

# ROOTED IN THE PAST: HISTORICAL LEGACIES AND MEMORY POLICY DEBATES IN POST-AUTHORITARIAN PORTUGAL

Arraigado en el pasado: legados históricos y debates  
sobre políticas de memoria en la Portugal  
postautoritaria

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## **Abstract**

This article examines how memory issues, particularly transitional justice bills, are debated and decided in national parliaments, focusing on the historical roots of political elites and parties. Drawing on the concept of authoritarian successor parties (Loxton, 2015), we argue that the presence or absence of these parties influences the approval of transitional justice laws. In cases where no such parties exist, as in Portugal, we analyze how political parties ideologically aligned with the previous regime—but not directly linked to it—navigate the “authoritarian stigma”. We hypothesize that these parties may support transitional justice bills, even against their preferences, to distance themselves from the authoritarian past. To explore this, we conduct a qualitative analysis of transitional justice bills debated in the Portuguese parliament since 1976, a rare context with no authoritarian successor parties and a strong authoritarian stigma arising from the democratic transition. Our findings reveal that right-wing parties, despite not being successor parties, generally avoid opposing transitional justice bills. The debates also highlight the emergence of a second type of stigma, enriching the understanding of how memory and transitional justice intersect with political legacies.

**Keywords**

Memory Policies; transitional justice; historical legacy; Portugal; authoritarianism; successor parties.

**Resumen**

Este artículo analiza cómo se debaten y deciden los temas de memoria en los Parlamentos nacionales, en particular los proyectos de ley de justicia transicional, centrándose en las raíces históricas de las élites políticas y los partidos. Basándonos en el concepto de *partidos sucesores autoritarios* (Loxton, 2015, 2018), argumentamos que la presencia o ausencia de estos partidos influye en la aprobación de leyes de justicia transicional. En casos donde no existen estos partidos, como en Portugal, analizamos cómo los partidos políticos ideológicamente alineados con el régimen anterior, pero no directamente vinculados a él, manejan el “estigma autoritario”. Nuestra hipótesis es que estos partidos pueden apoyar los proyectos de ley de justicia transicional, incluso en contra de sus preferencias, para distanciarse del pasado autoritario. Para explorar esto, realizamos un análisis cualitativo de los proyectos de ley de justicia transicional debatidos en el Parlamento portugués desde 1976, un contexto poco común donde no existen partidos sucesores autoritarios y donde un fuerte estigma autoritario surgió durante la transición democrática. Nuestros hallazgos revelan que los partidos de derecha, a pesar de no ser partidos sucesores, generalmente evitan oponerse a los proyectos de ley de justicia transicional. Los debates también destacan la aparición de un segundo tipo de estigma, lo que enriquece la comprensión de cómo la memoria y la justicia transicional se intersectan con los legados políticos.

**Palabras clave**

Políticas de memoria; justicia transicional; legado histórico; Portugal; autoritarismo; partidos sucesores.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on how memory issues are debated in national parliaments. Our main argument is that, to explain opposition and support for memory issues, particularly transitional justice bills, one must consider the historical roots of political elites and parties represented in parliament, namely their connections to the authoritarian regime. Authoritarian successor parties (Loxton, 2015), as they have been defined in the literature, are present in most post-authoritarian and post-communist democracies, and this is expected to impact politics and political competition. So far, we know little about how their presence or absence in parliament affects transitional justice issues.

To examine this topic, it is crucial to consider the various types of connections that political parties may have with a previous authoritarian regime. The existing literature has extensively explored the pathways and transformations of authoritarian successor parties, emphasizing the non-linear and complex nature of their historical roots and political trajectories. Ishiyama (1995) examines how former communist parties in post-Soviet and post-communist democracies often redefine themselves ideologically to appeal to new constituencies while navigating their authoritarian legacies. Loxton (2015, 2018) has expanded this idea to cover all types of authoritarian legacies beyond the post-communist world. Tavits and Letki (2009) explore how these legacies influence party competition and voter alignment, particularly in the early stages of democratization. Additionally, Houghton and Deegan-Krause (2015) provide insights into how these parties negotiate their identities, often oscillating between continuity and transformation. In a similar line, Grzymala-Busse (2002) discusses how these parties often adapt through rebranding or ideological shifts to remain politically viable in new democratic contexts. Nalepa (2010) highlights how these parties' connections to the

previous regime can result in internal vulnerabilities, such as being susceptible to blackmail due to unresolved scandals or “skeletons in the closet”, which in turn shape their behavior and policy positions. The resistance or willingness of these parties to confront their authoritarian past, as well as their strategic decisions regarding memory policies and transitional justice, reflect broader struggles over legitimacy and political realignment.

These works collectively underscore that the historical roots of parties and elites are shaped by a dynamic interplay of adaptation, stigmatization, and institutional constraints. Whether parties resist condemning the past, embrace transitional justice measures, or seek to reframe their historical narratives, their stances on memory policies are profoundly influenced by these legacies. This intricate relationship between historical continuities and political realignments makes the study of authoritarian successor parties a key area for understanding transitional justice and memory politics.

What happens when there are no authoritarian successor parties? Even in contexts where such parties are absent, it is likely that political parties aligned with the ideological spectrum of the former regime will emerge. These parties may or may not have absorbed segments of the previous elite, even at lower levels and remain associated with the legacy of the old regime. This raises critical questions: Should we expect these parties to experience an “authoritarian stigma” due to their perceived proximity to the former regime? And how might this stigma influence their stance on transitional justice and memory debates? In this article, we address this often-overlooked category of parties, whose role in shaping memory politics has received limited scholarly attention.

While we emphasize the importance of historical roots in explaining the receptivity or rejection of memory policy proposals, we also acknowledge the significance of other factors, particularly those rooted in contemporary politics and overlapping legacies. These dynamics may include evolving party strategies, public opinion, and the broader political environment, which interact with historical legacies in complex ways.

Our core question is: How is transitional justice debated in parliament when no authoritarian successor parties are present? We hypothesize that parties ideologically aligned with the previous regime, while not formal successor parties, may nonetheless bear the weight of authoritarian stigma. Yet due to the lack or low impact of links to the previous regime, these parties might prefer to support transitional justice bills, even when such support contradicts their ideological preferences, as a strategic move to distance themselves from the authoritarian past. This dynamic highlights the interplay between historical legacies and contemporary political calculations, shedding light on the behavior of an underexplored group of political actors in transitional justice debates.

In order to examine this question, we qualitatively analyze the bills discussed at the Portuguese parliament since 1976. Portugal is a rare example among post-authoritarian democracies where no authoritarian successor party exists and where a strong authoritarian stigma arose during the transition. We first offer an overview of how transitional justice bills performed in parliament and then include examples of debates that occurred during the discussion and approval of those bills. The arguments used by the deputies and the voting patterns of the parties demonstrate that despite not being authoritarian successor parties, right-wing parties usually choose not to oppose transitional justice bills. In addition, another type of stigma emerged during the debates that offer an interesting dimension to the analysis that should be considered in the future.

The next section of the article examines the historical roots of the main Portuguese political parties. We then present the empirical analysis, starting with a longitudinal overview of transitional justice bills and laws passed in the parliament and then focusing on the discursive strategies used by the four main parties, two on the right and two on the left during the debate. We conclude with some ideas for future research.

## II. THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF PORTUGUESE PARTIES

In Portugal, there has never been a strong authoritarian legacy within the parliamentary elite. The Estado Novo, the dictatorship created by Oliveira Salazar in 1930 and inherited by Marcello Caetano in 1968, was long-lasting but ended abruptly. On April 25, 1974, a *coup* orchestrated by military captains led to the immediate dissolution of the regime and triggered a process of strong rejection of the Estado Novo's legacies. That very day, the rupture began. For the opposition to the Estado Novo—a politically engaged segment of the population—the dictatorship's image was unquestionably negative, and the need to start anew was obvious. These were people for whom Salazarist indoctrination had not taken hold. Although socialized under the Estado Novo, they embraced opposing ideas. They were communists, anarcho-syndicalists, Marxist-Leninists, Trotskyists, progressive Catholics, socialists and republicans; they defended ideals that stood in stark contrast to those of the Estado Novo and fought for them for decades. They were imprisoned, tortured, subjected to forced labor, dismissed from jobs, expelled from universities, forced into clandestinity and exile (Pinto and Raimundo, 2016). For much of the general population, on whom Salazarist indoctrination was more effective, the negative image of the dictatorship did not arise spontaneously. It was gradually constructed after the coup by the military captains. Up until the

founding elections of democracy on April 25, 1975, and even beyond that, television, newspapers, and radio worked hard to create an unequivocally negative image of the dictatorship. This image would not have emerged with such intensity spontaneously, as the less politically engaged population, geographically more distant from the major cities, was less exposed to the repressive nature of the dictatorship. To combat this lack of awareness, the military also engaged in a campaign, traveling across the country from north to south with a clear message: fascism was bad, and there were political forces that wanted to bring it back, which must be fought against (Almeida, 2008; Raimundo *et al.*, 2021).

From the intent to create a democratic political culture that categorically rejected any new political projects resembling the one that had shaped the country for more than four decades, an “authoritarian stigma” was born. In this process, the entire ideological right was stigmatized and marked by a negative connotation, even though, unlike in most other democracies, there was no heir party to Salazarism or Marcelism in either an organizational or ideological sense. The single party created by Salazar, which in 1974 was called the National Popular Action (Acção Nacional Popular), was dissolved on the very day of April 25 and the few attempts to form new parties were halted in the first months following the captains’ *coup* (Marchi and Alves, 2023). Hence, for nearly half a century of democracy, more than half of the Portuguese parliament has been dominated, first and foremost, by elites and political parties with ties to the opposition or semi-opposition to the Estado Novo, the authoritarian regime that ruled Portugal from 1930 to 1974. These connections with the opposition or semi-opposition were concentrated in three parties: the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), the oldest party, founded in 1921 before the 1926 military coup that gave rise to the authoritarian regime; a Marxist-Leninist orthodox party whose members were severely persecuted by the regime (Lisi, 2011), its parliamentary group has ranged from a maximum of 44 deputies to a minimum of 5. The Socialist Party (PS), the second oldest party and one of the two largest Portuguese parties, was created in 1973 by opposition members in exile and is a center-left party; its parliamentary group has never had fewer than 57 deputies and has reached up to 121. The Social Democratic Party (PSD), a center-right party created weeks after the Carnation Revolution by members of the so-called semi-opposition, is the other major party, with a parliamentary group ranging from no fewer than 73 to as many as 148 deputies. Despite its name, it is not a left-wing party. The story of this party is more complex as apart from the semi-opposition, it accepted former Estado Novo ministers but also antifascists (Paris and Silveira, 2021).

Those three parties dominated the Portuguese parliament during four decade together with the CDS (Centro Democrático Social), originally

composed of right-wing sectors with some ties to the Estado Novo elite, even though they were not representatives of the regime's hardline or Salazarists in an organizational sense (Paris *et al.*, 2019). At the party's core was a group of individuals linked to one of the reformist wings of Marcelism, specifically the informal political group (more technocratic than political in nature) that revolved around Diogo Freitas do Amaral and Adelino Amaro da Costa in the final years of the Estado Novo. Although some individuals associated with this current decided to remain out of politics after April 25, the CDS did have within its ranks a group labeled by *Expresso* as the "new Marcelist right", composed of young figures who collaborated with Marcello Caetano's governments and, on the eve of the regime's collapse, included close collaborators of two rising young ministers, Silva Pinto and Veiga Simão (Paris *et al.*, 2019).

Consequently, the Right represented in the Portuguese parliament has neither been heir to the Estado Novo nor nostalgic for it, although a part of the Salazarist and Marcelist elite that accepted the democratic game, particularly at the local level, did concentrate within the two main right-wing parties that dominated political life until 2022<sup>1</sup>. However, the right was keen to distance itself from these ties and present itself as fully democratic, especially to avoid being successfully associated with the previous regime.

These historical roots, however relevant, represents just a small share of the main parties' identity. Another important share of their identity was formed during the transition to democracy (Jalali, 2007). The *coup* led to a state crisis, the subsequent dilution of authority, and abuses committed by political actors who considered themselves legitimized by a supposed "revolutionary legitimacy". This resulted in a division between those who aligned with this legitimacy and those who rejected it. The political parties that have dominated the parliament for nearly five decades all have historical roots in the democratic transition and carry the legacy of that period. While the PCP and PS clearly and unequivocally share antifascist roots, the same cannot be said of their transition legacies. This era saw the nationalization of key industries, the expropriation of private property, land occupations, and instances of violence, events that led some individuals and families to go into exile. The turbulent period of 1974-75 was marked by multiple coup attempts, widespread collective action, and significant social upheaval (Palacios Cerezales, 2003). Purges were established within businesses independently of the unions, and the PCP shared control of these bodies with the parties of the extreme

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<sup>1</sup> In the legislative elections of January 2022, new right-wing parties solidified their place in the parliament, changing the landscape of Portuguese politics on that side of the ideological spectrum.

Left. These commissions implemented the great majority of ‘wild’ purges, which the PCP often did not control (Pinto, 2006). But the party has ever since been accused of having attempted to hijack the democratization process. In the battle between revolutionary and democratic forces, the PCP was isolated by an anti-communist alliance formed by the PS, PSD, and CDS (Centro Democrático e Social). PSD and CDS are unquestionably on the opposite side, frequently claiming that the PCP attempted to impose a new type of dictatorship in the country, while the PS struggles to know whether to align with their former anti-communist allies or with the antifascists. This represented a dual legacy (Pinto, 2006).

After April 25, 1974, the widespread dissemination of a negative image of the Salazar and Caetano dictatorship, identified as right-wing, caused the right that entered parliament in the first elections to frequently deviate from its true beliefs, fearing it would not survive in the politically radicalized environment, particularly concerning the handling of the Estado Novo’s legacy. This deviation was particularly intense during the months following April 25 until November 25, 1975, but it extended well beyond that period, with repercussions within the parliament, first elected in 1976. In 1979, when the right first won the elections, its management of the authoritarian stigma changed, leading to a gradual shift in discourse and a progressive willingness to counterattack the left from a rhetorical standpoint.

As we will show in the following section, the discursive strategy of right-wing parties in most cases did not find parallel in their voting patterns.

### III. DEBATING AND VOTING MEMORY BILLS IN THE PORTUGUESE PARLIAMENT

In 50 years of democracy, legislative proposals on the memory of the authoritarian regime and transitional justice in Portugal have covered various areas. These include the punishment of former agents of the dictatorship’s political police (PIDE-DGS), the granting of pensions to former regime opponents and their immediate family members, the restoration of professional and pension rights lost due to opposition to the dictatorship, the management of the Estado Novo archives, the construction of new museums, and the honoring of figures from the opposition (Raimundo and Morais, 2024).

Table 1 shows the number of transitional justice laws and resolutions approved since 1976, including their origin (party/parties that sponsored it), voting (how it was voted at final vote), number, and summary. The table shows that around half of these laws and resolutions, which are highly symbolic, were approved unanimously, regardless of their origin.



Table 1. *Transitional Justice Laws and Resolutions approved by the Portuguese Parliament (1976-2022)*

YEAR	ORIGIN	VOTING	NUMBER	SUMMARY
1977	PS	Approved Unanimously	Law 1/77, 12 January (DR 9/77)	Introduces changes to DL 349/76: Government members directly responsible for criminal activities of PIDE/DGS and LP; employees belonging to the categories of managerial personnel and technical criminal investigation personnel, superior and auxiliary up to brigade chief; doctors; collaborators; those who used the services of PID64E/DGS causing moral or material damage to any natural or legal person.
1978	PCP / PSD (joint discussion)	In favour: PS and PCP; Abstention: CDS; Against: PSD	Law 64/78, 6 October (DR 230/78)	Executes # 4 of article 46 of the Constitution, in the part that prohibits Organizations that embrace fascist ideology
1986	-	-	Law 49/86, de 31 December (DR 300/86, Supl 4)	(State Budget, Article 11)– Lifelong, cumulative monthly compensation, equal to the highest amount of the national minimum wage, exempt from any deductions, upon request of the person concerned or their heirs: citizens subjected to forced labor in the Tarrafal concentration camp
1988	PS	Approved Unanimously	Law 51/88, 26 April (DR 96/88)	Reintegrates former Consul General of Portugal in Bordeaux Aristides de Sousa Mendes into the diplomatic career, posthumously
1988	CDS, PCP, PRD, PS, PSD	Approved Unanimously	Parliamentary Resolution 19/88, 12 October	Transfer of mortal remains of General Humberto Delgado to the National Pantheon
1989	PCP	Approved Unanimously	Law 26/89, 22 August (DR 192/1989)	Allocation of a lifelong allowance to citizens who participated in the revolt of January 18, 1934

YEAR	ORIGIN	VOTING	NUMBER	SUMMARY
1990	-	Approved Unanimously	Law 101/89, 29 December (DR 298/89)	(General State Budget. Article 58)—Sets a deadline: The monthly lifelong allowance to all those who died in Tarrafal provided for in article 11 of law 49/86 may be requested until December 31, 1990
1990	CDS, PCP, PEV, PRD, PS, PSD	Approved Unanimously	Parliamentary Resolution 16/90, 22 May (DR 150/90)	Establishment of a Parliamentary Committee to Monitor the Program of Transfer Ceremonies of the Deceased [same as Parliamentary Resolution 19/88]
1991	PSD	Approved Unanimously	Law 4/91, 17 January (DR 14/91)	Dissolves the Service for the Coordination of the Extinction of PIDE/DGS and LP and integrates the Archives of PIDE/DGS into the Torre do Tombo Archives; determines that public access to the archives can only take place from 25/4/94; the archive is subject to the right to protection of the right to a good name and personal and family privacy of citizens
1993	-	-	Law 75/93, 20 December (DR 295/93)	(General State Budget) Article 8—Nullifies the deadline: The lifelong monthly allowance provided to all those who died in Tarrafal, in article 11, law 49/86, can be requested without a time limit
1995	CDS, PCP, PS, PSD	In favour: PS, PSD, CDS, Against: PCP	Parliamentary Resolution 24/1995, 19 April (DR 92/95)	Parliamentary inquiry into the possible diversion of information and documents from PIDE/DGS and LP Archives to the KGB

YEAR	ORIGIN	VOTING	NUMBER	SUMMARY
1997	PS	In favour: PS and PCP; Abstentions: PSD and CDS	Law 20/97, 19 June (DR 139/97)	Special counting of time in prison and underground (in Portugal or abroad) for political reasons for old age or disability pension purposes to individuals engaged in political activities for democracy, victims of police persecution hindering normal professional and social activity between May 28, 1925, and April 25, 1974
2008	PS	Unanimously	Parliamentary Resolution 24/2008, 26 June (DR 122/2008)	Disclosure of the struggles for freedom in resistance to dictatorship and for democracy to future generations
2012	BE, CDS, PS, PSD	Unanimously	Parliamentary Resolution 119/2012	Rehabilitation in the Army of Infantry Captain Artur Carlos Barros Basto, who was subjected to political-religious segregation in 1937.
2015	PCP	In favour: BE, PS and PCP; Abstentions: PSD and CDS	Parliamentary Resolution 87/2015, 13 de July (DR 134/2015)	Recommends the government, while maintaining the Military Museum of Porto, to identify the paths and rooms used by PIDE and to pay tribute to those who passed through the building of heroism and resisted fascism there
2015	BE	In favour: BE, PS and PCP; Abstentions: PSD and CDS	Parliamentary Resolution 90/2015, 14 de July (DR 135/2015)	Recommends the government to include the memory of political persecution at the Military Museum of Oporto
2017	PCP	In favour: BE, PS and PCP; Abstentions: PSD and CDS	Parliamentary Resolution 118/2017, 14 June (DR 114/2017)	Recommends the Government to recover, requalify, and enhance the Fort of Peniche and preserve its history

YEAR	ORIGIN	VOTING	NUMBER	SUMMARY
2018	BE	In favour: PE, BE, PCP, PEV, PAN; Against: PSD, CDS	Law 28/2018, 16 July (DR 135/2018)	Restores the possibility of applying for reinstatement in their functions under DL 173/74, of April 26 to Military personnel and former military personnel
2019	BE	In favour: BE, PS and PCP; Abstentions: PSD; Against: CDS	Parliamentary Resolution 153/2019, 22 August (DR 160/2019)	Recommends the Government to create a museum of memory of resistance to fascism in the property where the delegation of the former PIDE/DGS operated in Porto, integrating it into a National Network of Resistance Museums

*Note:* 1) Some of the initiatives were sponsored by small parties that are not included in the analysis. This information has been added for accuracy but they will not be mentioned in the text; 2) State budget laws are not identified by origin and voting because they are significantly broader than the article included in the table.

*Source:* Own elaboration.

Between 1976 and 2023, 82 % of the resolutions submitted to the Portuguese Parliament were scheduled, debated, and approved<sup>2</sup>. It is important to note that parliamentary resolutions are merely recommendations to the government<sup>3</sup>; they do not have the force of law, although they carry symbolic power. Since they do not have legal force, they are easier for parties to approve compared to law “projects” and “proposals”<sup>4</sup>, which had a much lower approval rate of only 37 %. In 55 % of the cases, these proposals expired at the end of the legislative session, due to a lack of political opportunity, inability to gather sufficient political support, or even because the proposal was abandoned or replaced by another. Few bills that were scheduled for debate and voting were

<sup>2</sup> The Assembly of the Republic is party-centered. Deputies must adhere to the voting direction indicated by the parliamentary leader, although they may occasionally diverge from it. For this reason, voting records are done by party, with the names of deputies being listed only when there is a dissenting vote.

<sup>3</sup> Resolutions of the Assembly of the Republic may also have other purposes, such as the ratification of international treaties or the authorization for the President of the Republic to leave the national territory, but in such cases, they are initiated by the President of the Assembly of the Republic.

<sup>4</sup> The former are initiated by parliamentary groups, while the latter are initiated by the government

rejected in general (12%). Portuguese parties seem to prefer not to schedule their proposals unless they are sure they have the necessary support for approval.

This level of consensus can be explained in part due to the absence of authoritarian successor parties and the presence of a strong authoritarian stigma. Due to the strong presence of Left and extreme-Left groups in the first years of the transition, and the overwhelming demand for a clear break with the past, the centre of the political spectrum was deviated to the left, and right-wing parties did not dare present themselves before the electorate with their real ideology (Raimundo, 2023). This left a strong imprint in Portuguese politics that endured for many years and affected how transitional justice bills were debated. As we shall see below, the political-economic context, the composition of the government and parliament, party leaderships, the language of the proposals, and the political skill of negotiators help explain the level of tension in debates and whether the “authoritarian stigma” was mobilized, but not necessarily the approval of the initiatives. Often, securing the necessary support meant obtaining abstentions from the right. Ultimately, there has been very little opposition to proposals presented by the left, and even significant levels of consensus around memory policy projects (Raimundo, 2021). By this we mean the absence of blocks that would prevent the approval of proposed measures. In other words, on several occasions, the right refrained from using veto powers, allowed for unanimous approval, and generally limited itself to presenting legal (and rarely political) arguments to justify its reservations. In other cases, the “authoritarian stigma” was not strong enough to influence the right-wing’s parliamentary actions, leading them to employ alternative strategies to resist it. In general, the left, represented by both the PCP and the PS, has sought to repair and commemorate its struggle for democracy, and the right, represented by the PSD and by the conservative party Centro Democrático e Social (CDS), the fourth oldest party in Portuguese democracy, has rarely opposed this, preferring instead to counter with the legacy of the transition. The survival strategy used by the right was to mobilize the memory of the democratic transition as a political weapon against part of the left, thus inverting the authoritarian stigma against them. The right primarily adopted this inverse legitimization strategy against the communist left, accusing it of attempting to establish a “dictatorship of the opposite sign” during the transition, and the center-left of not sufficiently distancing itself from that period and those actions. They did so persistently, in an effort to reclaim their legitimacy, highlighting their own role in the events that, on a single day, put Portugal back on the path of European liberal democracies: November 25, 1975. In the next section, we illustrate this idea with examples from bills that aimed to introduce reparation or acknowledgement.

# 1. MOBILIZING PORTUGUESE PARTIES' HISTORICAL BAGGAGE WHEN DEBATING REPARATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT BILLS

As stated earlier, the Portuguese parliament began debating transitional justice bills as soon as 1976. Although that was the year in which the parliament began to operate, it was not before 1982, when the new democratic Constitution was revised for the first time, that Portuguese democracy began to stabilize, as the military finally returned to the barracks and political institutions could operate without their influence. Hence, we focus on the period since the 1982 Constitutional revision to find illustrations of how the authoritarian stigma played and how political parties on the same ideological spectrum as the former regime reacted to initiatives that aimed to acknowledge and compensate the victims of the authoritarian regime.

In 1986, under a right-wing minority government, the PCP used the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Tarrafal concentration camp to push for the acknowledgement of the suffering of those who had been imprisoned there. That year, the parliament proposed a vote of condemnation and the voting statements from all parliamentary benches, from left to right, aligned in condemning the Estado Novo. While PSD's language was closer to that of the left, referring to the regime as "the oppressive dictatorship", CDS was less negative emphasizing the "relative mildness of the authoritarian regime". This distinction, however, only existed on a rhetorical level as the condemnation was unanimous.

That same year, the parliament also approved financial compensation for the victims of Tarrafal, again without facing resistance. In the State Budget law passed on December 31, 1986, Article 1 granted a lifelong pension equivalent to the national minimum wage, exempt from contributions to all victims or immediate family members who had been subjected to forced labor at Tarrafal.

While inside the parliament the right-wing seemed willing and ready to facilitate the recovery of the memory of the fight for democracy and compensation for the victims of the Estado Novo, PSD's behavior in government was different. For instance, also in 1986, the government overturned a decision made by the previous PS-PSD coalition government, when a pension for exceptional merits in the defense of freedom and democracy was granted to 22 antifascists. These were people who had resisted the Estado Novo during its early years and, as a result, were part of the first wave of deportations to the Tarrafal camp. Their lives were irreversibly changed because of fighting against the regime in the early stages of its institutionalization, when repression was move severe. They either died in Tarrafal or spent eight to nine years there until they were amnestied in 1945 following international pressure. They had

very few links with any party with parliamentary representation other than the PCP. The granting of these pensions had been confirmed symbolically by a decree issued on the 10th anniversary of April 25. Under Cavaco Silva's leadership, the government decided to shelve the pensions and deny the financial awards to all of them, apparently against what the majority in parliament was willing to do.

PSD's position regarding the role of the state in honoring the antifascists was therefore ambiguous. Yet, because neither PSD nor CDS were technically authoritarian successor parties, and in face of a right-wing majority in government, the PCP chose not to use the authoritarian stigma against the two parties and instead publicly stated their belief that PSD and CDS had "fully converted to democracy". Their MP further stated, "I have no doubts that the Portuguese right repudiates the crimes —some of which it may not have even known about— committed by Salazar's regime".

The strategy of the right in parliament was therefore not to reject acknowledgement and reparation. Instead, they wished to share that historical baggage. In 1988, the parliament approved two other initiatives to honor important figures from the opposition to the Estado Novo not directly linked to the PCP, trying to shift the focus of the antifascist and freedom fighting baggage from the Communists. One was a law that posthumously reinstated former consul Aristides de Sousa Mendes, who had been dismissed by Salazar after helping refugees flee nazi-occupied France in Bordeaux, into the diplomatic service. The other was a resolution commemorating the 30th anniversary of the presidential campaign that led to the assassination of the main opposition candidate, Humberto Delgado, recommending that the government move his remains to the National Pantheon. The latter initiative was proposed by the Social Democrats who presented Delgado as "a legendary figure in our collective imagination" and someone not affiliated with any political party. Despite the consensus around the symbolism of Delgado as a freedom fighter, the CDS wanted to make it a symbol "against all forms of totalitarianism", thus emphasizing their position regarding Communism. Although willing to acknowledge and vote in favour of transitional justice bills, CDS was constantly focused on diminishing the PCP by emphasizing their role in the transition to democracy and their alleged attempt to establish a new type of dictatorship in the country.

In 1989, just months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) submitted another bill, this time to compensate the victims of January 18, 1934. That was the day when an illegal general strike against the Estado Novo was brutally repressed, resulting in the arrest of nearly 700 people, many of whom were later sent to the concentration camp in Tarrafal. Many of the victims of this episode were members of the PCP,

which led the party to propose financial compensation to those who still lived as well as their close relatives. Portugal was now being governed by the first single-party absolute majority, won by the Social Democratic Party (PSD) again under the leadership of Aníbal Cavaco Silva. The political climate seemed now less favorable to those seeking to preserve the memory of the resistance and honor those who fought against fascism, yet PSD's absolute majority had no negative impact on transitional justice in parliament and the PCP's bill was unanimously approved less than three months after being submitted to parliament and the absence of an authoritarian successor party is a strong factor.

After the PCP successfully passed its bill to compensate the victims of the January 18, 1934 uprising, the Socialist Party (PS) felt the need to compensate "their own". In 1994, they proposed a bill to compensate those who had been detained, imprisoned, gone into hiding, or been exiled during the dictatorship. But this time, at the end of Cavaco Silva's third term as PSD leader, the bill was met with indifference from the right-wing parliamentary majority and was never scheduled. This was the first time it was clear that the right might be less willing to support the Socialists attempt at recovering their anti-fascist baggage than the Communists'.

The dynamics of these debates would change more clearly after the left returned to power, in 1995. While right-wing parties voted in favor of the law that granted a pension to the victims of January 18, 1934, PSD and CDS seemed less willing to allow the PS to take the spotlight for its antifascist past and reacted more aggressively than it likely would have when it was in power. The two left-wing parties, who did not need the right's support to pass this new bill, were also less restrained in their rhetoric compared to the 1980s debates.

PS's bill could also benefit former communist opponents, but it was mainly aimed at compensating sectors represented by the PS. The bill put on the agenda in 1996, after the PS had won the elections, was more ambitious than the 1994 version. The new bill allowed for the inclusion of time spent in prison and hiding as qualifying periods for pension and disability benefits. It was the first bill to directly address the impact of imprisonment and clandestinity on pensions. This did not stop the PSD from accusing the PS of using memory politics to bolster its electoral base. At the time, the Socialist government had recently implemented a broad privatization program, which faced strong criticism within its own ranks but was praised by right-wing parties. The PSD therefore argued that the PS was instrumentalizing antifascist memory to retain support from its core electorate, arguing, "this bill trivializes the idealism, selflessness, altruism, and strength of conviction that drove so many citizens to fight for freedom and democracy". The PSD did not want to



come across as opposing a bill that aimed to compensate those who had fought against the dictatorship and made sure to emphasize not only that they were not authoritarian successor parties but also that they even incorporated former anti-fascists within their ranks. As stated by one of the MPs, “in this bench, to the great pride and honor of all of us, we have many people who fought against the previous regime as much as or more than many of those sitting in your bench”.

This is an important difference between the PSD and CDS. While the PSD could point to its antifascist credentials during such debates, this was something the CDS could never do.

Despite acknowledging the existence of anti-fascists among the social democrats, the socialist deputy was not interested in bringing the right to the anti-fascist side. Hence Pereira Marques pointed to the gap between the discourse and practice of the social democrats by questioning his interlocutor about the number of pensions “for exceptional merits in defending freedom and democracy” awarded in the 10 years of social-democratic governance. A review of government dispatches confirms that during the PSD governments there was a gap between the party in government and the party in parliament.

During the PS-PSD government led by Mário Soares the number of pensions awarded was higher. Starting from 1996, but more clearly from 1997, a new period of awarding these pensions began, peaking in 2001, with 56 pensions awarded in a single year by the socialist governments led by António Guterres. The sharp decline that followed in 2003 corresponded again to a period of PSD-CDS governance, and there was only a new resumption in 2005, again with a socialist government led by José Sócrates. From then on, due to changes to the law introduced in 2003 by the coalition government PSD-CDS led by Durão Barroso, which made it more difficult to award this pension, no new dispatches show up beyond 2013. At the very least, these data corroborate the idea of “indifference” that Pereira Marques alluded to. But the accusations made by the left during the debate went beyond that. The PCP did not just suggest that there was indifference on the part of the PSD; this time it accused the social democrats of not distancing themselves from the (authoritarian) past. Like the PS, the communist bench also questioned the awarding of pensions during Cavaco Silva’s governments but referred to another pension, intended to recognize “exceptional or relevant services rendered to the country”, which was awarded to two former political police agents and denied to a key operational of the April *coup*. This way, the PCP sought to mobilize the authoritarian stigma. “You did not seem bothered when the PSD government decided to award pensions for to former PIDE agents, denying it to Salgueiro Maia”. These former were pensions awarded in 1992 to two former inspectors of the PIDE/DGS for their “high

and notable services rendered to the Fatherland". As for Salgueiro Maia, he had received a favorable opinion from the Advisory Council of the Attorney General's Office, unanimously voted in 1989 based on the "valorous and determined behavior of the one who was dubbed the Great Operational of April 25" (Expresso, 2009). This opinion was then sent to the government, which should have approved it for the pension to be granted, yet Cavaco Silva's executive never homologated it.

In this context, PSD's strategy was not merely defensive. In addition to accusing the PS of instrumentalizing memory policies, the social democrats resorted to reverse legitimization, by confronting the socialists with their lack of concern with those who "were persecuted, imprisoned, purged, and summarily stripped of the most basic rights" in 1975. Just as the authoritarian stigma was indiscriminately mobilized by the left against the right, the legacy of the transition was also used against the socialists, not because of their responsibility, but for their lack of willingness to repair the wrongs allegedly committed by the extreme-left and the Communists.

It was the CDS that invested the most in this strategy, doing so in a provocative manner by framing the issue of the wrongs committed during the transition in terms of reconciliation and using the same language used in the bills that aimed to repair and acknowledge the victims of the Estado Novo. This generated greatest tension in the parliament. The narrative of the right-wing was that the PSD and CDS were moderate parties that had fought for democracy when it was under threat from the communists. PCP was responsible for the abuses committed in 1975 and their "victims" should be compensated. PS' lack of initiative while in government made them an accomplice.

The PCP bench responded to the CDS deputy with the authoritarian stigma, adding accusations of attempting to whitewash the past when using expressions such as "temporary interruption or violation of rights, freedoms, and guarantees" to define the New State.

The Socialists challenged the CDS to present a bill to compensate the victims of the democratic transition and the CDS did not hesitate to do so, but it did not have the support of the PSD. In July 1997, the centrist party individually presented a proposal to amend the newly passed Law 20/97, which had been approved with abstentions from the PSD and the CDS. As they had argued during the debate, the CDS maintained the idea that the only way to make the Socialist bill acceptable was to include compensation for those who had been deprived of work and pension contributions after April 25, 1974, thereby including the sectors they believed had been wronged by the left during the transition. By proposing an amendment to the existing law, they sought to maintain the structure, language, and scope of the law designed by the Socialists. It is worth noting the inclusion of a preamble that

had been present in the original bill submitted in 1994 and 1996 but disappeared from the final text of Law 20/97. Table 2 offers a comparison of the two preambles, highlighting how in both cases the victims are defined, the type of wrongdoings is described, and the goal is presented. The strategy to place both victims at the same level is clear.

Table 2. *Comparison of the preamble of the bills of the PS and the CDS to compensate the victims of the authoritarian regime*

Content	Bill to compensate the victims of the authoritarian regime (PS)	Bill to compensate the victims of the transition (CDS)
Definition of victim	During the long years of the regime that was overthrown on April 25, 1974, many Portuguese citizens were persecuted and became <i>victims of repression because of their democratic and antifascist convictions</i> .	In the two years following the overthrow of the regime that lasted until April 25, 1974, many Portuguese citizens were persecuted and became <i>victims of repression due to their democratic and anti-communist convictions</i> .
Identification of the type of wrongdoing and the wrongdoer	They were thus harmed in the exercise of their professions, removed from the public administration, prevented from teaching, and, in some cases, forced into hiding or exile, or imprisoned for long periods. This was undoubtedly the most serious situation, often dependent on arbitrary decisions <i>by the political police or covered by mock trials and unjust provisions like those regulating the infamous security measures</i> .	They were thus harmed in the exercise of their professions, removed or purged from the positions they held, prevented from teaching, forced into hiding or exile, and in some cases, imprisoned for long periods. These were undoubtedly the most serious situations, often dependent on arbitrary decisions <i>by COPCON and resulting from the use of blank arrest warrants issued by military officials</i> .

Content	Bill to compensate the victims of the authoritarian regime (PS)	Bill to compensate the victims of the transition (CDS)
Goal of the bill	It is a matter of basic justice that, more symbolically than compensatory, the State expresses the recognition of the Portuguese people to these citizens, providing for the possibility of counting <i>the time of imprisonment and hiding for political reasons toward old-age and disability pensions.</i>	It is a matter of basic justice that, more symbolically than compensatory, the State, recognizing the violation or suspension of rights, freedoms, and guarantees suffered by these citizens, provides for the possibility of counting <i>the time of imprisonment and hiding for political reasons toward the calculation and granting of old-age and disability pensions.</i>

Source: Own elaboration.

The CDS bill was never discussed and lapsed at the end of the legislative term without being reintroduced by the CDS in subsequent terms. This would be practically the last time the parliament would discuss reparation mechanisms.

From this point on, the central focus would shift primarily to museums and memorialization and on that matter right-wing parties were willing to offer their support to several legislatures, although they were all resolution proposals rather than law proposals. The case of Resolution AR 24/2008 regarding the memory of resistance and the struggle for democracy is an example of the ability of political elites to reach consensus, but it again shows how the historical roots in the transition matter. In 2006, a petition was submitted to parliament asking for the creation of “public places that preserve and disseminate the collective memory of the crimes committed by the so-called Estado Novo and of the resistance, taking advantage of the iconic locations still existing”. Specifically, they requested the preservation of former political prisons in Portugal and its former colonies, as well as the headquarters of the political police in Lisbon and Porto. This implied that the mayors of Lisbon and Oporto and the Minister of Justice would agree to transform these old buildings into memorial sites. The political context was exceptionally favorable not only because the PS had won its first absolute majority in the history of Portuguese democracy in 2005 but also because both the Minister of Justice and the Mayor of Lisbon were members of the Socialist Party particularly involved or sympathetic to the memory of the struggle against the dictatorship. The headquarters of the political police in Oporto

had to wait and are still waiting for a favourable context at the time of the writing of this article.

The socialists accepted to transform the petition into a resolution proposal. This led the other two leftist parties (PCP and BE, Bloco de Esquerda) to also draft their own projects, showing some interest in claiming ownership of the theme. However, BE, a radical left-wing party, quickly agreed to sponsor the project drafted by the Socialist Party, while the PCP pursued its own initiative. The Communists' bill differed from the one put forward by the Socialists in three ways. First, the PCP's attempt to simultaneously preserve its place in the narrative of the past and in the transition was clearly demonstrated in the Preamble, which clearly emphasized the role of the working classes, that is, the sectors that the party seeks to represent in the struggle for democracy, describing the transition as an episode in which the military managed to put into practice what workers had long been fighting for. Second, in terms of the actual content of the projects, it is evident that the former prisons of Aljube and Peniche had different meanings and represented distinct memories. While the PS proposal clearly mentioned Aljube (the former political prison where several members of the socialist opposition were imprisoned during the dictatorship), the PCP proposal specifically referred to Peniche, where some of its most notable members and the general secretary were imprisoned. Third, the PCP's intention to legislate against 'negationism' was not contemplated in the PS proposal. Eventually, the Communist Party agreed to withdraw its resolution in exchange for amendments to the socialist proposal.

On the right, there was not much reaction to the idea of approving such a project unanimously. On June 6, 2008, the parliament unanimously approved the resolution in favor of disseminating knowledge for future generations about the resistance against the dictatorship. On the day of the vote, the main proponent of the resolution, Colonel Marques Junior, was given a standing ovation by socialists, PCP, and BE, as well as part of the PSD benches. Some PSD deputies and all from the CDS applauded without standing. The position of the Portuguese right was merely expressed by remaining seated at that moment. In summary, unanimity was achieved after a negotiation that was much more difficult on the left than on the right. We might assume that if the right-wing sectors had a different profile, the negotiation process and the level of consensus would also have been different.

Resolution 24/2008 had strong symbolism because it advocated for the need to investigate and preserve the heritage "of civic combat against the Estado Novo" and of the "common struggle for freedom" in the former colonies. It also called for the construction of a museum, a route, and a memorial dedicated to this theme. Approving it meant accepting the left's narrative and the

state's role in its museologization. Behind the scenes of the negotiations, the concern was to ensure that the consensus around that initiative would not "bring trouble". The skillful negotiator from the PS sought to reassure the more right-wing sectors by confirming that there was nothing to fear; the language would be neutral, and the nature of the recommendation would be easily accepted by any democrat. Thus, the most right-wing party in the AR voted alongside the left in favor of the resolution and defended its vote as follows: "The CDS [Social Democratic Center] associates itself with this resolution project because it celebrates democracy and the struggle that led to its establishment". By being unanimously approved, Resolution 24/2008 symbolized the right's acceptance of the left's narrative. The authoritarian stigma was not raised, but the CDS's discourse ended with the legacy of the transition: "It must also be remembered by young people that, initially, after April 25, some political forces attempted to overthrow democracy and undermine it through extremist movements".

One of the most visible effects of this resolution was the opening of the Aljube Municipal Museum of Resistance and Freedom in Lisbon, approved and inaugurated under the socialist presidency. The museum is essentially focused on the movements of resistance and opposition, telling the story of those who fought against the regime, including those who were imprisoned there when Aljube was a political prison. The acceptance of the museum is a good illustration of how this level of consensus parallels the societal level. Both the first director of the Aljube Museum (2015-2020) and the current one (2020-) report that they faced no criticism, disapproval, or negative reactions from visitors or local representatives from either end of the political spectrum regarding the content or activities of the museum<sup>5</sup>. According to the first director, strongly critical anonymous messages about the museum and its history sent around 2018 were an isolated episode and originated from a person or group that chose not to identify themselves rather than openly criticize the museum's narrative. While memory museums around the world are often subject to controversies and criticism, the fact that this has not happened in Lisbon is yet another sign that the authoritarian past is a reasonably resolved issue.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This article has examined the role of parties' historical roots in shaping debates about memory policies in post-authoritarian Portugal. The literature

<sup>5</sup> Interviews with the author, March 2023, Lisbon.

highlights authoritarian successor parties as a distinct type, suggesting that there is something specific about their historical baggage that influences their behavior.

In Portugal, the right-wing parties, although having some ties to the Estado Novo, cannot be defined as direct successors of the authoritarian regime. This has allowed them to avoid the authoritarian stigma and facilitated their participation in memory policy debates. Moreover, the Portuguese right has generally been willing to let the left's narrative about the authoritarian period dominate memory policies, recognizing that challenging it too directly could be politically costly. However, they have often employed a strategy of reverse legitimization, particularly by invoking the memory of the democratic transition and the turmoil of the 1974-75 period to counterbalance the left's focus on the authoritarian past.

Despite occasional discursive tensions, accusations, and provocations, memory policies have rarely been blocked in Portugal's parliament. This is largely due to the fact that neither side benefits politically from vetoing such initiatives, leading to broad, if sometimes grudging, consensus. These dynamics reflect the dual legacies of both the authoritarian regime and the democratic transition, which continue to shape the Portuguese political landscape.

Yet most studies tend to focus narrowly on the links with the authoritarian period, overlooking the significant role the democratic transition plays in shaping collective memory and parties' positions towards that memory. Through this analysis we were able to demonstrate that the transition to democracy not only builds upon but also amplifies the legacies and memories of the authoritarian past. Transitions from authoritarianism to democracy are often periods of intense political confrontation, as various parties and elites seek to influence the direction of the new political order. During these transitions, political actors frequently advance divergent and sometimes competing projects for the country's future. Theories of democratic transition highlight that such periods are characterized by a struggle between different political forces, some of which advocate for radical transformations, while others push for more moderate or conservative reforms (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Linz and Stepan, 1996). These competing projects reflect underlying ideological divides, social cleavages, and strategic calculations about the future of the political system. Over time, certain actors will emerge as "winners" of the transition —those whose political vision and policy preferences shape the new democratic order— while others will perceive themselves as "losers", having failed to achieve their goals or having been forced into compromises that undermine their original objectives. The "winners" of the transition often seek to institutionalize their vision, shaping key political institutions, laws, and norms. Conversely, the "losers" may retain resentment and use this sense of

historical injustice to frame future political battles, including those related to memory policies and transitional justice. These dynamics are essential to understanding post-authoritarian politics, as transitions are rarely seen as neutral or equitable processes by all participants.

In new democracies, political parties and elites often have roots in both periods. This may become a long-lasting feature of democratic regimes or change quickly, depending on the level of institutionalization of the party system. Those varied historical roots create a complex landscape of political allegiances and strategies in post-authoritarian democracies, influencing how parties and elites engage with memory policies, navigate the legacy of the authoritarian past, and position themselves in the new democratic order.

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