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Chapter 24

Parties and Political Representation

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Abstract: How has the topic of representation been studied empirically in Portugal? Which main results have been reached? This chapter focuses on the party-voter linkage, and aims at mapping the study of party representation in Portugal. On the one hand, we systematize the most relevant research contributions on the topic; on the other hand, we update and consolidate the findings on the most important trends that have been identified so far. The analysis comprises four main lines of research studies on the subject in Portugal: on political and ideological congruence; on promises fulfilment; on political agendas; and on roles of representation. The general conclusion, aligned with the findings of the international research, is that there is a prevalence of reasonable and quite stable levels of correspondence between parties and electorates.

Keywords: representation; ideological and policy congruence; party pledges; policy attention; roles of representation.

24.1 Introduction

What does it mean to represent citizens politically or ideologically? Despite the acknowledged difficulty in conceptualizing representation, in democracy it entails acting on someone else's behalf, granting him/her a presence that he/she would otherwise not have. In other words, in democracy, representatives make those represented present by acting on their behalf.

Regardless of the discussion on what model of representation should prevail (Andeweg, 2014), it is generally acknowledged that representatives should respond to the interests of those they represent (Pitkin, 1967). Based on this assumption, much of the empirical research on representation has rested on assessing the correspondence between representatives and those represented. This chapter focuses on the analysis of representation in Portugal from this perspective.

Portugal is an interesting case to study party-voter linkage, as it may be considered a paradoxical case. Its electoral system is generally seen as generating few incentives for strong ties between MPs and voters, as we will discuss in the next section. Furthermore, little clarity prevails as to parties' programmatic offer, (Tsatsanis et al., 2014) and citizens hold relatively low levels of political information and interest¹. All of these aspects affect the expected levels of representation negatively. However, so far research has found quite reasonable levels of correspondence between Portuguese representatives and represented. Portugal is also an interesting case as it went through a profound economic crisis, thus making it possible to evaluate the influence of the crisis on the representation process. Our analysis aims to systematize the existing knowledge and data in order to gauge the extent to which a case that is not conducive to a strong party-voter linkage does generate good levels of correspondence between these two actors.

Firstly, we will present a quick overview of the Portuguese political system and how it affects representation. Secondly, we will explore the diverse up-to-date trends of studies on this topic. Lastly, we will present some concluding remarks.

24.2 The Portuguese Political System and the Process of Representation

Political representation in Portugal is usually considered to be party-based and centred at the national level. The Portuguese closed-list electoral system and strong voting discipline (Leston-Bandeira, 2009; Goes and Leston-Bandeira, 2019: 13-14) generate small incentives for a link between representatives and their constituents. The Portuguese Constitution establishes that MPs represent the nation as a whole and not the districts through which they are elected. This explains why extra-parliamentary party organizations are seen as playing an important role in the Portuguese parliament, selecting parliamentary candidates and controlling MPs' decision-making (Van Biezen 2003; Teixeira, 2009). Furthermore, in Portugal, earning a seat in parliament involves a solid party career that begins with becoming a member of the party, which leads to a more or less fixed set of offices and positions (Teixeira et al., 2012: 110). The prominence of party leadership in this process is not, however, exclusive to Portugal (Kam, 2009). As a consequence, MPs enjoy a low level of independence in parliament and their role as individual representatives is constrained (Jalali and Teruel, 2019). This means that the relationship between voters and their representatives is mediated by parties, which are *de jure* and *de facto* the representative unit (Leston-Bandeira and Tibúrcio, 2012; Brack et al., 2012), making the Portuguese system averse to correspondence between representatives and represented. In other words, such party mediation implies that MPs have few opportunities for direct contact with their constituents, and that constituencies themselves have little meaning in parliamentary representation (Leston-Bandeira, 2012).

There is a tendency to think that parties are not representative of Portuguese citizens' opinions (Lobo et al., 2013), calling into question the role of parties as core instruments of representation. Empirical data suggests the prevalence of a downward trend in citizens' views on the process of representation. For instance, in 2011, about 48 per cent of Portuguese respondents admitted that no party represented their opinions reasonably well (Brito Vieira and Wiesehomeier, 2013: 98-100); this figure rose to about 58 per cent in 2019.² In 2012, less than a third agreed that elections ensured that the views of MPs accurately reflected voters' views (Belchior et al., 2016: 283); in 2016, this dropped to a mere 15 per cent (Freire et al., 2016).

Portuguese voters appear to be quite pessimistic in comparative terms. Based on data from 2002-2004, among a group of 35 countries (including many European countries), Portugal ranks 29th in terms of voters considering that MPs mirror their views, and 21st when it comes to voters feeling that the policies they defend are represented by a party (Holmberg, 2014: 140 and 144).³

These institutional constraints, as well as citizens' unfavourable opinions on representation, suggest a much more pessimistic scenario than the actual functioning of political institutions indicates, or, at least, than representation studies suggest. Research on Portugal has revealed reasonable levels of political and ideological correspondence between representatives and voters, generally aligning with international findings. However, this conclusion should be interpreted with caution, as some constraints may arise from the methodological options in these studies, as we will discuss below.

Political parties have shown no signs of planning an institutional reform that would promote greater connection with voters. Despite widespread political concern about the disconnect between Portuguese citizens and the political system, as the low rates of political participation and low levels of political trust illustrate, and the fact that an electoral system reform could

improve that relationship, the lack of consensus between the parties – especially among the main parties – has been the major obstacle to the implementation of any electoral reform. Proposed reforms mainly consist of abandoning the party list system and adopting more proportional and/or personalized alternatives. They either report to an overall change of the electoral system (e.g. by introducing a mixed-member proportional system), or to an adjustment of the present system (especially by adopting preferential vote). To a greater or lesser extent, any of these options would have the potential to promote a better link between representatives and represented than the current system. None of the proposals to change electoral law has gathered sufficient party support to produce any kind of practical effect (Freire and Meirinho, 2012; Lobo, 2018).

24.3 Political and Ideological Congruence in Portugal

Assessing the link between MPs and voters is the most commonly used approach in empirical studies of representation. This assessment assumes the proximity of political or ideological positions between representatives and represented as an indicator of representation. Simply put, congruence is greater when the differences in the positions between both actors are smaller, and lower when such differences increase; when the difference is zero, congruence is absolute. Nevertheless, congruence should not be understood as synonymous with representation, but rather as a proxy. As Przeworski and colleagues (1999) point out, a government may be representative without responding to voters' preferences; and it may, on the contrary, be unrepresentative, while following those preferences closely.

Several studies have focused on party-citizen congruence in Portugal. Their main conclusion is that heterogeneity in party congruence is contingent on the issue at stake, as well as on the moment under analysis. If we consider congruence on the abstract left-right scale (where

respondents position themselves on a scale where 1 represents extreme left, and 10 or 11 represent extreme right), mainstream parties tend to be consistently more representative of voters, both in Portugal and in Europe (Belchior and Freire, 2013; Freire and Correia, 2020). The main reason for this trend lies in the position of mainstream parties at the ideological centre, which is where most of the electorate lies (Belchior, 2013; see also: Dolný and Baboš, 2015: 1290).

The picture becomes markedly different when we take into account traditional economic policy issues (such as state intervention or redistribution), or cultural issues (such as gay marriage or abortion). Portuguese mainstream parties – the centre-right Social Democratic Party (PSD), the centre-left Socialist Party (PS), and the conservative Popular Party (CDS-PP) – can be among the less congruent (Freire et al., 2014a: 427). In this case, it is the party's ideological stance that explains the level of correspondence with voters. Left-wing parties tend to be more congruent with voters regarding the traditional economic issues and right-wing parties more congruent on cultural issues (Belchior and Freire, 2013). This has also been recently demonstrated in relation to European parties (Dalton, 2021: 17).

The austerity policies implemented during the 2009 economic crisis aggravated the crisis of representative democracies, increasing the gap between policy positions of voters and representatives (Traber et al., 2018). This was particularly relevant in the most severely hit countries, such as Portugal or Greece, and in relation to issues such as European integration or austerity policies (Freire et al., 2014a; Freire et al., 2014b; Teperoglou et al., 2014). In turn, the crisis appears to have enhanced MP-voter congruence among (radical) left-wing parties when it comes to redistribution and social protection issues (Belchior et al., 2016), not affecting the (relatively high) levels of congruence in terms of positioning on the left-right ideological scale (Freire and Correia, 2020). One plausible explanation for the better performance of left-wing opposition may be found in Mair's claim that there is a bifurcation 'between parties which claim

to represent but don't govern and those which govern but no longer represent', and which the crisis may have intensified (Mair, 2009: 17). In other words, contrary to government parties, after the crisis emerged, opposition parties seem to have had more leeway to prioritize being responsive to voters, since they were not responsible for the economic and international context.

To sum up, studies on congruence in Portugal reveal that the proximity between legislators and voters is quite high and stable over time when the analysis is based on the ideological self-positioning on the left-right scale (as it is, generally, in Europe: Dolný and Baboš, 2015), especially among mainstream parties. Policy congruence – that is, with regard to substantive policy issues – is comparatively lower, depending on the issue and the party in question (see also Costello et al., 2020; Dalton, 2021). Furthermore, the 2009 economic crisis affected the levels of congruence in crisis-related issues and especially regarding government parties during the crisis (the PSD, similarly to what happened with the Greek ruling party, the radical-left SYRIZA; see Freire et al., 2014a).

To update and consolidate the findings on the Portuguese case, we now present an analysis of the congruence between voters and political parties in Portugal. It is based on the latest data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, to position the parties, and the European Election Study, to position the party's voters⁴. The results are shown in the six diagrams below, which measure congruence within parties. They report on the parties' position within the left-right scale, as well as each party's stance on five political issues. Two of these issues are anchored in the traditional left-right dichotomy (state intervention and redistribution), two in the libertarian-authoritarian dichotomy (freedom, and immigration), and a last one encompasses both dichotomies (comparing economic growth with environmental protection). The diagonal line in the diagrams represents the point where congruence is higher, as the differences between means are zero. The closer they are to the diagonal, the higher the congruence.

Figure 24.1: Ideological and political congruence in Portugal, 2019

The diagrams in Figure 24.1 provide at least three main conclusions about the link between voters and parties in Portugal. Firstly, the positioning on the left-right scale generates a more linear and positive correspondence between parties and their voters than substantive policy issues. As we have seen before, this is a tendency that had already been found in previous research, thus suggesting the prevalence, over time, of a high congruence between parties and voters' ideological positions in Portugal. Studies about MP-voter congruence, however, raise some questions about the meaning of the results, as they compare political actors with distinct characteristics. Unlike MPs, voters are not a coherent collective entity and tend to have much lower levels of education, information and political sophistication. These differences mean that the comparison between the two is problematic (Pierce, 1999: 13-15), and this must be taken into account when interpreting the results.

Secondly, there is a greater ideological polarization of parties compared to their voters. The former are more firmly positioned on the left or on the right than their voters, especially left-wing parties. This trend in the Portuguese case is neither new nor specific to the country (Belchior, 2010; Belchior and Freire, 2013; Dolný and Baboš, 2015).

Thirdly, Portuguese catch-all parties (the PSD and the PS) tend to be more congruent on this scale than other parties. Both parties' positions nearly overlap on the diagonal line. This also matches previous findings about European party systems (Belchior, 2013).

Fourthly, the ideological polarization referred to in the previous points is reaffirmed with regard to traditional socio-economic issues, such as state intervention or wealth redistribution, being

even more evident when it comes to libertarian-authoritarian issues, such as the defence of civil liberties *vis-à-vis* its restriction with a view to fighting crime, or the defence of a restrictive versus liberal immigration policy. As a rule, electorates tend to position themselves more at the centre compared to their parties, partly due to their lower political sophistication. This is especially true of libertarian-authoritarian issues, as electorates are almost the same, showing horizontal alignment in the diagrams. The higher spread of parties across issue positions and the centralization of voters contribute to lower levels of correspondence between the two.

Lastly, right-wing parties tend to better converge with their voters regarding libertarian-authoritarian issues than about traditional socio-economic matters, and left-wing parties tend to better represent their electorates in the latter rather than the former (a conclusion already reached in relation to Portugal: Belchior and Freire, 2013; and elsewhere: Dalton, 2021). Regarding the diagram comparing environmental protection with economic growth, the parties on the left are largely aligned with their electorates, while the parties on the right move away from theirs. Right-wing parties are more averse to defending environmental protection when it comes at a cost in terms of economic growth, moving away from their voters, while both left-wing parties and their electorates converge in being more willing to incur in such an economic cost.

By generally reaffirming previous research, these results suggest a consolidation of the patterns of representation in Portugal, despite the vagaries of political life or, more objectively, the turbulence generated by the 2009 economic crisis. Although a representation crisis was admitted, the data suggests that the impact generated by the crisis did not promote structural changes in Portugal's political and ideological representation.

24.4 Parties' Pledge Fulfilment in Portugal

Promissory representation, that is, the idea that the promises made by parties during the electoral campaign and the political decisions they make after the elections, keeping their word or failing to do so, is at the heart of representative democracy (Mansbridge, 2003). This approach acknowledges citizens' power of influence over political outcomes, by voting for compliant parties and not voting for the non-compliant, embodying it as a core mechanism of democratic accountability (Schedler, 1998). In the mid-1990s, substantial methodological advances were made in the study of pledges (Royed, 1996; later consolidated by Royed et al., 2019). Since then, research on the topic has grown very significantly, especially among some European countries, including Portugal.⁵

Pledge fulfilment research generally considers as a pledge a 'commitment to carry out some action or produce some outcome, where an objective estimation can be made as to whether or not the action was indeed taken or the outcome produced' (Royed, 1996: 79). This method consists of identifying precise and objectively testable pledge statements in party manifestos (non-testable vague commitments have been excluded from the analysis) and verifying their fulfilment by searching in different sources (such as legislation, ministerial decrees, official websites, or direct contact with public departments). For instance, statements such as 'To continue to support women so that they can reconcile their work and family life' were not considered pledges, while statements such as 'Launching a programme for the prevention of juvenile delinquency' have been included. Pledges were classified as 'fully fulfilled' (if evidence among the search sources demonstrates that the promise was completely accomplished), 'partially fulfilled' (if party efforts only led to a partial delivery of what was promised), and 'not fulfilled' (if there is no evidence at all indicating that the party fulfilled the pledge).

The work that integrates or focuses on the Portuguese case has, to a great extent, achieved results aligned with the main conclusions of international research (Naurin et al., 2019). Findings on the Portuguese case can be summarized in three main ideas. Firstly, as in other cases and contrary to common belief, research has systematically found that the Portuguese governments tend to fulfil a high percentage of their election pledges (e.g., Thomson et al., 2017; Moury and Fernandes, 2018; Lisi et al., 2019). As shown in Figure 24.2, between 1995 and 2019, the percentage of fulfilment among Portuguese governments tends to be rather high. On average, they fulfil or partially fulfil about 64 per cent of their manifesto pledges, and this percentage increases to 77 per cent if we only consider governments that completed their terms (the PS 1995, 2005 and 2015, and the PSD/CDS 2011). Even Portuguese opposition parties, within the constraints of fulfilling a mandate while being in opposition, make a significant effort to keep their word (Serra-Silva and Belchior, 2020). Opposition parties have fully or partially kept between 30 and 60 per cent of their promises over the period 1995-2019.⁶ An important implication of these results is that electoral programmes should not be seen as mere bureaucratic documents, since parties do seem to take them seriously when it comes to deciding on policies to be adopted.

Secondly, research has also demonstrated that minority governments tend to fulfil at least as many pledges as majority governments (Lisi et al., 2019; Thomson et al., 2017; Moury and Fernandes, 2018). As Figure 24.2 shows, the two most compliant Portuguese governments were minority governments: the first government led by António Guterres (PS, 1995), and that of António Costa (PS, 2015), although the latter had parliamentary support from the two radical left parties (these governments fulfil or partially fulfil, respectively, 85 per cent and 87 per cent of their pledges). The main reason put forward for the fact that minority governments perform better concerns the use of policy bargaining with opposition parties. Minority cabinets need to

negotiate to deliver on their electoral pledges, with the ultimate purpose of increasing the likelihood of re-election (Moury and Fernandes, 2018).

Thirdly, as demonstrated in previous research (Thomson, 2011), studies on the Portuguese case have shown that citizens perceive pledge fulfilment by governments in a biased manner (Belchior, 2019). Focusing on the government led by Passos Coelho (2011-2015), the research demonstrates that a motivated reasoning process leads citizens to biased perceptions of government performance. Specifically, party identification and sympathy towards the government trigger distortion of individual perceptions of pledge fulfilment. Citizens' negative evaluations of the government's performance or identification with opposition parties promote bias towards perceiving pledges that have been fulfilled as unfulfilled, leading citizens to see the government as less compliant than it actually is. A comparative analysis between Portugal and five other countries also concluded that the use of heuristic shortcuts (party identification) leads citizens to perceptual bias of pledge fulfilment, even among well-informed citizens (Pétry et al., 2018). This finding has implications on government accountability, as biased perceptions make it hard or even impossible to reward the governments that keep their promises and to punish those that do not.

Figure 24.2:

In order to understand how governments keep their promises, we now analyse the level of pledge fulfilment in Portugal by policy area, between 1995 and 2019, corresponding to seven legislatures.⁷ Figure 24.3 shows the percentage of pledge fulfilment by policy area⁸ for each of the governments for which data is available.

Figure 24.3: Portuguese governments pledges fulfillment, 1995-2019 (%)

The main conclusion drawn from Figure 24.3 is that there is relative stability in the emphasis of pledge fulfilment within governments. That is, governments keep promises related to different political areas in similar proportions. In particular, the first government of António Guterres (PS, 1995) or that of António Costa (PS, 2015), the ones with the highest level of promises kept, tend to have percentages of fulfilment (full and partial) of about 80 per cent or more in all policy areas under analysis. At the other end of the spectrum, the performance of the PSD/CDS coalition in 2002-2005 shows the lowest level of compliance concerning all policy issues within our sample of governments (in total, this government only fully or partially fulfilled 30 per cent of their campaign pledges). Two main factors might have contributed to this overall low level of compliance. The first and most obvious factor is that this government did not complete its term and, for that reason, it did not have enough time to fully implement its programme. Secondly, this government was characterized by high ministerial instability. It was led by Durão Barroso between 2002 and 2004, and by Santana Lopes between 2004 and 2005, while still being considered a single executive, as it counted on the same party support and there were no elections between both leaderships. When Santana Lopes replaced Durão Barroso as prime minister, he reshuffled most of the ministers and changed the previous portfolios as a sign of modernization (Lopes, 2006: 89). This instability at the ministerial level might have contributed to such low performance. There were other governments that did not complete their terms (PS 1999 and PS 2009), or that faced external financial intervention due to the economic crisis (PSD/CDS, 2011), which certainly affected the executives' leeway to implement their electoral programmes. However, promise fulfilment was not affected in any of

these cases as much as in the previous coalition (those socialist governments fully or partially fulfilled, respectively, 51 and 60 per cent of their manifestos, and the PSD/CDS coalition of 2011 fully or partially fulfilled 61 per cent).

Since parties have strong incentives to behave strategically regarding their more emblematic areas (Budge, 2015), they are expected to place more emphasis in certain areas to the detriment of others in their manifestos. However, government parties show a strong tendency towards overlap with regard to issue emphasis. For example, the CDS/PP (the conservatives) places more emphasis on 'justice and home affairs', followed by 'government and public administration' in their electoral platforms (respectively 22 and 22 per cent of the party's promises between 1995-2015). The PS and the PSD are aligned when they place greatest emphasis on 'government and public administration' issues (respectively, 16 per cent and 23 per cent of their manifesto pledges), followed by 'education and culture' (16 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively), and thirdly to 'justice and home affairs' (10 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively). After those, the PS gives more prominence to 'health' (7 per cent) and the PSD to 'macroeconomics' (8 per cent), with the remaining issues ranking differently in each of the two parties' programmes. Furthermore, among the policy areas analysed in Figure 24.3, 'health' and 'environment and agriculture' have the lower salience of government parties taken globally (representing, respectively, 5 and 7 per cent of all pledges in manifestos). 'Labour and unemployment', 'energy', 'transportation', 'defence', 'foreign trade', or 'international affairs' have even lower relevance in government parties' manifestos.

Despite the importance of salience in party competition, these results show high consistency across parties (and over time) in terms of how electoral platforms are developed. That is, parties tend to place similar emphasis on the same issues when it comes to the proportion of pledges in manifestos. These conclusions are in line with research that has shown that government parties distribute policy attention differently across issues, following similar patterns in issue

salience between them, not only in Portugal (Belchior, 2020: 30-32), but also elsewhere (e.g. Jennings et al., 2011).

24.5 The Link Between Portuguese Public Opinion and Parties' Policy Attention

Another line of research on representation in Portugal refers to the study of policy attention (based on the frequency with which policy issues are mentioned by political actors). Studies on policy attention have been mainly devoted to understanding how parties compete by selectively emphasizing specific policy issues to the detriment of others (Budge, 2015). Part of these studies relate to representation, assessing the correspondence between public opinion and parties policy attention (e.g. Bonafont and Palau, 2011; Spoon and Klüver, 2014). In this line of research, the work carried out on Portuguese parties' policy attention with regard to public opinion is quite recent. Findings suggest the prevalence of a reasonable level of party-voter correspondence, highlighting, in some cases, the importance of the media in the process of representation.

By looking at governments' policy attention measured by press releases, Borghetto and Belchior found significant congruence between the executive's agenda and government parties' electoral platforms. Besides responding to campaign manifestos, the executive's agenda also takes into consideration mainstream opposition issue priorities, but only when the media focus on them (Borghetto and Belchior, 2020). Another study focused on manifestos to assess how much parties respond to public opinion (Belchior, 2020). It demonstrates that the effect of public opinion on policy emphasis in manifesto pledges somewhat increases when the media devote more attention to the issue, although this does not happen consistently across all parties – it is important for opposition parties, but not for government. This finding reinforces previous research reiterating that public opinion does not seem to be relevant when setting the government parties' agenda (Klüver and Spoon, 2016).

Partially aligning with these results, and by comparing parliamentary matters in Italy, Spain and Portugal, Borghetto and Russo concluded that citizens' priorities (as well as manifestos) are relevant predictors of how parties distribute their attention across issues between elections, especially among opposition parties. This is especially true when public opinion priorities become more concentrated on the economy as a result of an economic downturn (Borghetto and Russo, 2018). Also based on parliamentary questions, Borghetto and colleagues found that MPs tend to be responsive to their constituencies on matters of unemployment and crime when their district is affected by these problems (Borghetto et al., 2021). Studying Portugal as a least-likely case, as Portuguese institutional mechanisms do not encourage strong links between MPs and constituents, this study shows that geographic representation is not determined by the existence of institutional incentives and that other factors should be taken into account (see also, for a similar conclusion on localism in legislators' speeches: Fernandes et al., 2020).

Similarly to research on MP-voter congruence or on electoral promise fulfilment, the study of representation based on political attention has found reasonable levels of correspondence between parties and public opinion.

24.6 Roles of Representation

Finally, the analysis of the roles of representation directly relates to the intensity of the connection between representatives and the represented (Andeweg, 2014). Representatives in Portugal guide their activity by national, individualistic and party-centred principles of representation to the detriment of their constituency, reflecting the constitutional provision of representing the country as a whole (Teixeira et al., 2012; Espírito-Santo and Lisi, 2015: 436-441). Research on the roles of representation has especially concluded that the Portuguese deputies' individual political goals, particularly the quest for re-election, are the most important driving forces determining the prevalence of a certain style (whose interests are represented)

and focus (the territorial – or other – level of representation) of representation (Brack et al., 2012; Teixeira et al., 2012; Fernandes et al., 2018).

In particular, Fernandes et al. (2018) suggest that representation focus is not static over time. Portuguese representatives are strategic in their behaviour when tabling parliamentary questions, adapting the focus of representation as election day approaches to help their re-election. More specifically, the representatives who are electorally more vulnerable are more likely to focus on their district, a tendency that increases with election proximity.

The 2009 economic crisis changed the patterns of representation among both voters and deputies. Surprisingly, the shift was toward greater proximity between representatives and voters. On the one hand, greater deputy-voter congruence was observed after the crisis had broken out on issues involving representation (Belchior et al., 2016). On the other hand, after the emergence of the crisis, the deputies appeared to better represent the interests of the general population, to the detriment of those of their party (Teixeira et al., 2012; Espírito-Santo and Lisi, 2015). There are no more recent studies available to allow us to support the prevalence of these trends after the crisis has passed.

24.6 Conclusion

This chapter focused on substantive representation in Portugal. The general conclusion is that reasonable levels of correspondence between parties and electorates tend to prevail, whether we look at ideological and policy congruence, or the fulfilment of electoral promises, or even at the levels of political attention. Furthermore, the data suggests that the levels of correspondence remain relatively stable over time.

Two main reasons may contribute to understanding the apparent paradox between the reasonable results reached so far and citizens' pessimism regarding the representation process. One aspect relates to the studies' methodological constraints. In addition to the aforementioned limitations of congruence studies, so far research has not paid enough attention to the most prominent issues for citizens. In other words, we do not yet know whether representatives' correspondence remains reasonably high when it comes to issues that are highly important to citizens. Additionally, studies have mostly discarded citizens who do not vote or who have no party affiliation, as the measurements have mainly been based on the party or MP-voter link. Most likely, these individuals feel less represented than those linked to a party. The fact that less attention is being paid to these two aspects is relevant because there is a good chance that it may be contributing to over-inflating representation in Portugal. A second and more prosaic explanation lies in the psychological tendency of individuals to have negative biases towards political evaluations and perceptions (Lau, 1982). Individuals seem to attach more importance to negative information compared to positive, and to be more motivated to negatively perceive and evaluate the political sphere. This tendency may also help to explain the paradox, insofar as citizens' perceptions of the representation process may be somewhat skewed.

The study of representation in Portugal is not, however, limited to substantive representation. There is also an important line of research on descriptive representation, particularly with regard to the representation of women (e.g. Verge, 2013; Espírito-Santo, 2016; Espírito-Santo and Santos, 2021). Other lines of research relate to electoral rules and political recruitment (e.g. Teixeira, 2009; Freire and Meirinho, 2012; Lobo, 2018), and to political perceptions (e.g. Pétry et al., 2018; Belchior, 2019).

We conclude this chapter by briefly presenting three main limitations of the work carried out in Portugal so far. Firstly, given the relatively late development of this research area in Portugal, longitudinal analyses are still scarce, conditioning the identification and consolidation of trends.

This has particularly impacted on the ability to carry out studies on dynamic representation (Stimson et al., 1995), that is, on governments' response to changes in public opinion preferences over time. Secondly, comparative studies have also been limited, being largely restricted to southern European democracies (Spain and Greece). Finally, studies on the impact of political representation are scarce, namely on the quality of democracy. It is thus advisable that future research develops methodological strategies that allow for the longitudinal and comparative study of representation in Portugal, as well as its implications.

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¹ For example, data from the 2019 European Electoral Study shows that only 5 per cent of Portuguese respondents say they followed the campaign for the 2019 European elections very closely, and only 10 per cent admit to being very interested in politics. Out of the 28 European countries in the study, only eight and three countries, respectively, present lower percentages regarding these matters (available at: <http://europeanelectionstudies.net/european-election-studies/ees-2019-study/voter-study-2019>).

² Portuguese Electoral Study, 2019, available at: <https://dados.rcaap.pt/handle/10400.20/2080>.

³ Similarly, more recent data on this indicator, from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems – module 3, 2006-2011, places Portugal in the 23rd position, out of a sample of 41 countries (available at: <https://cses.org/data-download/cses-module-3-2006-2011-2/>).

⁴ In both cases, the data reports to 2019.

⁵ Especially in Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the UK, as well as in Canada.

⁶ Data from the projects 'Party Pledges and Democratic Accountability' and 'Public Preferences and Policy Decision-Making'. See <http://www.comparativeagendas.net/portugal>.

⁷ As per common practice, we consider as 'fulfilled' the cumulative promises that were fully fulfilled and those partially fulfilled.

⁸ Calculated as the number of pledges fulfilled within a certain policy area, divided by all pledges in that area, multiplied by 100.