

Radical right advance and party system change: the 2024 Portuguese snap elections

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Abstract

The 2024 general elections triggered an unprecedented shift in the Portuguese party system. The radical right skyrocketed from 12 to 50 MPs precisely as the country celebrated 50 years since the overthrow of a right-wing dictatorship. Corruption scandals prompted snap elections, but the main parties experienced some of their worst results in history. The centre-right witnessed a bittersweet and narrow victory, and in the resounding defeat of the centre-left, there is more than meets the eye. The closely contested election was marked by the radical right breakthrough and the breakdown of the two-party system. The driving force behind this party system change seems to be the supply side of party competition. Despite government formation remaining within the realm of conventional formulas, it is unclear whether the *cordon sanitaire* between mainstream and radical right will falter or damage the chances of executive survival.

Keywords: Radical right; party system; corruption; elections; government formation; Portugal.

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Introduction

The 2024 Portuguese general elections unfolded against a challenging backdrop for the incumbent Socialists.¹ Despite the country's favourable economy, corruption scandals prompted snap elections. The rising cost of living and crises in healthcare, education, and housing placed further pressure on the incumbent. Consequently, the mainstream right surpassed the Socialists. However, the centre-right was unable to capitalise fully on this context, paving the way for an unprecedented change in the Portuguese political landscape.

Portugal's party system has long been characterised by remarkable stability. The financial crisis and the increasing fragmentation observed elsewhere in Europe did not impact the party system. Unlike other proportional representation settings, the multiparty system is tendentially bipartisan, with the d'Hondt formula and district size allowing for single-party absolute majorities, and the two main parties monopolising government formation, either alone or in coalition. For this reason, Portugal has been often described as having a *de facto* two-party system (Jalali, 2007).

However, the 2024 elections consolidated political competition patterns inaugurated in the 2019 elections (Jalali, 2019; Lisi et al., 2020; Serra-Silva and Santos, 2023). The collapse of the historical cleavage between the radical and centre-left during the government formation process in 2015 planted the seeds for party system change (Fernandes, 2016). Moreover, the recent entry of four new political parties into parliament, and their subsequent rise — most notably that of the radical right — posed an additional challenge to conventional parties, especially those on the right side of the ideological spectrum.

These elections put an end to the *de facto* two-party system. The radical right emerged as the major beneficiary of snap elections. The two main parties endured some of their worst electoral outcomes to date, leading to increased fragmentation and polarisation. The new government faces a dilemma: whether to maintain a *cordon sanitaire* against the

radical right or risk facing ‘negative coalitions’ that may jeopardise its survival.

This article proceeds as follows. First, I analyse the political and economic context surrounding the election. Second, I evaluate whether the policy priorities of voters were reflected in the campaign, as well as party strategy and performance. Third, I examine the electoral results and the extent to which the party system changed, along with the reasons behind these shifts. The final section describes the type and composition of the new executive and reflects on government stability.

Background to the election

In breaking the *cordon sanitaire* with the radical left, the Socialist Party (PS) secured a parliamentary majority to form a government in 2015 (De Giorgi and Cancela, 2021). Prime Minister António Costa’s reappointment after the 2019 elections was short-lived, as the ‘divorce’ with the radical left triggered snap elections in 2022. Despite this setback, the Socialists surprisingly secured their first-ever consecutive third term, as well as majority control of parliament. They capitalised on low polarisation surrounding the pandemic (Santana-Pereira and De Giorgi, 2022), voter backlash against the radical left for rejecting the state budget, and widespread fear of a coalition of the opposition parties including the radical right (Ferrinho Lopes, 2023).

However, Costa’s third government ended after just 19 months into his mandate. Costa became the first leader of a single-party majority government to fall in Portuguese history. A series of scandals resulted in a rate of nearly one resignation per month among executive members (see Online Appendix, Table A1), culminating in the prime minister himself becoming the subject of a high-profile public prosecution investigation on 7 November 2023 — the day he resigned from office. The investigation focused on corruption and influence peddling in connection to lithium mining and hydrogen production. The probe uncovered more than €75,000 hidden in the office of Costa’s chief of staff.

Except for the Social Democrats (PSD) and the radical right (Chega), parties appeared to have little to gain from snap elections. The Communists (PCP), Left Bloc (BE), and Liberals (IL) had recently changed leaders and were expecting to have more time to increase their public visibility. Additionally, following Costa's resignation, the Socialists faced an uphill battle to elect a new leader within a short period. Nevertheless, except for Socialists and the environmentalist-animalist PAN, all parties advocated for snap elections.

The president rejected the Socialists' proposal to appoint a new head of government. Instead, he called for snap elections on 10 March 2024, which not only gave the Socialists the time to elect a new leader, but also to approve the state budget. This decision was supported by the majority of citizens.² Pedro Nuno Santos, the former Minister of Infrastructure and Housing who had resigned almost a year earlier because of a scandal related to the state-owned airline (see Online Appendix, Table A1), was elected as the Socialist party leader.

The election occurred against a challenging backdrop for the incumbent party. Voters' perceptions of government and economic performance were negative. However, the perceptions about the economy do not match official figures. Despite experiencing its sharpest contraction during the pandemic, the economy resumed its growth shortly after (Reis et al., 2023). By the end of 2023, the annual growth rate was 2.3%, well above the Eurozone average, while the public debt-to-GDP ratio had steadily declined to levels comparable only to those before the Great Recession (98.7%). Furthermore, in the balance of trade, exports reached an unprecedented share of 50% of GDP (Online Appendix, Figure A1), mostly because of tourism. Along with inflation and workforce expansion, which reached an all-time high of almost 5 million employed people, this resulted in a record tax-to-GDP ratio of 36.4% (Online Appendix, Figure A2).

While the economy performed well, public investment remained persistently negative.³ A decade-long erosion of public capital threatened the provision of public services and growth.⁴ Additionally, the ECB's tightening monetary policy took a particularly heavy

toll on homeowners with adjustable-rate mortgages (Online Appendix, Figure A3), which make up the vast majority of homeowners in Portugal. Low-skilled workers had experienced wage growth thanks to increases in the minimum wage, but the middle class had witnessed an erosion in their living standards (Oliveira, 2023). Importantly, net migration underwent a major change during the Socialist tenure. Portugal’s labour market features the EU’s least qualified workforce.⁵ While emigration has declined, emigrants have become unprecedentedly educated, with nearly 50% holding a university degree.⁶ This relates to the structural stagnation of the country’s productivity.

The electoral campaign

The economic challenges outlined in the previous section were echoed in the campaign. Eurobarometer data indicate that the cost of living, healthcare, housing, and the economy were the most pressing concerns for Portuguese citizens.⁷ Two polling institutes further confirmed that voters wanted these issues, along with education, to be addressed in the campaign.⁸ In Portugal, political parties partially align their agendas with the priorities of voters (Belchior et al., 2024). This campaign was no exception.

The main issues under discussion were the economy (including salaries, taxes, pensions, and employment), healthcare, coalition politics, and housing.⁹ Surprisingly, education did not receive as much attention, likely due to a shared consensus on education policies in party manifestos. Still, this shows that parties were largely responsive to voter concerns.

Coalition politics reflected the recent surreptitious transformations of the Portuguese political landscape. Costa’s first government reshaped coalition dynamics for leftist parties. The Socialists, the radical left, and PAN were open to forming a coalition. Although the matter remains somewhat disputed among Socialist elites, the new party leader wholeheartedly embraced a post-electoral alliance with other leftist parties. The emergence of the radical right shifted the debate on coalition politics towards the rightist parties. With

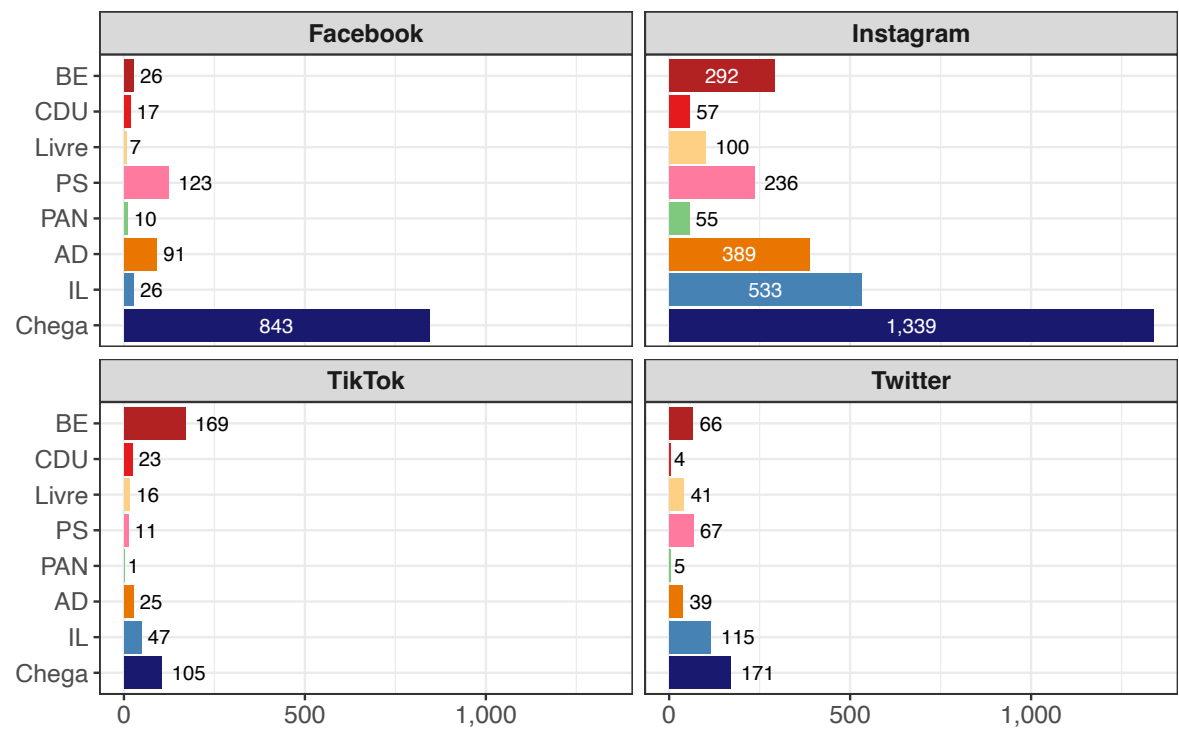
polls indicating that a majority government would be unlikely without the inclusion of the radical right, the Social Democrats faced pressure to clarify their alliance strategy. They formed a pre-electoral coalition dubbed Democratic Alliance (AD), alongside the Christian Democrats (CDS-PP) and the Monarchists (PPM). The Liberals declined to join AD but expressed willingness to coalesce after the elections. However, both AD and IL refused to coalesce with the radical right, establishing a *cordon sanitaire* towards Chega. Eventually, both PS and AD changed their positions during the campaign, accepting a minority government led by the other party in case of victory.

While voters did not put great emphasis on the environment and the judiciary (including corruption and crime) as the most important issues facing the country, these issues unexpectedly gained traction in the campaign. The first incident occurred when the AD's leader was hit by a bucket of green paint thrown by an activist from a climate movement. Regarding the second, except for the radical right, which campaigned under the slogan 'Clean Portugal', and to a lesser extent the Liberals, parties largely avoided politicising corruption. However, the AD's decision to launch a billboard campaign against corruption proved fateful when both the national leader and the president of Madeira's regional government faced corruption probes. Additionally, the leader of the AD confronted two other controversies: when a candidate from the coalition partner CDS-PP proposed reversing the uncontested abortion law, and when a former PSD prime minister publicly advocated for a more restrictive immigration policy, which was seen as an alignment with radical right-wing ideology.

Media coverage, particularly on television, played a crucial role in shaping citizens' perceptions of the campaign. The debates between party leaders highlighted the division of party competition into three coalition blocs. Despite lower audience numbers compared to previous elections,¹⁰ there was a renewed interest in potential junior coalition members due to their influence on government formation.¹¹ Moreover, despite perceptions that news coverage disproportionately favoured the radical right (OSCE, 2024), the Chega party did

not attract half the audience of the leaders of the two main parties and was closely followed by IL.¹²

Figure 1: Engagement with political parties on social media (thousands).

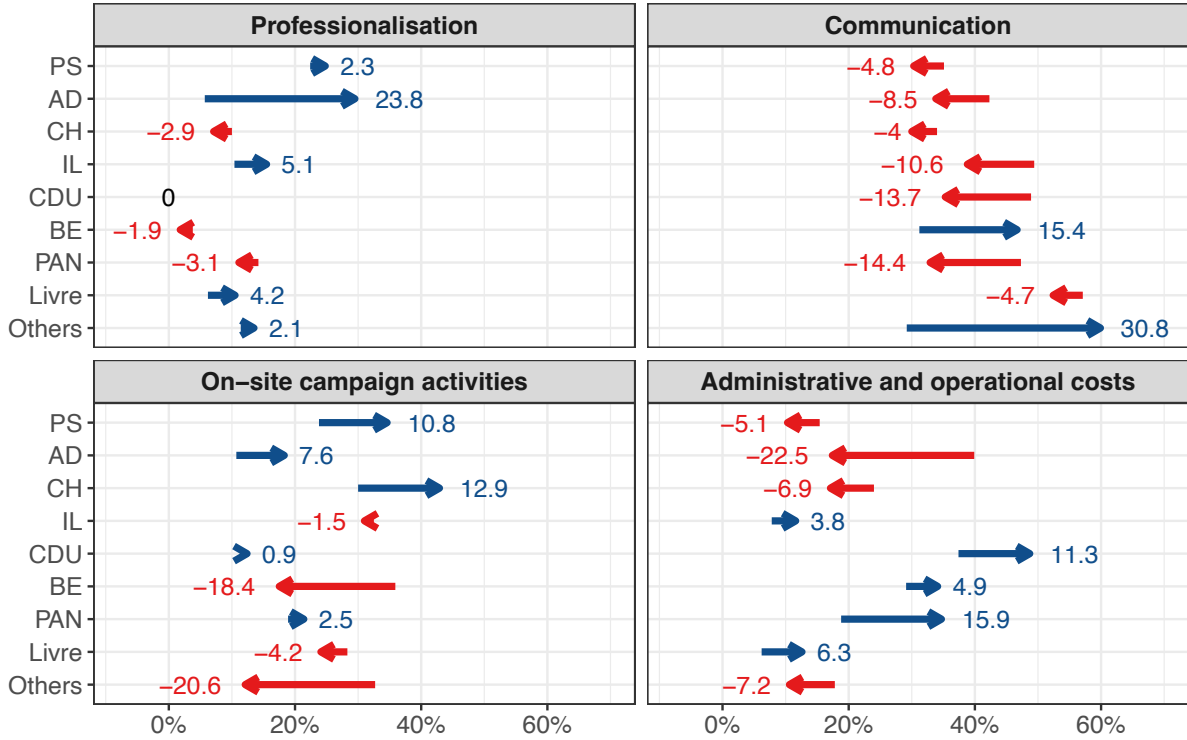


Source: Own calculations from data provided by FOXP2.
 Notes: Sum of interactions (likes, comments, and shares) on posts from each party between 15 January and 8 March 2024.

However, social media data presents a contrasting picture. Figure 1 highlights the performance of political parties across these platforms. Chega’s impact on social media is overwhelming, ranking second only to BE on TikTok. The radical right’s audience also reflected the interests of the public: Chega had far more followers on every social media platform than any other party (data not shown). This is especially relevant since their agenda on social media is based on nativism, populism, and authoritarianism (Mendes, 2021), which increases discrimination towards minorities (Magalhães and Costa-Lopes, 2024). It also confirms findings from studies indicating that Chega benefits from am-

plification on social media (Fernandes and Won, 2023). A deeper examination echoes evidence from previous elections, where right-wing parties and BE achieved the highest number of interactions and the most favourable ratio between interactions and the number of followers (Online Appendix, Figure A4; see also Ferrinho Lopes 2023).

Figure 2: Change in party campaign investment.



Source: Own coding from the Entity on Political Finance and Accounts (https://www.tribunalconstitucional.pt/tc/contas_eleicoes-ar-2024.html).

Notes: Arrows depict the change in investment (in percentage points) in a given party's budget from the previous election. For ease of interpretation, parties running in coalition in 2024 are pooled in 2022. 'Unknown/other costs' are omitted. Further details are available in Table A2 (Online Appendix).

Finally, most parties planned to allocate more financial resources to this campaign compared to the previous one. Although the total campaign budgets are similar to 2022 (around €8.2 million, with two-thirds attributed to the two main parties), this is offset by extra-parliamentary parties which reduced their budgets by almost €500,000. Fig-

ure 2 breaks down relevant variations by the type of investment (classified according to Santana-Pereira et al., 2023). The main parties increased spending on professionalisation, particularly the AD, which saw a 23.8 percentage point increase. Additionally, larger parties invested more in on-site activities. This shift is likely a response to the post-pandemic context and came at the expense of reduced spending on communication and administrative and operational costs.

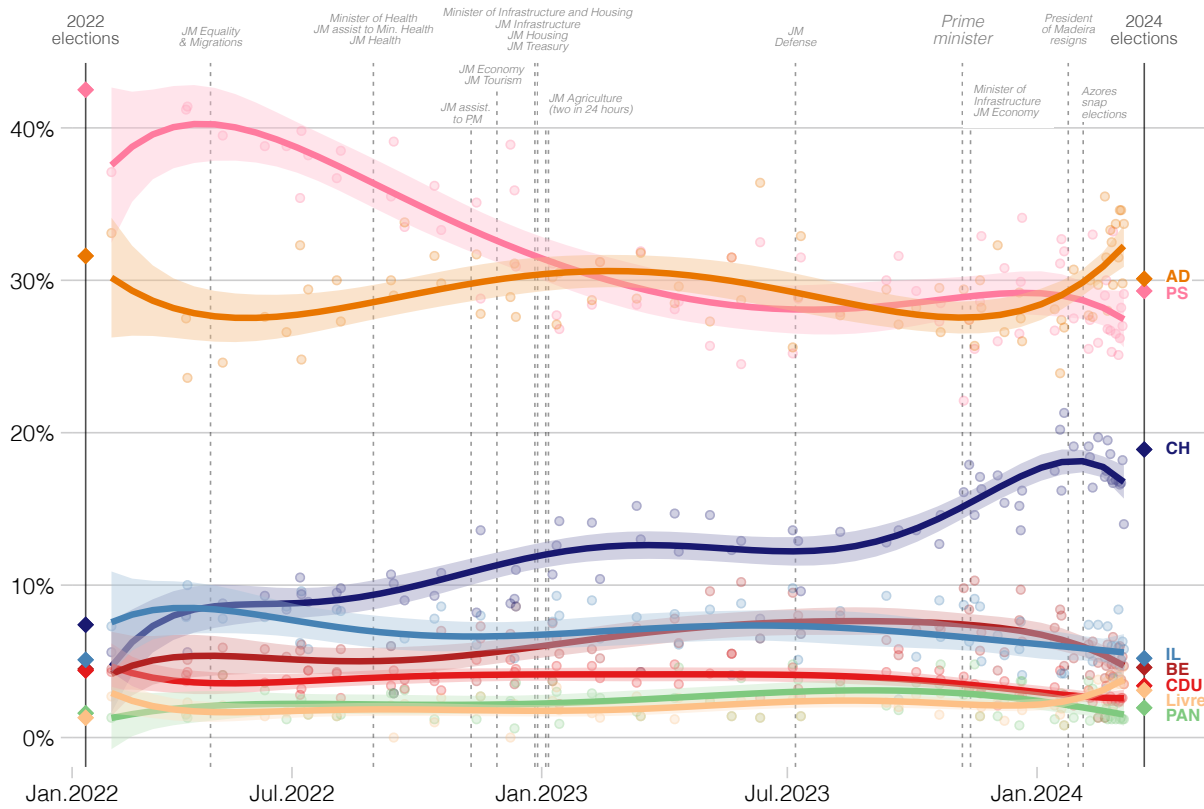
The electoral outcome

Figure 3 plots voting intentions for the main political parties. Since the end of 2022, the two main parties have been competing closely. There was a significant shift in voting intentions leading to the prime minister’s resignation, although not between the two front-runners. Polls suggested that the radical right Chega would reap most benefits from government termination. Indeed, Chega saw an increase of about 3 percentage points after the corruption scandal that prompted snap elections. Fluctuations leading up to election day, notably after the regional elections in the Azores region and the AD–Chega debate, in which the former rejected any coalition with the latter, predicted a victory for AD and a slight decrease in support for Chega. However, the AD’s victory was neck and neck with the PS, and the radical right was still able to disrupt the party system.

Table 1 shows the election outcome. The AD achieved a narrow victory, only 0.8 points above PS. Along with the Communists, the latter suffered a resounding defeat. In contrast, the radical right gave a strong performance. The left-libertarian Livre also claimed victory, quadrupling their representation. Meanwhile, every other party failed to grow. These results have several implications.

First, turnout increased considerably. Despite observing one of the highest proportions of undecided voters to date in the week leading up to election day,¹³ approximately 6.5 million citizens cast their ballots. This represents an increase of almost one million addi-

Figure 3: Voting intentions for political parties (95% CIs).



Source: Own coding of data available at the ‘Poll of Polls’ (<https://sondagens.rr.sapo.pt/>).

Notes: Circle markers represent voting intentions for each political party at the midpoint of the fieldwork period for a given opinion poll (coalition parties are polled for ease of interpretation). Smooth lines depict the results from kernel-weighted local polynomial regressions with 95% confidence intervals, using the Epanechnikov function, 6 degrees, and rule-of-thumb (ROT) optimal bandwidth. Diamond markers at the first and last reference lines indicate the results of the 2022 and 2024 general elections. The remaining vertical lines denote key events, including resignations by government members (see Online Appendix, Table A1 for more details), the resignation of the president of Madeira’s regional government, and the snap regional elections in the Azores.

tional voters or 8.4 percentage points (from 51.5% to 59.9%) compared to 2022, marking the highest turnout in the mainland since 1995. As I explain later on, post-electoral survey data suggests that rightist parties benefit the most from the decrease in abstention.

Second, the 2024 election witnessed the closest margin of victory in Portuguese democratic history. The rightist coalition secured slightly more votes (1,866,991) than the Socialists (1,812,443). They won all districts in the Northern region and regained their

traditional electoral strongholds such as Leiria and Viseu. However, the election marked a change from an absolute majority to an ‘absolute minority’, whereby the PSD and PS ended up with an equal number of seats (78 MPs each), as the two additional mandates from AD were allocated to CDS-PP, which returned to parliament after failing to elect any MPs in the previous term. Furthermore, this election marks the worst result for the centre-right in democratic history, while simultaneously being the best result ever for the right when including Chega.

The scale of the Socialists’ defeat should also be taken with more than just a pinch of salt. The party suffered its most significant electoral setback, losing over a third of its seats, 13.2 percentage points, and nearly half a million votes. However, considering the wear and tear that comes from eight years in power, and a last term marked by negative public evaluations, cabinet instability, and corruption scandals, the PS showed considerable resilience. They secured victories in several electoral districts, tied with the PSD in terms of seats, and only narrowly lost to AD in votes. As I discuss later, while the Socialists conceded defeat and supported the centre-right during the government formation stage, they relinquished any obligation to approve state budgets. Ergo, the new government may fall under radical right influence.

Third, the radical right skyrocketed and the party system changed. Chega achieved astonishing growth, especially considering the party’s brief five-year existence. Surging from 1.4% to 18.9% in half a decade, it garnered nearly 1.2 million votes and secured representation in all but one district (Bragança). This constitutes the best-ever performance for any party other than the two largest ones. Coincidentally, the radical right elected 50 MPs when the country celebrated 50 years since the end of a right-wing dictatorship. Chega emerged as the second most popular party in the south, overturning previous left-wing strongholds. In the Algarve, Chega came in first, marking the first time since 1991 that a third party has won a district.

On election night, Ventura underlined the most important consequence for the party

Table 1: Results of the 2024 Portuguese general elections.

	2024			2022			Change (Δ)		
	Seats (N)	Votes (000's)	Votes (%)	Seats (N)	Votes (000's)	Votes (%)	Seat Δ (N)	Vote Δ (000's)	Vote Δ (p.p.)
AD (PSD/CDS-PP/PPM)	80	1,867	30.1	77	1,707	31.6	3	160	-1.5
PS	78	1,812	29.3	120	2,303	42.5	-42	-491	-13.2
CH	50	1,170	18.9	12	400	7.4	38	770	11.5
IL	8	320	5.2	8	274	5.1	—	146	0.1
BE	5	282	4.6	5	245	4.5	—	37	0.1
CDU (PCP/PEV)	4	206	3.3	6	239	4.4	-2	-33	-1.1
Livre	4	205	3.2	1	71	1.3	3	134	1.9
PAN	1	126	2	1	88	1.6	—	38	0.4
ADN	0	102	1.7	0	11	0.2	—	91	1.5
Others	—	105	1.7	—	80	1.5	—	25	0.2
Invalid and blanks	—	282	4.4	—	147	2.6	—	135	1.8
Total	230	6,477	100	230	5,565	100	—	912	—
Turnout			59.9			51.5			8.4

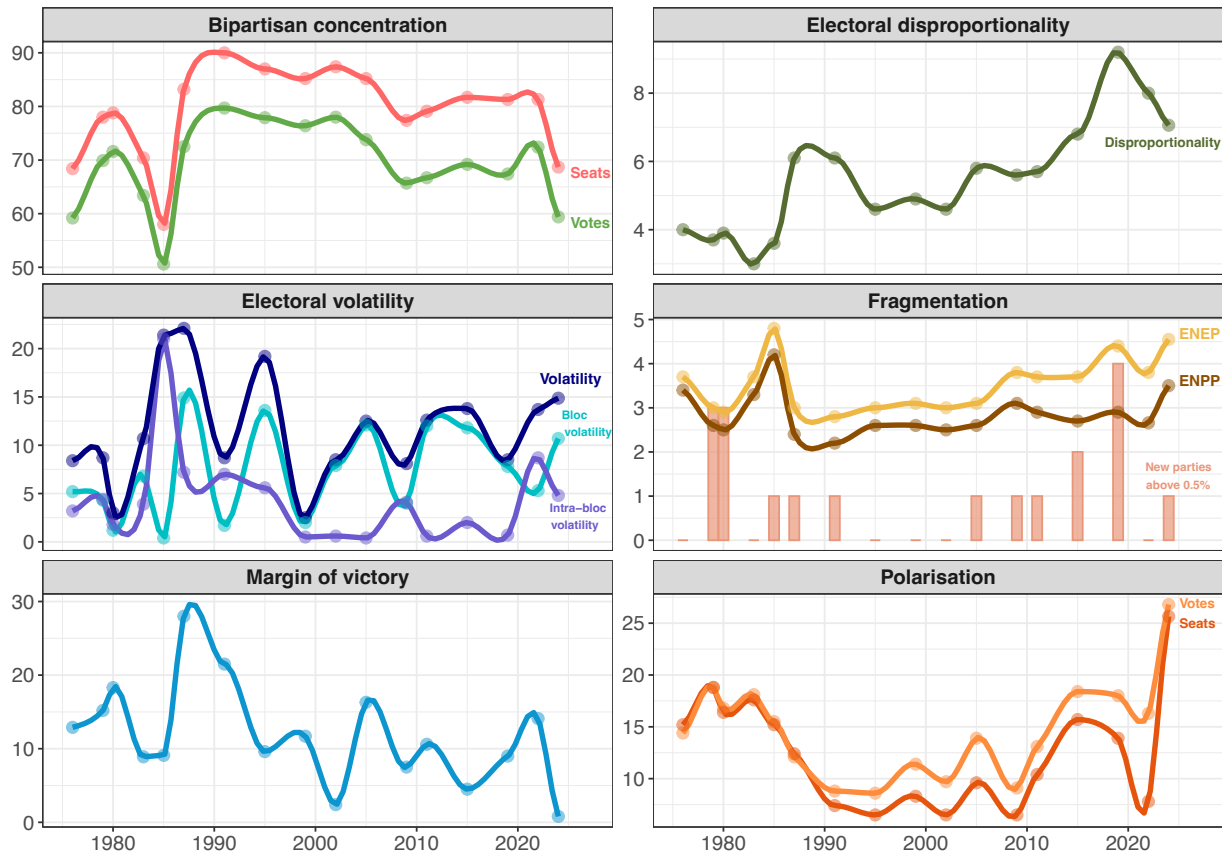
Source: National Electoral Commission (<https://www.cne.pt/content/eleicoes-referendos>).

Notes: For ease of interpretation, the results for parties running in coalition in 2024 are pooled in 2022. PSD and CDS-PP formed a coalition without PPM in the Madeira region in 2024. Using the same criteria, their results are aggregated in one row.

system. The radical right-wing leader asserted that ‘the two-party system has ended’. Figure 4 supports this claim. Portugal can no longer be characterised by moderate pluralism tending towards bipartisanship, as it had been since 1987 (Lisi, 2022). The two main parties declined to their second-lowest level of support combined, and the margin of victory was near zero. The change to polarised pluralism is evident in the levels of party system fragmentation and polarisation. The effective number of electoral and parliamentary parties grew from 3.8 to 4.55 and from 2.66 to 3.5, respectively. This confirms the end of the *de facto* two-party system. Notably, while fragmentation was high in 1985, polarisation reached unprecedented levels. Although the roots of increased polarisation appear to have begun with the financial crisis, a significant increase is observed in this election: from 16.3% to 26.8% in votes and more than tripling in seats (from 7.8% to 25.7%). Additionally, disproportionality has decreased but remains above levels observed prior to the radical right’s entry into parliament and is higher than other proportional systems, while overall volatility and bloc volatility have increased, with the former reaching

its highest level since 1995, and intra-bloc volatility has decreased.

Figure 4: Party system change.



Source: Updated from Lisi (2022), Ferrinho Lopes (2023), Casal Bértoa (2024), and Teixeira et al. (2024). Notes: Concentration: the sum of the percentage of votes and seats of the two largest parties. Electoral disproportionality: Gallagher's (1991) least squares index. Electoral volatility: Pedersen's index (1979). Fragmentation: Laakso and Taagepera's (1979) effective number of electoral (ENEP) and parliamentary (ENPP) parties, as well as new parties above 0.5% of votes. Margin of victory: the difference between the percentage of votes of the two most voted-for parties. Polarisation: the percentage obtained by parties listed on the 'PopuList' (Rooduijn et al., 2023).

Fourth, among the remaining parties, only the left-libertarian Livre celebrated a victory. Livre grew from 1.3% to 3.2% and from one to four seats. This enabled them to form a parliamentary group and achieve comparable weight to the other radical left parties. The Communists suffered their worst electoral performance to date, dwindling to just four MPs. Losing its long-standing stronghold of Beja, the party failed to secure representation in the Alentejo region, where Communist strength was previously promi-

nent. Meanwhile, the environmentalist-animalist PAN, the Liberals, and the Left Bloc experienced negligible change, falling short of their expectations.

An examination of exit poll data sheds light on the social bases of party system change.¹⁴ Portugal is beginning to reflect the ‘modern gender gap’, whereby women favour left-wing parties (PS, BE, and PAN) while men lean towards IL and especially Chega. Additionally, there is a divide between ‘old’ and ‘new’ parties. Emerging parties such as IL, Livre, Chega, and BE attract a younger electorate compared to PS, CDU, and AD. This trend is particularly noteworthy concerning the radical right and the Socialists. A surprising number of young adults voted for Chega, while PS would have ranked third if only the young had voted. This pattern is also evident in terms of education. The newer left-leaning parties (BE, Livre, and PAN) tend to appeal more to those with a college degree, while the traditional left (PS and CDU) holds sway among less educated citizens. On the right, the pattern is reversed: AD and IL perform better among college graduates, while Chega garners more support from those with secondary-level education. The radical right’s appeal is particularly strong among young and less educated men, signalling a shift in young voters’ preferences. Furthermore, Chega’s rise is related to affective polarisation (Manucci and Heyne, 2024), gaining traction in rural areas where voters feel neglected (Magalhães and Cancela, 2024).

Results from a post-electoral survey additionally reveal that nearly one-third of voters changed their voting behaviour compared to the previous election.¹⁵ Party switching is especially prevalent among younger, educated individuals who lean towards the left and those who do not identify themselves with any specific party. The Socialists lost votes primarily to AD and Chega, which garnered the most votes from former abstainers and undecided voters. More importantly, the radical right managed to maintain almost their entire voter base from the previous election and to draw support away from mainstream parties (PSD, CDS-PP, and PS).

Finally, on election day, the main centre-right coalition expressed concerns about vot-

ers mistakenly casting their ballots for ADN (National Democratic Alternative) instead of AD (Democratic Alliance). This confusion arose from the similarity in names, particularly among older and less educated voters, resulting in electoral advantages for the smaller party.¹⁶ Table 2 further suggests that ADN indeed benefited from voter confusion. Leveraging the variation in party rankings on the ballot, which is randomised across districts in Portugal, it shows that when ADN was listed above AD on the ballot, support for ADN was, on average, 0.67 percentage points higher compared to when AD appeared above ADN. This underscores the importance of ballot placement.¹⁷ Note, however, that the coefficient does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance when using AD vote share as the outcome.

Table 2: Effect of AD being listed below ADN in the ballot on vote for ADN (difference-in-differences estimates).

	2015-2024	2024	2022-2024	Placebo lagged outcome
ATET	0.667** (0.246)	0.679** (0.242)	0.700* (0.378)	0.045 (0.171)
Intercept	1.089*** (0.066)	0.573*** (0.033)	0.317** (0.121)	1.093*** (0.055)
Election year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	70	70	30	50

Notes: ATET: Average Treatment Effect on the Treated.

Standard errors clustered at the district level in parentheses.

Districts where ADN did not run in some elections are excluded.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Together, the lessons of the 2024 election point to a driving force behind changes in the party system: the supply side of party competition. That is, the expansion of the ‘menu’ of parties and the inability of conventional parties to attract voters. This is in line with recent works on the growth of the radical right in Portugal (see Mendes and Dennison, 2021; Carvalho, 2023; Manucci, 2024). However, the demise of the two-party system is not

mirrored in the executive arena. As we shall see in the next section, government alternation remains centred on the conventional formulas, despite concerns about stability.

Government formation

Coalition strategy was crucial during the campaign. However, in the absence of a single-party majority, most voters and party sympathisers preferred a minority government over a coalition with other contenders.¹⁸ On 21 March, the president appointed the Social Democrat and AD leader, Luís Montenegro, to form a government. On 2 April, a two-party minority government of PSD and CDS-PP took office. The junior coalition partner controls only one portfolio, and PPM, which was also part of the AD pre-electoral coalition, was excluded from the executive. This is likely due to controversial statements made by the PPM leader during the campaign and the party's small size, evident from its lack of elected MPs.

The structure of the executive remains relatively unchanged from the outgoing government, comprising 18 ministers, including the prime minister, and 41 junior ministers. However, a closer examination, illustrated in Figure 5, reveals relevant changes at the ministerial level. First, the ratio of women occupying ministerial positions (7 out of 18) is lower than that of the two previous governments, particularly noteworthy after the Socialists' milestone achievement of complete gender parity (Ferrinho Lopes, 2023). However, Luís Montenegro's executive not only ranks third in terms of women's representation but also boasts the highest overall presence of women to date when accounting for the junior minister level (40.6%).

Second, the cabinet has the oldest members to date ($\mu = 54.8$ years). This marks an increase of 10 years on the average age of ministers over the past five decades. Indeed, the majority of ministers are over 55 years old, surpassing the prevalence of those aged between 35 and 54 (Figure 5). Nonetheless, the executive includes a minister under the

age of 35. Margarida Balseiro Lopes, the Minister of Youth and Modernisation, is the youngest woman to assume ministerial office in Portugal.

Third, holding a college degree is not only a *sine qua non* for a ministerial position, but the academic requirements are also increasing. There has been an almost complete absence of ministers without university education in the past five decades (only 4 out of 515). Furthermore, the proportion of ministers holding at least a postgraduate degree reached an all-time high of two-thirds.

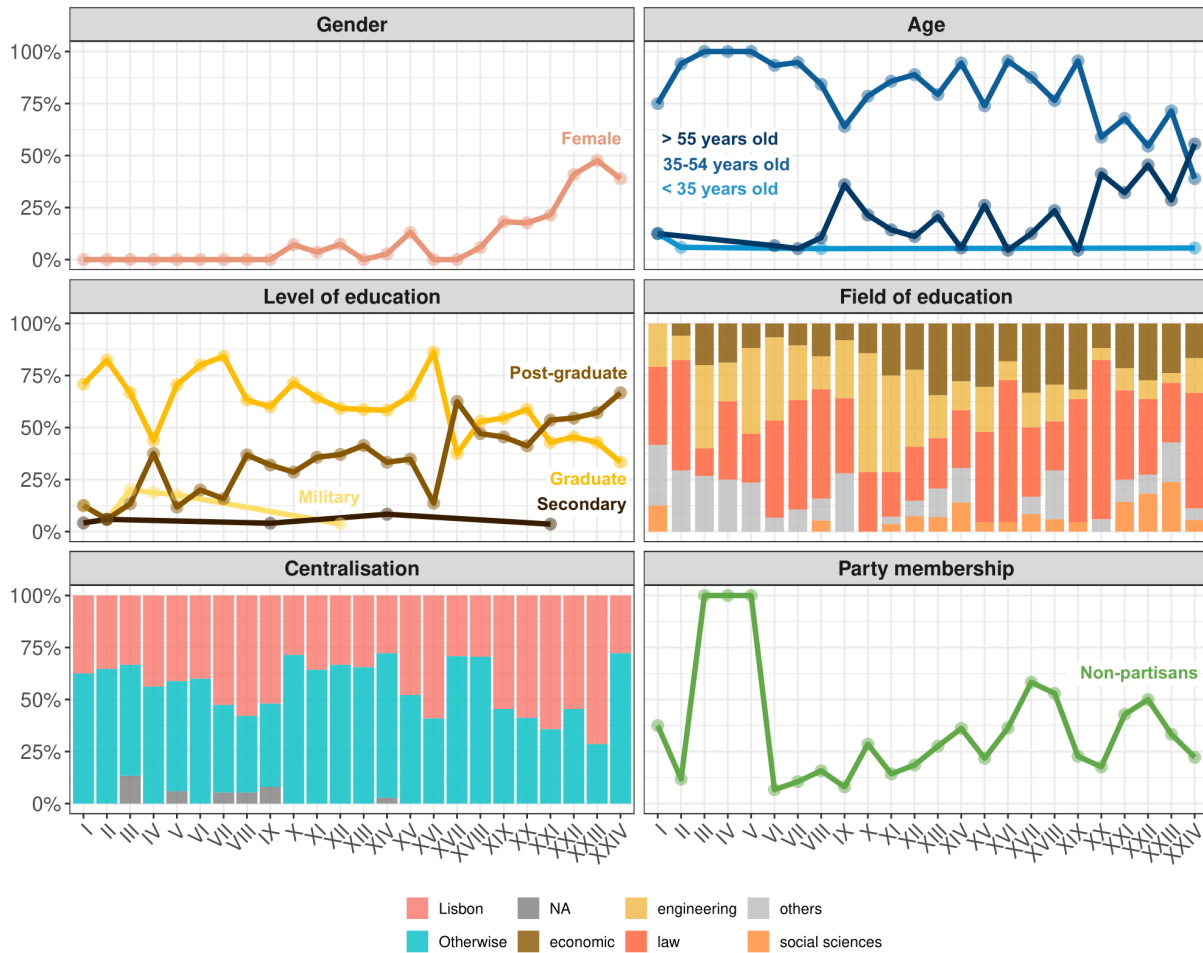
Fourth, the prominence of lawyers has more than doubled. Traditionally, most ministers hold degrees in law, economics, social sciences, and engineering. Although the weight of engineers in such positions had been declining, it has experienced a slight resurgence under Montenegro's leadership (from 1 to 3). More importantly, during Costa's terms, the proportion of lawyers serving as ministers decreased to one-third. However, lawyers account for more than half of the new government (10 out of 18). This shift came at the expense of economists, social scientists, and ministers with other educational backgrounds.

Fifth, there has been a substantial decline in the centralisation of ministerial elites. Over the past 50 years, a large portion of ministers were recruited from the capital, with the highest share observed during Costa's third term (75%). Montenegro has significantly reduced this proportion, with only one-quarter of the executive now hailing from Lisbon, marking the lowest level in 15 years.

Finally, only about one in five ministers is non-partisan. Historically, Portugal has seen a remarkable presence of non-party or soft partisan ministers (Paris, [2023](#)). Given that this cabinet has less collective government experience, particularly because the PSD has been out of government for eight years — its longest period to date — Montenegro likely prioritised party members over technocratic ministers, expecting it would bolster its chances of survival.

Indeed, stability will be a concern for the government. Despite AD and IL expressing willingness to form a coalition during the campaign, the Liberals were excluded from the

Figure 5: Government composition.



Source: Updated from Paris (2023).

Notes: Centralisation refers to the location where the minister has been based or worked over the past four years, excluding political appointments.

executive. This exclusion was not incidental; even if they coalesced, they would not hold a majority of seats (88 MPs across PSD, CDS-PP, and IL), falling short of the combined strength of the leftist parties (PS, BE, CDU, Livre, and PAN, which hold 92 seats).

The radical right was also kept out of the executive. Montenegro rejected Chega's appeals to form a coalition, which would have secured a majority. Consequently, the government is reliant on piecemeal deals with the radical right or the Socialists to pass legislation. This dependency was evident in two crucial moments: the election of the

parliament's president, during which the radical right and leftist parties repeatedly rejected the centre-right's candidate, and the voting on the Left Bloc's and Communists' motions to reject the government. AD managed to overcome the first hurdle by reaching an agreement with the Socialists for a rotating presidency and the second obstacle with the support of the radical right and the abstention of the Socialists.

However, uncertainty about cabinet survival will persist. The government may face 'negative coalitions'. Two examples occurred on 2 May and 12 June 2024, when parliament approved the abolition of toll collection on highways and income tax reduction. The Socialists and the radical right united to pass the bills, opposing the government's stance. One crucial challenge lies ahead for the ruling coalition: the voting on the state budget in the autumn of 2024. If approved, the government will likely remain in office for two additional years, as the Constitution prohibits the president from dissolving the parliament when the following state budget is voted on, due to its proximity to the 2026 presidential elections. Nevertheless, whether the *cordon sanitaire* between mainstream and radical right will falter or damage the chances of executive survival is an open question.

Notes

1. For other recent articles in the elections in context series, see Arter (2024), Bernhard (2024) and Vall-Prat and Rodon (2024).
2. Aximage poll, November 2023.
3. <https://www.cfp.pt/pt/publicacoes/evolucao-orcamental/evolucao-orcamental-das-administracoes-publicas-em-2022>
4. https://www.cfp.pt/uploads/publicacoes_ficheiros/cfp-rel-05-2023_ap2022.pdf
5. http://www.gep.mtsss.gov.pt/documents/10182/80545/ant_qualificacoes2021.pdf/3cb16178-1240-47cb-8805-8eae4d939344
6. [https://www.pordata.pt/portugal/emigrantes+permanentes+total+e+por+nivel+de+escolaridade+completo+\(percentagem\)-3794](https://www.pordata.pt/portugal/emigrantes+permanentes+total+e+por+nivel+de+escolaridade+completo+(percentagem)-3794)
7. Standard Eurobarometer 100.

8. CESOP-UCP poll, January-February 2024, and Consulmark polls, waves 2-3, February 2024.
9. <https://rr.sapo.pt/especial/politica/2024/02/22/debatometro-custo-de-vida-fora-dos-debates-educacao-foi-dos-temas-menos-falados/367769/>
10. <https://www.publico.pt/2024/02/25/politica/noticia/novos-lideres-trouxeram-maior-a-udiencia-debates-tv-face-2022-2081603>
11. <https://observador.pt/2024/02/26/legislativas-debates-em-canal-aberto-com-menos-audiencias-do-que-em-2022/>
12. <https://expresso.pt/politica/eleicoes/legislativas-2024/2024-02-20-Quase-28-milhoes-de-portugueses-viram-o-debate-entre-Pedro-Nuno-Santos-e-Luis-Montenegro-efaf042f>
13. ICS-Iscte poll, May 2024 (Part II).
14. This paragraph summarises the results of João Cancela and Pedro Magalhães’ analysis, available at <https://expresso.pt/politica/eleicoes/legislativas-2024/2024-03-14-As-mulheres-votaram-mais-a-esquerda-e-os-jovens-afastaram-se-dos-partidos-antigos-quem-escolheu-quem-nas-legislativas--37730132>.
15. ICS-Iscte poll, May 2024 (Part II).
16. <https://analiseeleitoral.blogspot.com/2024/03/das-maiores-polemicas-em-torno-da.html>
17. The parallel trends assumption is supported ($F(1, 19) = 0.54$, $p = 0.471$), and the results are robust to the exclusion of each district at a time.
18. ICS-Iscte poll, January-February 2024.

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Online Appendix

Hugo Ferrinho Lopes 

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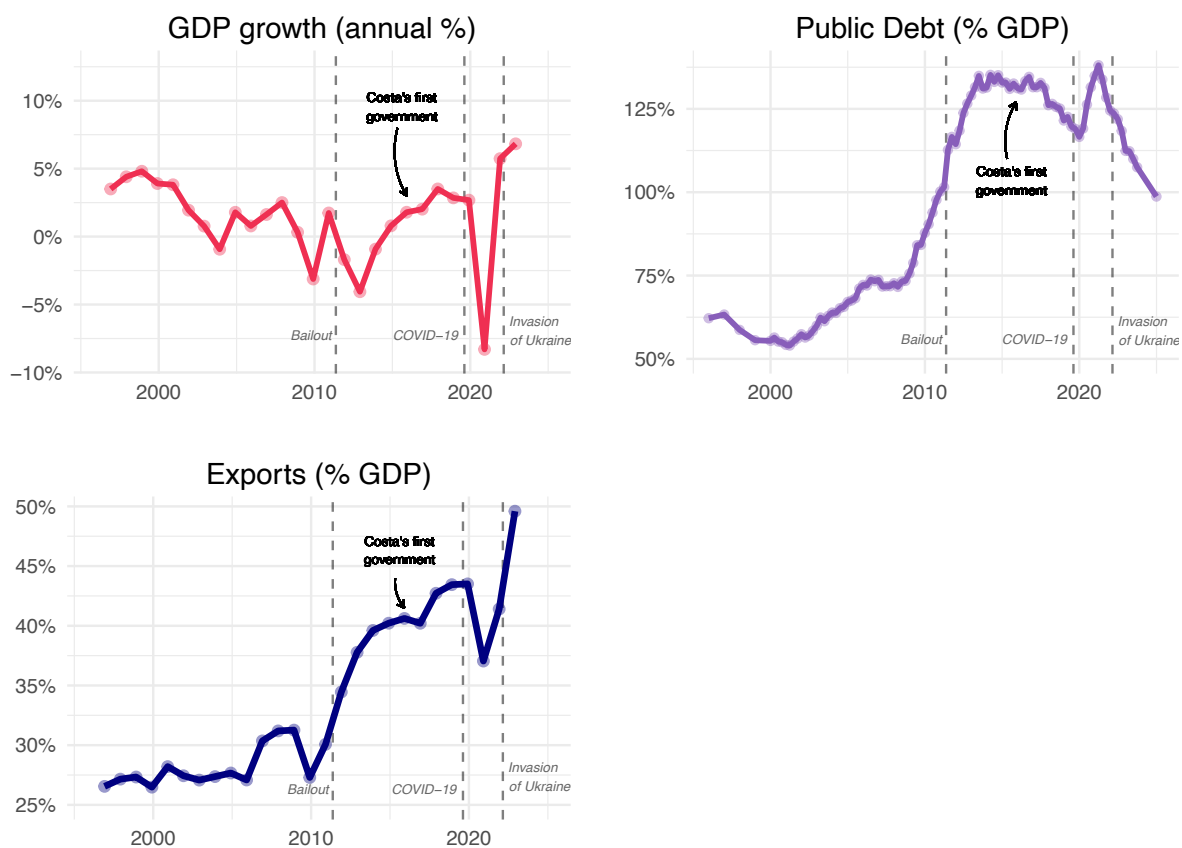
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Table A1: List of government members' resignations during Costa's third term.

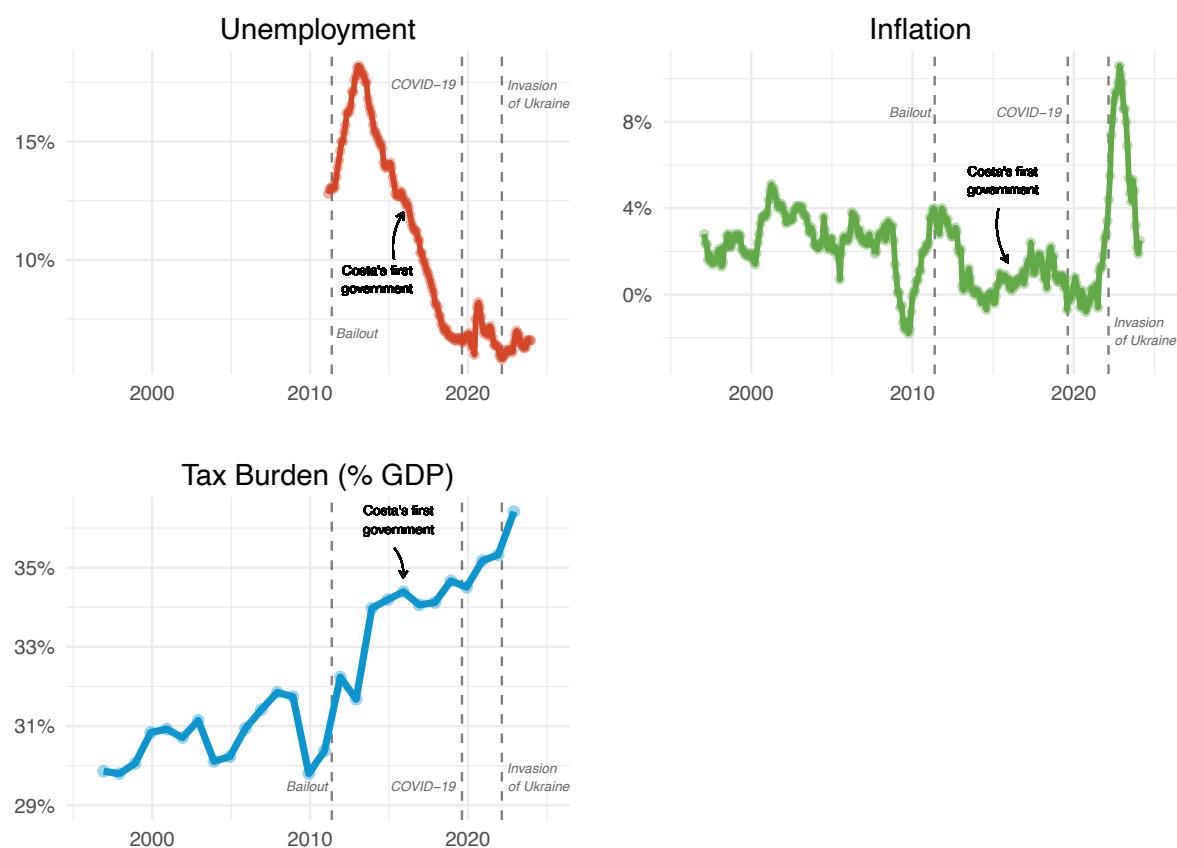
Date	Member of the government	Name	Reason (most recent)
2 May.22	JM Equality and Migration	Sara Guerreiro	Ukrainian accommodation controversy
30 Aug.22	Minister of Health	Marta Temido	Crisis of the national health system
30 Aug.22	Deputy JM for Health	António L. Sales	Solidarity with the Minister
30 Aug.22	JM Health	Maria F. Fonseca	Solidarity with the Minister
10 Nov.22	Deputy JM to the Prime Minister	Miguel Alves	Indicted for malfeasance
29 Nov.22	JM Economy	João Neves	Dismissed for dissent with the minister
29 Nov.22	JM Tourism	Rita Marques	Dismissed for dissent with the minister
27 Dec.22	JM Treasury	Alexandra Reis	Received a €500,000 severance payment by the state-owned airline
29 Dec.22	Minister of Infrastructure & Housing	Pedro Nuno Santos	Approved the severance payment by the state-owned airline
29 Dec.22	JM Infrastructure	Hugo Mendes	Approved the severance payment by the state-owned airline
29 Dec.22	JM Housing	Marina Gonçalves	Solidarity with the Minister
4 Jan.23	JM Agriculture	Rui Martinho	Health issues
5 Jan.23	JM Agriculture	Carla Alves	Family member implicated in corruption
7 Jul.23	JM Defense	Marco C. Ferreira	Charged with appointing a 'ghost' advisor
7 Nov.23	Prime minister	António Costa	Operation Influencer
13 Nov.23	Minister of Infrastructure	João Galamba	Operation Influencer
13 Nov.23	JM Economy	Pedro Cilínio	Operation Influencer

Figure A1: Evolution of the Portuguese economy: GDP growth, public debt and exports.



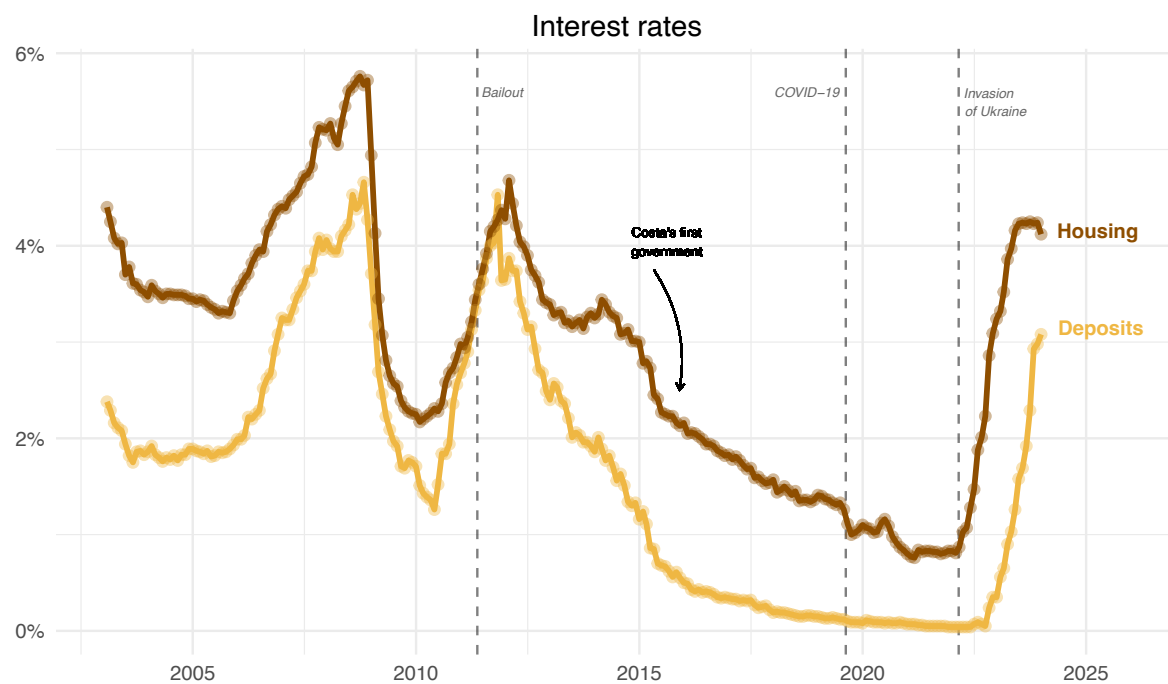
Source: Data retrieved from the IMF, Bank of Portugal, and Statistics Portugal, respectively.

Figure A2: Evolution of the Portuguese economy: employment, inflation and tax burden.



Source: data retrieved from the Statistics Portugal, Bank of Portugal, and Statistics Portugal, respectively.

Figure A3: Evolution of the Portuguese economy: interest rates.



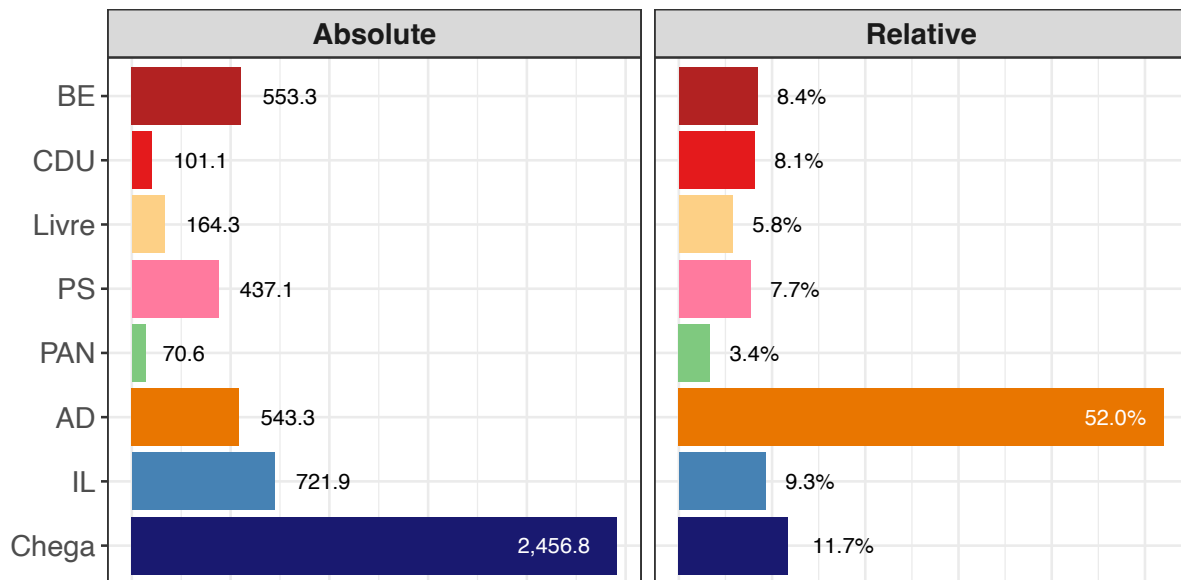
Source: data retrieved from the Bank of Portugal.

Table A2: Party investment in the 2022 and 2024 general elections (€000)

	Professionalisation		Communication		On-site campaign activities		Administrative and operational costs		Others		Total		
	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024	Δ
PS	550 (22.4%)	631.79 (24.8%)	860 (35.1%)	771.51 (30.3%)	583 (23.8%)	882.05 (34.6%)	377 (15.4%)	261.84 (10.3%)	80 (3.3%)	2.81 (0.1%)	2450 (100%)	2550 (100%)	100 (4.1%)
AD	137.65 (5.7%)	755 (29.5%)	1016.85 (42.3%)	864 (33.8%)	256.50 (10.7%)	468.50 (18.3%)	959.50 (39.9%)	445 (17.4%)	34.50 (1.4%)	27.50 (1.1%)	2405 (100%)	2560 (100%)	155 (6.5%)
CH	50 (10%)	50 (7.1%)	170 (34%)	210 (30%)	150 (30%)	300 (42.9%)	120 (24%)	120 (17.1%)	10 (2%)	20 (2.9%)	500 (100%)	700 (100%)	200 (40%)
IL	40 (10.4%)	100 (15.5%)	190 (49.4%)	250 (38.8%)	125 (32.5%)	200 (31%)	30 (7.8%)	75 (11.6%)	0 (0%)	20 (3.1%)	385 (100%)	645 (100%)	260 (67.5%)
CDU	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	340 (48.9%)	276.90 (35.3%)	80 (11.5%)	97.52 (12.4%)	260 (37.4%)	382.70 (48.7%)	15 (2.2%)	28.15 (3.6%)	695 (100%)	785.27 (100%)	90.27 (13%)
BE	22.93 (3.8%)	9.20 (1.8%)	190.54 (31.2%)	237.34 (46.7%)	218.80 (35.9%)	88.87 (17.5%)	177.78 (29.1%)	173.21 (34.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	610.05 (100%)	508.62 (100%)	-101.43 (-16.6%)
PAN	32.36 (14.2%)	22.70 (11.1%)	108.03 (47.3%)	67.40 (32.9%)	43.13 (18.9%)	43.75 (21.4%)	42.81 (18.8%)	71 (34.7%)	2 (0.9%)	0 (0%)	228.33 (100%)	204.85 (100%)	-23.48 (-10.3%)
Livre	3 (6.3%)	10 (10.5%)	27.40 (57.1%)	50 (52.4%)	13.60 (28.3%)	23 (24.1%)	3 (6.3%)	12 (12.6%)	1 (2.1%)	0.50 (0.5%)	48 (100%)	95.50 (100%)	47.5 (99%)
Others	73.25 (11.4%)	19.30 (13.5%)	186.60 (29.2%)	85.60 (59.9%)	209.45 (32.7%)	17.35 (12.1%)	114.05 (17.8%)	15.10 (10.6%)	56.65 (8.9%)	5.50 (3.9%)	640 (100%)	142.85 (100%)	-497.15 (-77.7%)
Total	951.19 (11.4%)	1597.99 (19.5%)	3208.42 (38.6%)	2812.75 (34.3%)	1777.48 (21.4%)	2121.04 (25.9%)	2171.65 (26.1%)	1555.84 (19%)	202.65 (2.4%)	104.46 (1.3%)	8311.39 (100%)	8192.08 (100%)	-119.31 (-1.43%)

Source: Own coding from ECFP — Political Accounts and Financing Entity.

Figure A4: Absolute and relative engagement with political parties on social media.



Source: Own calculations based on FOXP2 data.

Notes: The first subplot illustrates the sum of interactions (likes, comments, and shares) on posts from each party across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter between 15 January and 8 March 2024. The second subplot displays the ratio between interactions and the number of followers during that period. Importantly, note that AD refers to an autonomous profile of the pre-electoral coalition on social media, which is more recent than those of the parties comprising the coalition. Therefore, the second subplot should be interpreted cautiously due to the lower number of followers compared to the combined followers of PSD, CDS-PP, and PPM.