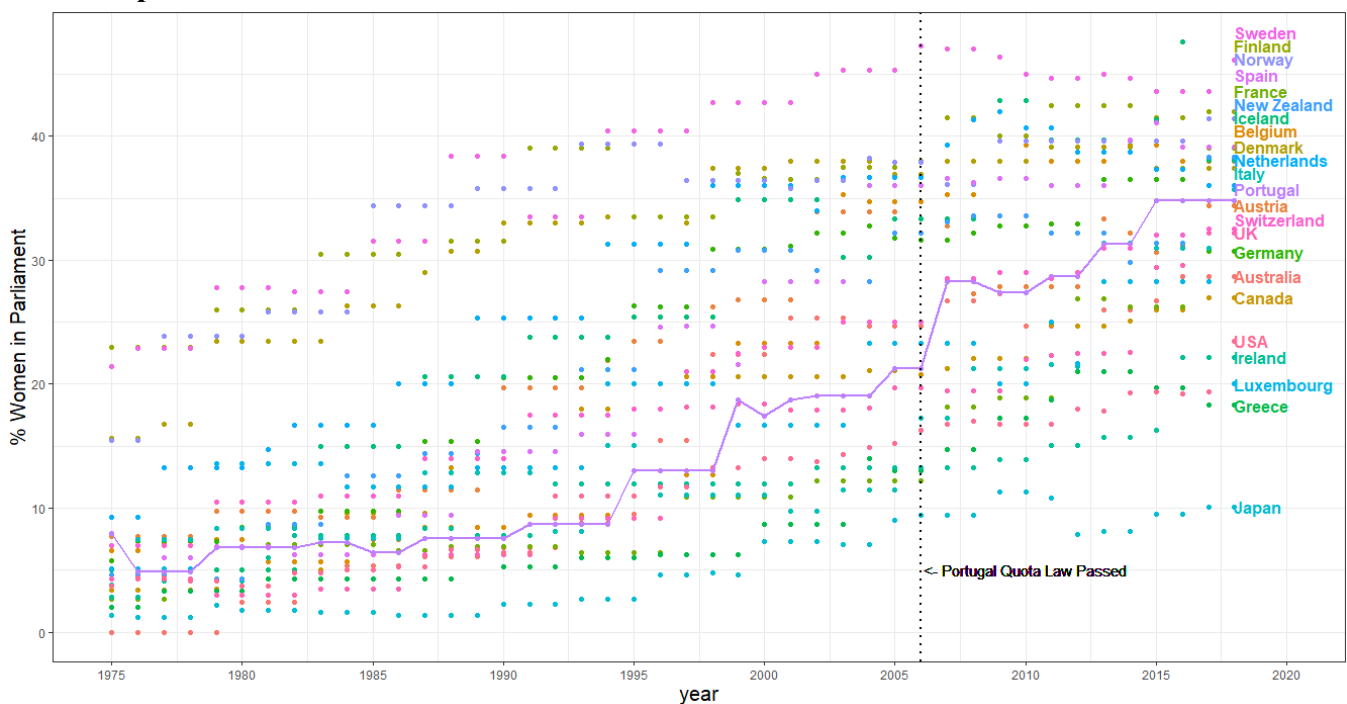
An important addition to this framework, particularly for the case of Portugal, is the theory of “state feminism”. State feminism is a theory centered on the role of “women’s policy agencies” (state-based structures assigned to promote the rights, status, and condition of women) and women’s movements as key actors in the policy process (McBride and Mazur 2010). The representation of gender equality goals can also be achieved within state agencies. Portugal established one of the first women’s policy agencies, now called the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG), as early as 1970 (Lombardo and Bustelo 2012). Because the CIG offers both formalized channels of access for women’s organizations and the independence and resources needed to formulate and implement a “women’s agenda”, it is coded by Weldon (2002) as one of the only women’s policy agencies that can provide a form of political representation for women.

Descriptive Representation: Parties, Women and Quotas

Women’s descriptive representation in Portugal increased dramatically over the past twenty years. Figure 4 shows the evolution of women’s descriptive representation in 23 advanced

democracies from 1975 – 2018. It shows that while many countries gradually increased women’s representation from 1975 to 1995, the situation in Portugal (purple line) remained static. In this period, Portugal often ranks among the bottom five countries in the sample for share of women in national parliament. However, from 1995 progress begins, and big jumps can be seen in some electoral years, including 1999 and 2009. As of October 2020, women make up 40% of Portugal’s national parliament, placing the country 22nd in the worldwide rankings – a steep increase on twenty years ago when women made up only 17% of parliament (IPU Parline).

Figure 4: Women’s Descriptive Representation in Portugal 1975 – 2018, Comparative Perspective



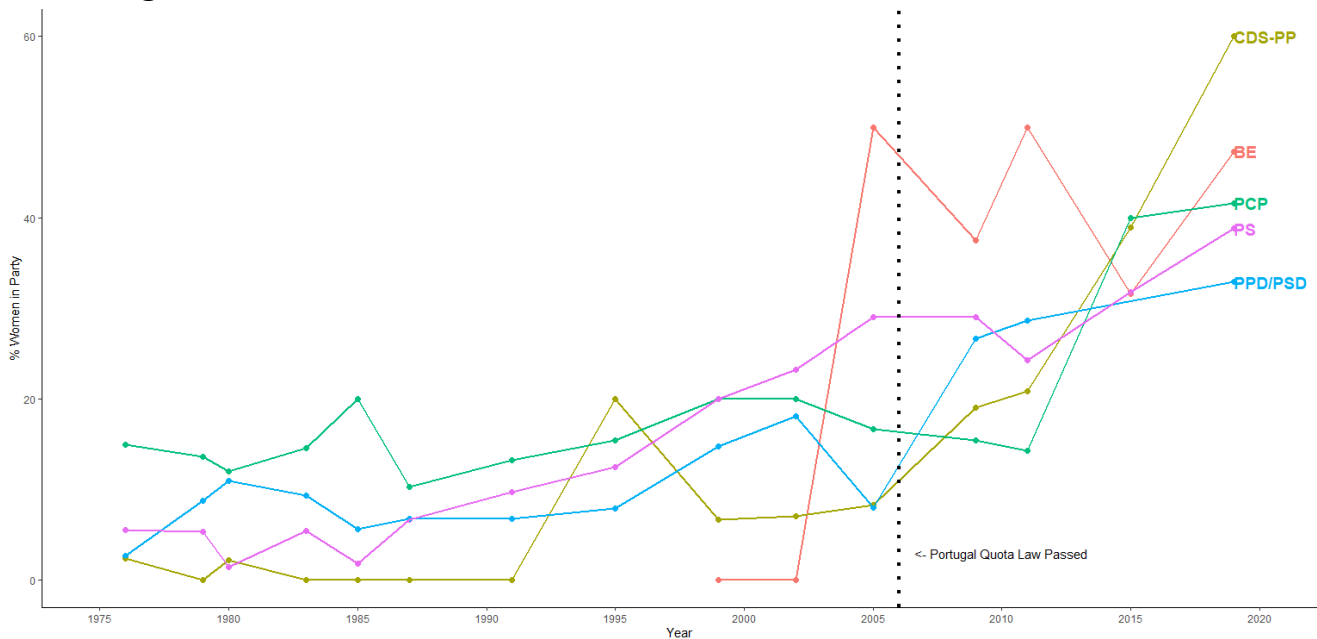
Notes: Data from CPDS (Armingeon et al. 2020).

Research on descriptive representation in Portugal highlights three main explanations: party ideology, women activists, and gender quotas. First, in Portugal as in other advanced democracies left-wing parties tend to be the ones to promote women’s descriptive representation the most. Left-wing parties are more likely to select women and put them in

winnable positions compared to their counterparts on the right (Kittilson 2006). Commitment to gender equality has been a longstanding element of socialist ideology, and new left parties like the Left Bloc often make gender central to their ideology (Duverger 1955; Keith and Verge 2016). However, Communist parties historically rejected feminism as undermining the class struggle. Figure 5 shows that in Portugal the Left Bloc (BE) typically are most inclusive of women, followed by the Socialist Party (PS). While the Communist PCP included women earlier than other parties, the representation of women in the PCP stalled for a long period from 1995 until only recently. Historically the Christian Democrats (CDS-PP) and center-right (PPD/PSD) are least inclusive of women, but these parties both see large boosts to women in the parliamentary party following the adoption of a national gender parity law in 2006.

Party ideology is closely related to the second two explanations for women's descriptive representation in Portugal, women (or feminist) activists and gender quotas. Left parties are early adopters of voluntary quota measures within the party, whereas conservative parties tend to reject affirmative action measures (Kittilson 2006). The Socialist Party (PS) instituted voluntary party quotas in 1988. The role of women activists in the PS was crucial in pushing the controversial party quota forward (Weeks 2018). While at first the party quota was not very effective, Figure 5 shows that by 2005 the PS elected 29% women, coming close to achieving its own target of 33%.

Figure 5: Share of Women in Parliamentary Party by Political Party, 1975 – 2019 Portugal



Notes: Authors' own data collection.

National gender quotas offer a “fast track” to increased numbers of women in office (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005). Unlike party quotas, which typically only affect a self-selecting group of left-wing parties, national quota laws increase the share of women across parties, particularly if they include placement mandates and strong enforcement mechanisms (Schwindt-Bayer 2009). The parity law in Portugal was passed in 2006, pushed through by the center-left Socialist Party (PS). It required 33.3% minimum representation of each gender at the local, national legislative, and European level, and parties that did not comply were subject to fines. An article was inserted in the legislation requiring it to be reassessed in five years’ time, but the idea of repealing it was never subject to serious debate. Instead, in 2019 the Assembly of the Republic voted to increase the threshold to 40% and reject party lists that do not comply, with all parties except for the Communist PCP and the majority of the CDS MPs voting in favor.

The parties most impacted by the quota law were the centre-right CDS-PP and PPD/PSD, both of which see large increases to women in the party from the first election that

the quota was implemented, 2009 (see Figure 5). Explanations for quota law adoption in Portugal highlight the role of women activists, transnational policy diffusion, and state feminism, as well as the strategic incentives of male party leaders (Baum and Espírito-Santo 2012; Monteiro 2011; Weeks 2018). The proposal originated from women activists within the Socialist Party, and was supported by the party's women's section. The CIG provided a platform for party women to lobby for legislative gender quotas in the runup to the law's adoption in 2006 (Monteiro 2011, Verge 2013). Transnational policy diffusion also played a role, as key actors took inspiration from other European countries and organizations like the Socialist International (Baum and Espírito-Santo 2012). Weeks (2018) points to the additional role of electoral threat, with the PS finally moving on quota legislation at a time when it faced challenges from a rising, socially progressive party further to the left (the BE).

Women's inclusion in parliamentary parties is only one facet of descriptive representation. We know less about determinants of descriptive representation at the local level in Portugal, from local legislatures to executive roles like mayors where women are still in the small minority (but see Almeida 2018 and Ruiz Jiménez 2009). Espírito-Santo and Santos (2020) show that the implementation of the quota law in 2009 increased the share of women elected in local politics, but women remain more underrepresented at the local and national levels compared to the European level. They argue that women are more likely to be included in European elections because these elections offer high district magnitude combined with good visibility and a focus on gender equality at the EU level.

Substantive Representation of Women

The Portuguese legacy of dictatorship and the democratic revolution in 1974 deeply shaped women's legal rights and social policies. The approval of the Constitution of 1976 – which established the principle of equality between all citizens in article 13º – constituted a crucial moment. The right to vote was extended to all adults without distinction as to sex, race, religion or economic or social status in 1974. Since then, the state has continued to contribute to gender equality efforts through the work of the CIG and several national action plans for gender equality from 1997 onwards which the CIG coordinates (Lombardo and Bustelo 2012; Monteiro and Ferreira 2016). The transformations towards gender equality in the beginning of the democratic regime were thus mainly the result of 'top-down' decisions deemed necessary for the construction of a modern democratic state (Amaral and Anjinho, 2012; Ferreira, 2011). In fact, although many women participated in the struggle against the dictatorship, scholars agree that there was no important public mobilisation in defence of women's rights during the dictatorship (Cova and Costa Pinto, 2002). However, several women's groups (feminist or not) flourished in Portugal throughout and after the democratic transition (Tavares, 2000). According to Melo (2017), the fact that those groups emerged mostly within left-wing and far-left parties – which led the transition process – created an environment propitious for women's demands, as long as they aligned with the socialist frame.

While the state thus plays an outsize role in women's substantive representation in Portugal, comparative studies highlight the importance of other factors including party ideology, women activists within and across parties, and gender quotas. Left parties have been linked to a range of feminist policy outcomes (Huber & Stephens 2000; Mazur 2002). However, recent work challenges the primacy of party ideology, highlighting Christian

Democrat and conservative party appeals to women voters through for example party quotas and work-family policies (Morgan 2013; O'Brien 2018). In Portugal, the initial aftermath of the revolution led to the delegitimization of the political right; even parties on the right aligned their platforms with ideology of socialism (Melo 2017). Yet, the left is still more linked to feminist policy in Portugal than the right – and the PPD-PSD party in particular has been criticized for failing to include women in its manifestos and decision-making bodies (Ruiz Jiménez 2009). Women have worked behind the scenes in left-wing parties to achieve legislative gains on various fronts such as voting, divorce, contraception, inclusion in the labour market and equal pay. In recent years, the center-left Socialist Party drove through important legislation including gender quotas in politics and for corporate boards, and gender-neutral shared parental leave (Escobedo and Wall 2015; Espírito-Santo 2018).

A long line of research exists investigating the link between women's descriptive and substantive representation, and this research tends to find that women representatives are more likely to represent women than men representatives (for a review, see Wängnerud 2009), mainly concerning issues that particularly affect women and specially if those issues are not yet crystallized (Espírito-Santo et al. 2020; Mansbridge 1999; Weeks 2020). An emerging literature suggests that gender quotas can also lead to better policies for women through the mechanisms of added numbers of women in office and increased salience to gender equality concerns (e.g., Clayton and Zetterberg 2018; Franceschet and Piscopo 2012; Weeks 2019). Weeks (2020) argues that gender quotas lead to change especially on women's interests that lie off the main left-right (class-based) dimension in politics, such as work-family policies, because the law adds important salience to cross-cutting issues that parties would otherwise prefer to ignore. Analysis of the substantive effects of the quota law in Portugal finds that women across parties worked together to make significant changes to family policy, through

for example their membership on the Parliamentary Working Group on Parenting and Gender Equality. These policy changes include the extension of parental leave rights to same-sex parents and the extension of paid paternity leave (Weeks 2020).

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The literature on gender and politics in Portugal offers considerable insights into the causes and consequences of women's inclusion in political life in advanced democracies. Our review highlights the unique role of state feminism in the Portuguese context, as well as the important impacts of women activists, transnational policy diffusion, and the strategic considerations of (male) party leaders. Still, scholarly lacunae remain, and in this final section we focus on three promising areas for future research on gender and politics in Portugal: the effects of gender quotas beyond national-level descriptive representation, non-binary and intersectional analysis of gender in politics, and the symbolic representation of women.

The case of Portugal gives scholars particular leverage to address research questions related to the effects of gender quotas beyond national descriptive representation. Quotas have proliferated in Portugal, moving from party-level voluntary quotas to a quota law for all levels of politics, to a quota law for corporate boards (Espírito-Santo 2018). As our review highlights, a great deal of research sheds light on the causes of political gender quota adoption and their consequences for increasing women MPs, but literature on the effects of quotas and women's inclusion on other important outcomes (such as legislative behavior and substantive policy outcomes) is in its infancy. Does women's inclusion in politics lead to other changes? For example, research shows a good deal of gender segregation in parliamentary committees (Espírito -Santo and Sanches 2020). Might this change after the long-term implementation of a quota law, with women achieving membership on more prestigious committees? We see

emerging signs of women's increased power in other aspects of legislative behaviour. Research finds that after the quota law in Portugal women increased their participation in legislative debates (albeit in some parties more than others) (Fernandes, Fonseca and Won ND). We recommend that future studies use the case of Portugal to investigate the downstream impacts of political gender quotas at the local and regional levels, and the substantive effects of quotas beyond numbers of women.

Another productive avenue for future studies is to move beyond gender as a binary and consider seriously intersections of gender and other forms of marginalization – race, class, education, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability, etc. Women are not a monolithic group with a singular set of preferences, and scholars agree that intersections of gender and other identities have unique impacts that are not simply additive (Hancock 2007). Taking an intersectional approach requires specialized efforts with regards to data collection and analysis, including the explicit inclusion and coding of multiple identities, subgroup or interactive analyses, and contextualizing intersectional data within systems of power. An initial foray on the descriptive representation in the Iberian legislatures following an intersectional approach suggests that gender intersects with other markers of identity. Specifically, ethnic minority, immigrant background, disabled and gay male MPs outnumber female MPs with similar characteristics (Espírito-Santo et al, 2019). Yet, evidence suggests Portuguese state institutions are slowly moving towards intersectionality. Alonso (2012) shows that Portugal is evolving towards a “multiple equalities agenda” in new policy plans and institutional support. Also the scope of CIG has recently moved from focusing exclusively on gender equality to a combination of gender with other equalities. It is thus important to move beyond gender binaries in future work in order to accommodate the proliferating range of gendered identities (masculinities and femininities) relevant to the study of politics in Portugal. Recent work in

this area suggests innovative and practical strategies for measuring gender as a continuum that future studies can draw on (e.g., Gidengil and Stolle 2020).

Finally recent research identifies new ways of measuring the symbolic representation of women – an area of representation which is comparatively underexplored (but see Verge et al. 2020). For example, Clayton, O’Brien, and Piscopo (2019) use a survey experiment to evaluate the impact of gender representation on democratic legitimacy, showing that women’s equal presence legitimizes decision-making processes and confers trust. Given rising levels of gender backlash which is increasingly seen as intersectional (Piscopo and Walsh 2020), it is crucial to understand what motivates public support for gender equality, and how we can implement policies that are viewed as legitimate and likely to promote fair democratic representation, rather than social conflict. Future studies could make important steps in this direction by investigating the impact of framing of positive action measures (from “quotas” to “parity”), the determinants of violence against women in politics, and the role of social media in spreading (mis)information and misogyny.

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