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**An impactful political shift in Portugal: 50 years
of democracy, 50 deputies from the radical right.**
The reasons for Chega's success in the 2024 legislative elections.

Author: **Sebastião Guerreiro Malheiro da Silva**
Supervisor: Andrew Lawrence Roberts

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Abstract

In the year Portugal commemorates the 50th anniversary of the 25 April 1974 Revolution, the radical right party Chega obtained a historic result in the legislative elections. From achieving its first member of parliament in 2019, Chega grew in just five years to a third-place finish and the election of 50 deputies in 2024, ending the two-party hegemony that defined Portuguese politics until now.

This thesis will analyse the reasons for Chega's growth and especially its success in the 2024 legislative elections. It considers four potential explanations: political corruption, economic weaknesses, failure of public services and public policies, and the use of social media in the political campaign. Methodologically, it uses quantitative and qualitative data. It links each of the hypotheses to Chega's success by considering time trends, voting patterns, and political campaigns.

It finds that each of the main hypotheses had an effect on the outcome. Chega capitalised on the Portuguese exhaustion and dissatisfaction with the mainstream parties concerning political corruption, the country's economic weaknesses, the crisis in several public services and the failure of public policies. In addition, the social media campaign strategy differentiated Chega from the other parties, allowing the party to spread its message more effectively and benefiting electorally from it.

The success in the 2024 legislative elections could be just the beginning of Chega's increasing influence in Portuguese politics, mainly if the mainstream parties do not deliver results and fail to represent the principles they claim.

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Introduction

2024 is the year in which Portugal and the Portuguese celebrate the 50th anniversary of the 25 April 1974 Revolution. This historic date for the country signalled the end of 48 years of right-wing authoritarian dictatorship and the beginning of Portugal's democratic path.

2024 is also the year in which the Portuguese radical right, represented by the Chega party, achieved a historic result. In 45 years of democracy, until 2019, Portugal was seen as an exception, not letting populist radical right-wing movements influence the political debate. However, this was not the case for the last five years. In the 2019 legislative elections, months after the party's creation, Chega won its first member of parliament. In just five years, Chega has gone from 1 to electing 50 deputies in the 2024 legislative elections.

The results of the 2024 parliamentary elections led to three conclusions. Firstly, despite not getting most votes, Chega is the party with more reasons to celebrate, quadrupling the number of deputies elected in the 2022 legislative elections. Secondly, the Partido Socialista (PS) (Socialist Party) and the Partido Social Democrata (PSD) (Social Democratic Party), despite remaining the two most-voted parties, obtained unimpressive results compared to other legislative elections. Thirdly, as a consequence of Chega's growth and the decrease in support for the PS and PSD, the 2024 legislative elections marked the end of the two-party hegemony that has defined Portuguese democracy for the last 50 years.

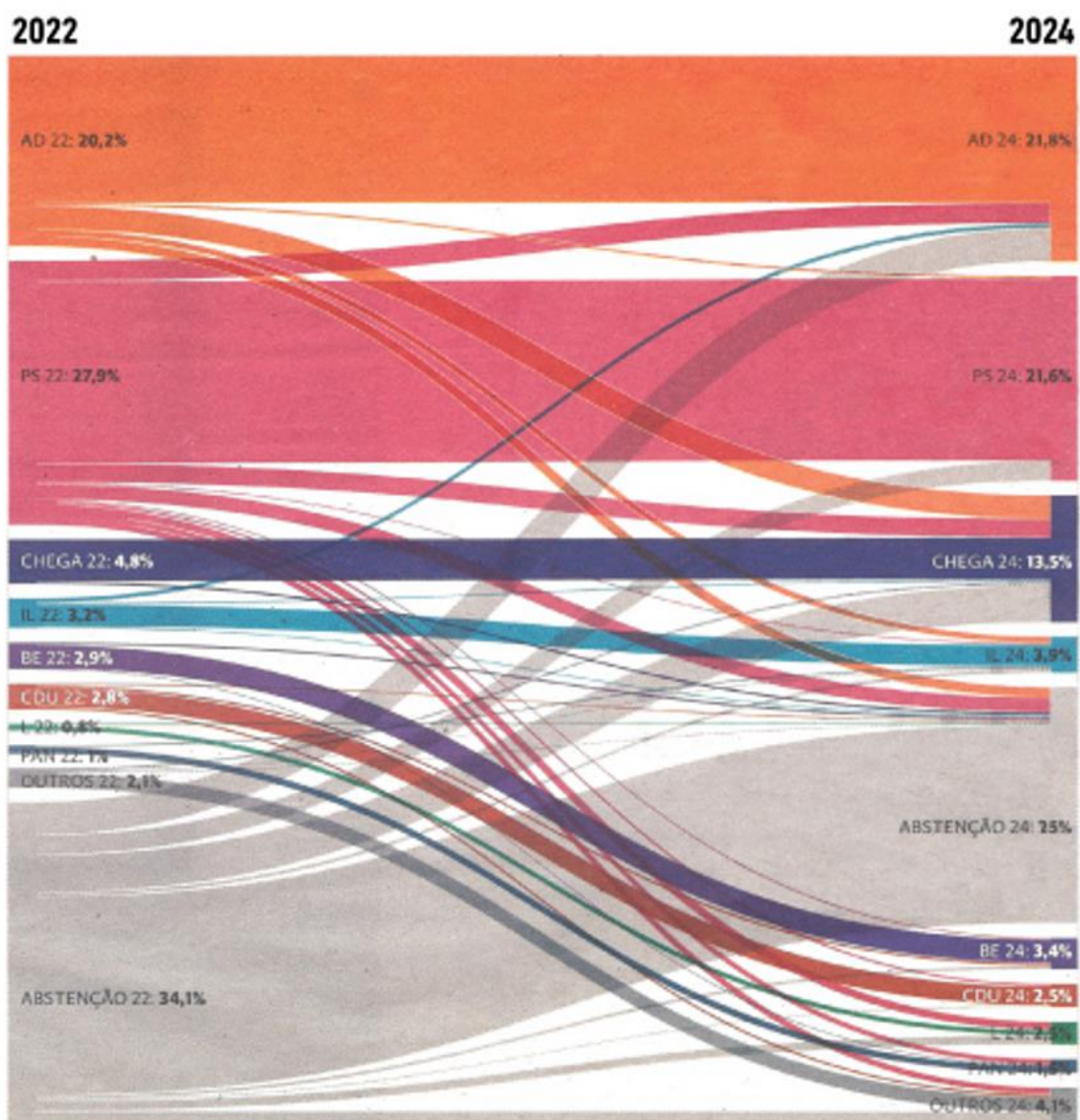
For a country that experienced an authoritarian dictatorship, History appears to be repeating itself. Chega's radical right-wing populist narrative intends to separate the people from the elite, prioritise native over immigrant populations, impose an authoritarian vision of society and disseminate disinformation for its benefit. This political party has also recovered the former dictator's guiding principles of God, Country and Family. Consequently, the increasing influence of Chega threatens the democratic values established in Portugal for the last 50 years.

Considering the facts described above, the research question of this thesis is to analyse the reasons for Chega's accelerated growth, especially in the 2024 elections. The historic result of the radical right in Portugal is not only Chega's merit but is also mainly due to the demerit of the two mainstream parties, PS and PSD. Bearing this in mind, to understand the transfer of votes in the 2024 legislative elections, one must also examine the reasons behind the Portuguese voters' loss of confidence in Portugal's two largest parties (Figure 1). Only after comprehending the factors that led PS and PSD to achieve

unsatisfactory results and how Chega capitalised on these factors to its electoral advantage will it be possible to have a complete picture of the reasons that led to the profound change in the Portuguese party system in the 2024 legislative elections.

The analysis will consist of four potential explanations: political corruption, economic weaknesses, failure of public services and public policies, and the use of social media in the political campaign, with each factor presented in a distinct chapter.

Figure 1: A survey on the Portuguese electoral transfer from 2022 to 2024 parliamentary elections



Source: EXPRESSO

Background Section

To better understand the relevance of this thesis and the analysis of Chega's success, it is necessary to provide background concerning Portugal's dictatorial past and the supposed consequent aversion to the radical right, the 2024 legislative elections' effects on the Portuguese political system and the identity of Chega and its leader, André Ventura.

Section I

Portugal, a country supposedly averse to the radical right

Until 2019, Portugal was considered an exception regarding the growth of the radical right. While many European countries were already experiencing the consequences of this phenomenon on the functioning of their democracies, the Portuguese political situation remained unchanged. To understand why, in 45 years of democracy, the far right did not have a seat in the Portuguese parliament, it is necessary to first analyse the situation at the beginning of the 20th century when the monarchy ended.

The 1st Republic was established after the end of the Portuguese monarchy on 5 October 1910 and, lasted from 1910 to 1926. The extreme fragmentation of political forces, mainly between the Portuguese Republican Party (PRP) and other moderate parties resulting from fractures in the PRP, and the consequent political instability were a constant during this period (Lagarto, 2021). This fragmentation made it difficult to form parliamentary majorities, preventing government programmes from being executed (Lagarto, 2021). As a result, from 1910 to 1926, the Portuguese 1st Republic had eight presidents and 45 governments, some lasting only a few months (Lagarto, 2021). Alongside governmental instability, in these 16 years, Portugal was also affected by the First World War, in which it took part, with severe economic consequences for a country already facing extreme poverty. The political and economic difficulties were at the root of the Portuguese discontent with the First Republic and the consequent start of 48 years of dictatorship that began with the military coup in May 1926 (Amaral, 2022).

Following his success as Finance Minister of the military dictatorship, during which he was responsible for maintaining the balance of public accounts, António de Oliveira Salazar emerged on the political scene with a discourse advocating for order and praising the army, which ultimately led to his appointment as President of the Council of Ministers in 1932 (Amaral, 2022). Salazar served as Minister of Finance from 1928 to 1932 and as President of the Council of Ministers from 1932 to 1968, influencing Portuguese politics for 40 consecutive years (Amaral, 2022).

Salazar's dictatorship had the characteristics of a nationalist authoritarian regime, including a single government party that always won the elections, censorship of the press and cinema, political police, absence of freedom of association and prohibition of trade unions (Amaral, 2022). The regime's propaganda was crucial, with a central communications department that permanently exalted nationalism, a heroic vision of History, patriotism, and its leader as the guarantee of order and development in the country (Amaral, 2022). Salazar's regime was defined by an authoritarian right-wing, conservative, catholic nationalist ideological component, with elements taken from Mussolini's fascism in Italy (Amaral, 2022). This dictatorship of the elites brought the Church closer to State power, defining God, Country and Family as its guiding principles (Amaral, 2022).

Salazar's medical incapacity to remain in power was the only reason for his replacement by Marcello Caetano, a former Minister of the Colonies in 1968 (Amaral, 2022). During the initial two years of Marcello Caetano as President of the Council of Ministers, the Portuguese hoped the regime would improve (Amaral, 2022). This expectation faded between 1970 and 1974 since the new President of the Council of Ministers did not contribute to the end of the Colonial War, occurring in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, and still promoted an authoritarian regime that restricted Portuguese liberties (Amaral, 2022). In addition, Portugal was affected by the international oil crisis in the early 1970s, which created economic difficulties that profoundly impacted the country (Amaral, 2022). These factors led to growing political opposition to the regime and discontent among the military regarding the Colonial War, which had been ongoing since 1961 (Amaral, 2022). The military's dissatisfaction was the main force behind the 25 April 1974 Revolution, which, in less than 24 hours, overthrew the authoritarian regime that had been in place since 1926 and initiated Portugal's democratic path (Amaral, 2022).

This democratic path, from 1974 to 2019, did not include any radical right-wing parties in parliament. Before Chega's creation, the Ergue-te party, formerly the National Renewal Party (PRD), represented the radical right in Portugal. The highest number of votes Ergue-te achieved was in 2015, with just 27,000 votes (Santos, 2024). As a result of Chega's rise, the party lost even more relevance, receiving 5,000 votes in 2022 and 6,000 in 2024, just 0.1% of the total (Santos, 2024). Portuguese could vote for the radical right before 2019 but rejected it.

Portugal was considered an example of a country that, because it had 48 years of an authoritarian dictatorship of the nationalist right, did not cede to the populist phenomenon of the radical right gaining influence in the Western world (Heyne & Manucci, 2021). On the opposite side of the political spectrum, Portugal always had radical left representation, with the Partido Comunista Português (PCP/CDU)

(Portuguese Communist Party) from the beginning of democracy and the Bloco de Esquerda (BE) (Left Bloc) from the end of the 20th century. Until the 2019 legislative elections, the party with parliamentary representation most to the right of the political spectrum was the Centro Democrático Social Party (CDS) (Social Democratic Center), which, like the PCP, has been present since the beginning of Portugal's democratic journey. Despite being until 2019 the political force in the parliament most to the right, the CDS is a Christian Democratic party that has been part of coalition governments and is opposed to the vision presented by radical right-wing populism.

The election of André Ventura, leader of Chega, in 2019 marked the first time the radical right was represented in Portugal's parliament. The Portuguese memories of the Salazar dictatorship no longer appear sufficient to prevent the advance of this ideological movement, which has risen from one to fifty members of parliament in just five years. In a survey conducted this year to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the April 25 Revolution in 1974, the Portuguese revealed a concerning forgetfulness regarding the dangers of living under an authoritarian dictatorial regime. For a third of Portuguese respondents (34 per cent), it would be preferable to have a strong leader who does not need to worry about parliament or elections (Almeida et al., 2024). Only 43 per cent, less than half of those questioned, disagreed with this statement (Almeida et al., 2024). Among the Portuguese questioned, 23% believe that the country would regain its greatness if Portuguese politicians followed Salazar's ideals and 29% agree that Portugal was doing better before 1974 because it relied on a national identity that defended traditional values (Almeida et al., 2024).

History appears to be repeating itself 50 years after the end of the dictatorship in Portugal. The country that was an exception for its supposed aversion to the growth of radical right-wing populism seems to be moving increasingly towards it. The survey mentioned and the electoral results of Chega, a party that has recovered Salazar's guiding principles of God, Country and Family, demonstrate the tendency of many Portuguese to reconnect with the country's dictatorial past (Lusa, 2021). Dissatisfied with the path that democracy has taken, the Portuguese blame the two parties that have governed Portugal for half a century, the Socialist Party (PS) and the Social Democratic Party (PSD), and turn to the radical right-wing Chega party to demonstrate their discontent. The country that did not have the presence of this ideological movement in parliament until 2019 now has Chega as the third most-voted political party, which, in the latest election, ended with 50 years of PS and PSD's predominance.

Section II

The end of the two-party hegemony that defined Portuguese democracy

The 2024 legislative elections signalled the end of the two-party hegemony formed by the Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Party, which had defined Portuguese democracy for the past 50 years. Over the last five decades, despite Portugal having a multi-party political system, executive power has only shifted between these two parties without the emergence of a third party with the capacity to approach the PS and PSD electoral results.

The PS, as a moderate centre-left party, and the PSD, as a moderate centre-right party, were the only two political parties with members of their own as Prime Minister. In instances where the PS and PSD have governed as minority parties, it has frequently been necessary for them to form parliamentary or government coalitions to remain in power. Recently, in 2015, the PS had to form a parliamentary alliance (known as the *Geringonça*) with two radical left-wing parties, namely the *Bloco de Esquerda* and the *PCP*. This agreement enabled the PS to retain power until 2022. Concerning the PSD, it campaigned for the 2011 elections jointly with the *CDS* and achieved a victory that led both parties to be in the government until 2015. In the 2024 elections, the PSD did the same as in 2011 with the *CDS* and added the *Partido Popular Monárquico (PPM)* (Popular Monarchist Party) to the coalition in recognition of the 1979 electoral campaign, in which the three parties campaigned together with the same name as in 2024, *Aliança Democrática (AD)* (Democratic Alliance).

In the Portuguese legislative elections, 230 deputies are elected to parliament, 226 from the votes obtained in Portugal and four from votes of Portuguese emigrants in and outside of Europe, with each constituency electing two deputies.

In the most recent elections, *Chega* achieved 50 seats in parliament, four times the result achieved in 2022 of only 12. *Chega* is not the first of the non-mainstream parties to achieve a result close to 20 per cent, since the Portuguese Communist Party in 1979 and the Democratic Renewal Party (*PRD*) in 1985 achieved similar results (Lusa, 2024). Despite this, it is the first time a populist radical right party has a prominent position in Portuguese democracy.

The end of this hegemony is not only a consequence of the growth of *Chega* but is also due to the relatively low results of the two governing parties, PS and PSD. The narrow victory of the Democratic Alliance (*AD*), a coalition that includes the PSD, the *CDS* and the *PPM*, resulted in only 80 deputies, close to the 77 obtained by the PSD in 2022 when it campaigned alone and quite distant from a

parliamentary majority that requires 116 deputies (Figure 2) (Figure 3). Only in 1985, with the victory of Cavaco Silva of the PSD, had the result of a legislative winner been so low (Lusa, 2024).

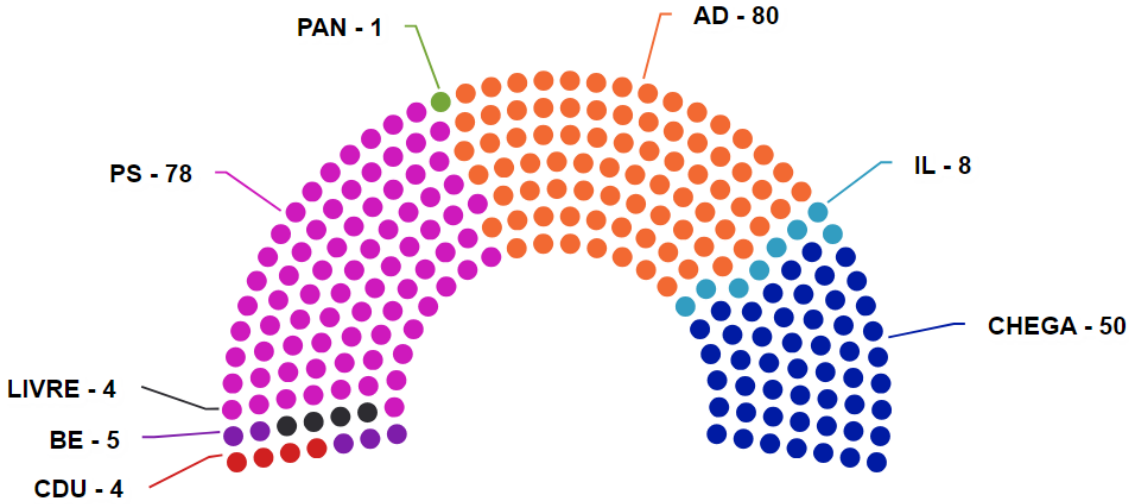
The Socialist Party lost its majority of 120 deputies from the 2022-2024 parliamentary term. The results in the national territory were the second worst in PS history, with the party losing 13.02 percentage points and 490,000 votes, meaning a reduction of 40 deputies (Dinis & Rosa, 2024). The party also suffered a significant defeat in the European and non-European constituencies, as they obtained three out of four possible members of parliament in 2022 but only one in the most recent elections. Overall, the PS lost 42 parliamentary seats, representing a decrease of approximately half a million votes (Figure 4) (Figure 5).

Figure 2: The results of the 2024 legislative elections - Percentage of votes, N° of votes and N° of elected deputies. (AD = PSD + CDS + PPM).

AD *	28.84% 1.867.013 votos	80
PS	28.00% 1.812.469 votos	78
CHEGA	18.07% 1.169.836 votos	50
IL	4.94% 319.685 votos	8
BE	4.36% 282.314 votos	5
CDU	3.17% 205.436 votos	4
LIVRE	3.16% 204.676 votos	4
PAN	1.95% 126.085 votos	1

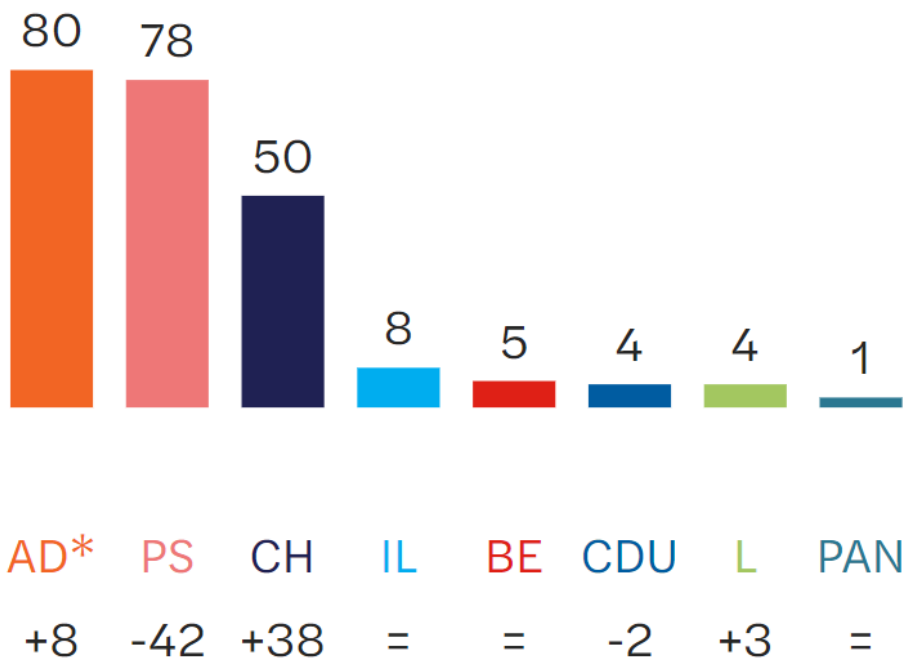
Source: CNN Portugal

Figure 3: Distribution of seats in the Portuguese Parliament after the 2024 legislative elections. (AD = PSD + CDS + PPM).



Source: CNN Portugal

Figure 4: The number of deputies elected in 2024 (above) and the comparison with the 2022 parliamentary elections (below). (AD = PSD + CDS + PPM).



Source: Observador

Figure 5: Parliamentary elections - Variation in the percentage of votes from 2022 to 2024.

(AD = PSD + CDS + PPM).



Source: Observador

Over the past three decades, the combined weight of PS and PSD deputies in parliament has never been as low as in 2024, almost approaching the point of not ensuring a two-thirds majority in parliament with only 156 out of 230 deputies (Dinis & Rosa, 2024) (Figure 6). The reduced influence of these two parties is mainly due to the rapid growth of Chega, a party with only five years of existence. In 2019, in the first legislative election Chega participated in, the party got 67,000 votes, which allowed its first deputy to enter parliament, its leader André Ventura (Dinis & Rosa, 2024). Three years later, in 2022, the party achieved 385,000 votes and 12 deputies (Dinis & Rosa, 2024). In the 2024 parliamentary elections, Chega obtained more than 1 million votes, which guaranteed the party 50 deputies. This success led André Ventura to claim that the PS and PSD's predominance had ended (Matos, 2024).

Figure 6: Parliamentary elections over the last 30 years - The number of deputies elected from the PS, the PSD, and the sum of the two parties (without considering the coalitions formed with other political forces before or after the elections results).

-	1995	1999	2002	2005	2009	2011	2015	2019	2022	2024
PS	112	115	96	121	97	74	86	108	120	78
PSD	88	81	105	75	81	108	89	79	77	78
PS + PSD	200	196	201	196	178	182	175	187	197	156

Data Source: Pordata

Despite not winning the elections, Chega was the party with the most reason to celebrate, having gained a decisive influence in the Portuguese party system (Matos, 2024). The 18 per cent achieved enables the party to exert pressure on the PSD/AD minority government and André Ventura to increasingly position himself as the opposition leader. In just five years, Chega has succeeded in electing deputies in 17 of the 18 districts of Continental Portugal, except for Bragança, and in the Autonomous Regions of Madeira and the Azores. The party won in the Algarve's only district, Faro, and removed the PCP/CDU's historic parliamentary representation in the three Alentejo districts for the first time since 1974 (Matos, 2024).

The 2024 legislative elections had the lowest abstention rate since 1995, at only 33.8% (Albuquerque & Rosa, 2024). 6.1 million Portuguese citizens voted, accounting for two-thirds of those registered (Albuquerque & Rosa, 2024). It represents a significant increase in voter turnout compared to previous elections in Portugal (Albuquerque & Rosa, 2024). The difference was substantial regarding the 2022 parliamentary elections, with an additional 745,000 Portuguese exercising their right to vote in 2024 (Albuquerque & Rosa, 2024).

The Portuguese party system has undergone a structural transformation. From 2022 to 2024, the PS lost approximately half a million votes, while the PSD/AD was unable to attract these voters or the 745,000 who had abstained in the previous elections, maintaining a similar result to that achieved by the PSD without a coalition in 2022. A significant part of the electors transferred their votes to Chega in 2024,

increasing the party's votes from 385,000 to over one million in just two years. This growth established Chega as the third most influential political force in Portugal.

Before the 2024 elections, no political party, other than the PS and PSD, could influence the country's governance to the same extent that Chega now does, with 50 members of parliament. The first sign of this conditioning occurred during the inaugural session of parliament for the term initiated in 2024, where the President of the Assembly of the Republic, the institutional figure in charge of coordinating parliament's activities, is supposed to be elected.

The election for this position adheres to a tradition whereby the party with the most votes in the legislative elections is entitled to appoint the President of the Assembly of the Republic, who then needs to be elected by a majority of 116 deputies. Despite the changes to the party system in 2024 and the minority representation of the PSD/AD government, there were no prospects of difficulties for the candidate from the victorious coalition in the legislative elections to secure the position of President of the Assembly of the Republic.

It did not easily succeed as expected, and after three rounds of votes, no candidate had been elected, with the first day of voting ending in a deadlock (Correia et al., 2024). Before that, the leader of Chega, André Ventura, had declared in an interview on the morning of the first voting day that the party would vote in favour of the AD candidate, Aguiar-Branco (Correia et al., 2024). Chega and the PSD/AD had an implicit agreement. If Chega voted for Aguiar-Branco, the PSD would ensure the election of a Chega deputy as one of the Assembly's four vice presidents (Correia et al., 2024). Contrary to what was agreed and affirmed by André Ventura, the 50 Chega deputies voted blank, blocking Aguiar-Branco's election in the first round (Correia et al., 2024). PS also voted blank, claiming that the PSD preferred to make a deal with the radical right instead of negotiating with them (Correia et al., 2024). Chega and PS took advantage of this instability to present in the second round their candidate for the position (Correia et al., 2024). Negotiations and votes ended only with the fourth attempt, with an agreement between the PSD/AD and the PS establishing that each party would hold the position of President of the Assembly of the Republic for two of the four years of the legislature, with Aguiar-Branco from the AD starting (Correia et al., 2024).

In a typically procedural election, the insufficient deputies to guarantee Aguiar-Branco as President of the Assembly of the Republic resulted in the dependence of the PSD/AD minority government on the PS and Chega. The instability created in this symbolic election demonstrates the end of the two-party hegemony and the start of a three-party cycle of political negotiations.

Section III

Chega's identity and its leader André Ventura

André Ventura, the leader and founder of Chega, started his political career within the PSD, a centre-right governing party. Before becoming a well-known figure in Portuguese politics, André Ventura enjoyed media visibility as a football commentator on the *Correio da Manhã* television channel from 2014 to 2020 (Heyne & Manucci, 2021). The rupture with the PSD and the emergence of his radical vision occurred in the 2017 local elections.

In 2017, André Ventura was the PSD candidate for the Loures Municipal Council. His campaign attracted considerable attention following the controversial statements made about the Roma community, in which Ventura accused this ethnic minority of being dependent on subsidies and living above the law (Marchi, 2019). Despite the controversy surrounding his campaign, André Ventura got elected as a municipal deputy with 21.55% of the votes (Lusa, 2018). His candidature for the Loures Municipal Council caused internal instability within the Social Democratic Party, culminating with the end of André Ventura's connection with the party and his resignation as Municipal deputy in October 2018 (Lusa, 2018). The 21.55% of the votes obtained in Loures provided André Ventura with the evidence needed to conclude that there was a receptiveness in the Portuguese electorate for a more radical discourse, which led him to create the Chega party in April 2019.

In September 2019, a few months after the party's creation, André Ventura was elected to the Portuguese parliament. The leader of Chega benefited from his past in PSD, a mainstream and moderate party, which gave him greater visibility and acceptance by the Portuguese voters and the media (Heyne & Manucci, 2021). Since his election in 2019, André Ventura has been shaping Portuguese politics with his anti-system discourse, representing the people's voice against the political elite and political correctness (Marchi, 2019).

Chega is André Ventura, and Ventura is Chega, highlighting the pronounced personalisation of this radical right-wing populist party (Marchi, 2019). Ventura appeals to supporters by being a young, charismatic, assertive politician with a well-structured speech who effectively spreads the party's

message on social media (Marchi, 2019). Chega's over-dependence on its leader has disadvantages, with voters losing confidence in the party when the candidate is not André Ventura, as occurred in the 2021 local elections and the 2024 European elections, where the party's results failed to meet its objectives.

"Chega" is a Portuguese word that translates to "enough", aligning with the party's protest nature. It has a radical right-wing identity, exhibiting the same characteristics as the other parties of this ideological movement (Heyne & Manucci, 2021). The populist discourse of Chega presents a narrative that separates the people from the elite, prioritises native over immigrant populations, emphasises the importance of law and order, and rejects policies designed to protect minorities (Marchi, 2019) (Heyne & Manucci, 2021).

The populist discourse presented centres on an "us versus them" rhetoric that aims to differentiate the party from other political actors by claiming to represent the people's voice in opposition to the political correctness of the governing parties (Marchi, 2019) (Heyne & Manucci, 2021). To this end, Chega seeks to capture the media's attention with its controversial positions in favour of ending financial support for ethnic minorities, the chemical castration of paedophiles and the reintroduction of life sentences for certain crimes (Marchi, 2019). Chega's objective is to prioritize what they consider to be "good Portuguese" and to fight immigration, the governing political parties (PS and PSD) and social diversity (Heyne & Manucci, 2021).

The security agenda of promoting law and order is a fundamental aspect of Chega's political programme (Marchi, 2019). The party's authoritarian vision of society receives the support of movements associated with the security forces (Movimento Zero) that aim to reaffirm Portugal's traditional values (Marchi, 2019) (Heyne & Manucci, 2021). Chega also portrays itself as an active voice in denouncing corruption cases, agreements between the media and government parties, and the partiality of the judicial system (Marchi, 2019).

Chega opposes what it calls the "dictatorship of gender ideology", with Catholic movements that disagree with LGBT communities' practices having a strong influence on the party's identity (Marchi, 2019) (Heyne & Manucci, 2021). André Ventura's party is against what it considers to be cultural Marxism and the radical left's agenda, which includes feminism, abortion legalisation, sex education in schools, and same-sex marriage, which for the party presents a dangerous threat to traditional family values (Marchi, 2019) (Heyne & Manucci, 2021).

Chega rejects positive discrimination policies, especially those aimed at supporting the Roma community and immigrants, claiming that these contribute to the existence of identitarian ghettos (Marchi, 2019) (Heyne & Manucci, 2021). For this radical right party, Portuguese natives are the priority, and there should not be any State subsidies or benefits for ethnic minorities (Marchi, 2019). Also, on immigration, André Ventura's party advocates for stricter control of these movements, where entry should only be allowed according to the country's economic needs (Marchi, 2019). To attract more support for its idea of closed borders, Chega disseminates the idea that Portuguese are being replaced in the labour market and demographically by immigrants (Marchi, 2019). To also promote its policy, Chega takes advantage of the increase in the number of immigrants from Islamic communities to foster fear, insecurity and the dangers of this cultural clash (Marchi, 2019).

Despite its structured radical right-wing identity, Chega's populist nature allows the party to be ideologically flexible and adapt to what is most electorally beneficial. Over the five years of its existence, both André Ventura and Chega have shifted how they communicate their political message and some of their political arguments to reach a broad number of voters (Monteiro, 2024).

The work conducted by Rádio Renascença, which analysed all the debates for the legislative elections in which Chega participated, demonstrated that many of the controversial positions that the party had when it elected André Ventura in 2019 were no longer used in its political discourse in 2024 (Monteiro, 2024). In the campaign for the 2024 elections, Chega did not mention the Roma community at any point, nor the cuts in financial support for the most disadvantaged, which include a significant number of people from ethnic minorities (Monteiro, 2024).

Five years ago, Chega focused on setting the media agenda with its racist and xenophobic positions, but the party's strategy for 2024 has shifted (Monteiro, 2024). The strategy's change does not make the party more moderate but allows Chega to broaden its electoral base and strengthen its position as Portugal's third most popular political force (Monteiro, 2024). The issues prioritised in 2024 brought the party closer to the other political forces of the European radical right than in 2019, replacing the fight against the Roma community with a discourse against Muslim immigration and expressing opposition to gender identity policies, which the party refers to as "gender ideology" (Monteiro, 2024). The less controversial approach the party has adopted recently contributed to Chega's rapid growth in just five years. Despite maintaining its radical right-wing identity, voters perceive André Ventura's party as a channel to demonstrate their opposition and discontent with the current state of the country.

For 45 years, the influence of a radical right-wing party in Portugal was minimal. However, for the past five years, this movement has emerged in the country as the third most significant political force. The exceptionalism claim and the two-party hegemony that had characterised Portuguese politics ended. Chega's success, achieving 50 deputies, and the unimpressive results of the mainstream parties in the 2024 elections have led to a profound transformation and the beginning of a new cycle. The following chapters aim to analyse the factors that contributed to the success of Chega, particularly in the 2024 parliamentary elections.

Hypotheses

In this thesis, I considered four hypotheses to explain Chega's growth, especially its success in the 2024 legislative election: political corruption, economic weaknesses, failure of public services and public policies, and the use of social media in the political campaign.

From reading the academic literature on the election along with political and journalistic reporting, these were the areas that journalists, commentators, and scholars have pointed to as the most significant for Chega's success. I put together systematic evidence and compared the hypotheses with each other rather than just providing isolated factors.

1. Voters might have lost trust in the mainstream parties due to cases of political corruption where members of these political forces were/are involved, in particular, an investigation that led to the Prime Minister's resignation and the subsequent early elections in 2024. Chega's capitalisation on the issue may have benefited the party electorally.
2. The resentment with measures implemented in previous governments and Portugal's current economic weaknesses might have contributed to voters' dissatisfaction with the mainstream parties. Chega's promises of immediate improvements could have attracted voters discontent with their living conditions and benefited the party's electoral results in the 2024 elections.
3. The crisis in public education, security forces, public health system and the failure of public policies in housing and immigration might have contributed to Portuguese dissatisfaction with the mainstream parties, mainly with the PS government. The increased support for Chega could be due to its position as the main protest party, opposing the Socialist government's policies and promising instant solutions for everything.
4. Chega's social media campaign strategy might have been the party's main strength. Chega adapted to the changes in how voters get their political information, which may have allowed them to spread their message more effectively than the other political parties. Moreover, by being a populist party, Chega may benefit electorally from these changes in political communication.

Methods

In this thesis, I provide systematic evidence for these hypotheses and determine which are the principal factors leading to Chega's success. The following steps outline the process used to achieve this objective.

I conducted a time trend analysis. It involved the examination of time trends in various areas to identify any correlation with the rise in popularity of Chega. It also entailed a comprehensive data review to define the sectors experiencing deteriorating conditions when Chega increased its support. For example, in the years of Chega's accelerated growth, public services in Portugal have progressively turned into an unsustainable situation.

I established a connection between the identified trends and voting behaviour. The objective was to determine whether the trends analysed would predict an increase in votes for Chega and fewer for the mainstream parties, the PS and the PSD. For instance, political corruption cases involving important members of PS and PSD led to voters' distrust in these political parties and more willingness to vote for Chega.

I analysed Chega's electoral program to determine whether the party took advantage of the negative trends and dissatisfaction, emphasising these aspects in its 2024 campaign. For example, it helped to understand the alignment between Chega's priorities and the widespread discontent regarding the situation of several public services.

To support my hypotheses, I used both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data included economic indicators, statistics on the state of public services and on areas where public policies have an impact, results from Portuguese and European surveys on perceptions of corruption, political parties' number of followers and interactions on social media, and polls regarding several aspects of the Portuguese political situation. The qualitative data included writings of political commentators, journalists, and political scientists, which helped me identify the primary factors leading up to Chega's success. For the past year, as part of my qualitative research and to have a complete picture of the Portuguese political events leading up to the 2024 election, I have been reading the major Portuguese newspapers and magazines. To better understand Chega's identity and its leader, I have also looked at André Ventura's biography, his speeches, and the main priorities in the party's political programme.

Analysis

Chapter I

Distrust of democratic institutions, high perception of corruption, its causes and consequences

Introduction

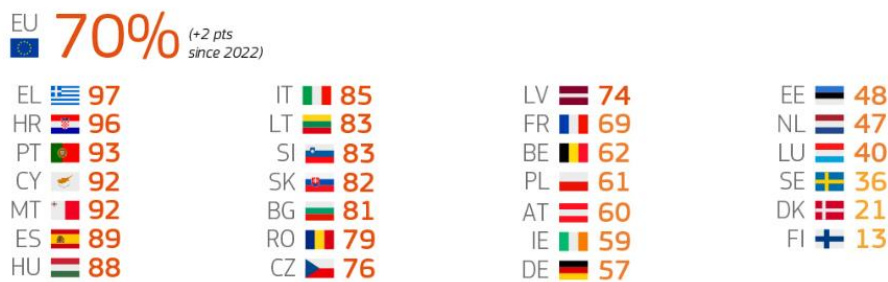
A recent Eurobarometer survey revealed that Portuguese have a high perception of corruption (93%) when compared to other Europeans (Figure 7). The data indicates that the Portuguese population perceives corruption as most prevalent among politicians and political parties (Figure 8). Following the events of Operation Influencer, which forced Prime Minister António Costa's resignation, the perception of corruption within the political class has become an increasingly prevalent issue in public discourse and was a central theme in the 2024 election campaign. Utilizing both survey data and a qualitative analysis of political scandals in Portugal, this chapter considers how the Portuguese high perception of corruption has diminished trust in the main political parties and contributed to the accelerated growth of the radical right-wing Chega party.

It is essential to make two preliminary notes. Firstly, the traditional definition of political corruption is associated with cases where public officials abuse their power for private gain (Transparency International, 2024). Members of the political class accused of corruption, falsifying documents, money laundering, and other crimes contribute to society's distrust of democratic institutions and a high perception of political corruption. In this chapter, I will address the most significant investigations involving Portuguese politicians and political parties that have generated scepticism and dissatisfaction among the Portuguese electorate. When asked about corruption in a recent poll, 66% of respondents said they believe things are worse than before the Revolution on April 25, 1974 (Figure 9). These investigations created a gap between the Portuguese and the traditional political forces, allowing populist movements to gain traction, with the fight against corruption positioned among their top priorities. Secondly, concerning the cases and investigations discussed in this chapter, I would like to emphasise that being a defendant or accused does not imply that the individual in question is responsible or/and will be held accountable for the actions aimed at.

Since 2017, at least 191 politicians and public office holders in Portugal have been accused by the Public Prosecutor’s Office (Guerreiro, 2023). The accusations involve a Prime Minister, 11 ministers, 13 secretaries of state, 33 members of parliament and 133 mayors. Over the past six years, they have all been made defendants in cases related to corruption, embezzlement and undue receipt of advantages (Guerreiro, 2023). The Socialist (PS) and the Social Democratic (PSD) parties have the greatest number of cases, with the majority occurring in local governments and involving mayors from several municipalities (Guerreiro, 2023). It explains the answers in the Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2023, which revealed that 91% of Portuguese respondents believed that corruption exists within national public institutions, while 90% held a similar view of regional or local public institutions (Figure 10) (Figure 11). These figures are significantly higher than the European Union average of 74% and 73%, respectively (Figure 10) (Figure 11).

Figure 7: Perception of corruption in European Union Countries

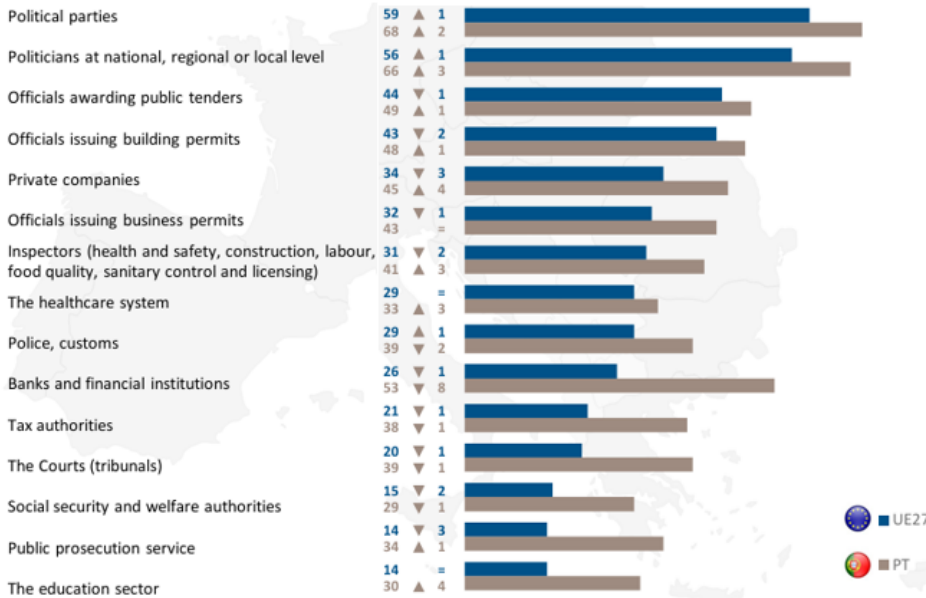
A majority of Europeans consider corruption to be widespread in their country



Source: Special Eurobarometer 534, 2023.

Figure 8: Perception of corruption in Portugal

QA7. In (OUR COUNTRY), do you think that the giving and taking of bribes and the abuse of power for personal gain are widespread among any of the following? (MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE)



Source: Special Eurobarometer 534, 2023.

Figure 9: Perception of corruption evolution in Portugal

"In relation to corruption, and compared to what happened before 25th April 1974, do you think things are better, the same or worse in Portugal?" - Corruption, % of total sample.



Source: ICS ISCTE, 2024 - The Portuguese and the 25th of April.

Figure 10: Perception of corruption in the Portuguese public institutions

There is corruption in the national public institutions in (OUR COUNTRY):



Red - Agree; Blue - Disagree; Grey - Don't Know

Source: Special Eurobarometer 534, 2023.

Figure 11: Perception of corruption in the Portuguese local or regional public institutions

There is corruption in the local or regional public institutions in (OUR COUNTRY):



Red - Agree; Blue - Disagree; Grey - Don't Know

Source: Special Eurobarometer 534, 2023.

Development

Section I

Corruption scandals in Portuguese politics

This section will present qualitative evidence indicating that Portugal's major political parties, the Socialist Party (PS) and the Social Democratic Party (PSD), were significantly impacted by corruption scandals that reduced public support, with these still fresh in voters' minds as they approached the 2024 election.

Operation Influencer

First, the most recent and relevant investigation in the context of the 2024 elections, Operation Influencer, will be addressed. The Operation Influencer was made public in November 2023, resulting in the resignation of Prime Minister António Costa. It marked the first time in Portuguese history that a Prime Minister resigned due to a corruption scandal (Llach, 2023). The investigation concerns a €3.5 billion investment in a data centre project, Sines 4.0, designed to be entirely powered by renewable energy sources and intended to be Portugal's most important foreign investment in 30 years (Jopson, 2023). The Portuguese Public Prosecutor's office has accused Start Campus, the project's investment company, of attempting to influence the outcome of licensing proceedings through influence peddling, a criminal offence (Jopson, 2023). The project, situated close to a deepwater port in Sines, encountered two significant challenges. It required approval to construct within a designated conservation zone and faced difficulties establishing a robust and reliable connection between Sines 4.0 and the national electricity grid (Jopson, 2023).

António Costa's Socialist Party's solid legislative majority ended, forcing an early election for the second time in two years. The Prime Minister resigned when two members of his inner circle, chief of staff Vítor Escária and businessman Diogo Lacerda Machado, referred by António Costa as his “best friend”, were

detained for interrogation on allegations of irregularities in the concession of lithium mines, a green hydrogen project and the data centre, all related to Start Campus (Llach, 2023).

António Costa previously appointed Diogo Lacerda Machado to oversee the nationalisation of Tap Airline and a banking dispute with Isabel dos Santos, the millionaire daughter of the former Angolan president (Jopson, 2023). Start Campus hired Lacerda Machado as a consultant to benefit from his close contacts with António Costa and his chief of staff, Vítor Escária (Jopson, 2023). The alleged intention was to gain insight into the government's inner workings and overcome bureaucratic obstacles (Llach, 2023). According to the Portuguese Public Prosecutor's office, Lacerda Machado, by using his close relationship with the Prime Minister, influenced and pressured government members, officials from local authority bodies, and other public institutions to expedite their actions to benefit the data centre project (Jopson, 2023).

In the Prime Minister's official residence, police searches found envelopes holding over €75,000 in cash in the office of Vítor Escária (Llach, 2023). Searches were also conducted in the Environment and Infrastructure Ministries since João Galamba, former Secretary of State for the Environment and Energy and Minister of Infrastructures at the time of the investigation, is also a suspect in the Operation Influencer investigation.

Two administrators of Start Campus and Nuno Mascarenhas, the mayor of Sines, were also detained for interrogation. Prosecutors have identified several expensive dinners offered by Start Campus, including one attended by Nuno Lacasta, head of Portugal's Environment Agency, and Infrastructure Minister João Galamba (Jopson, 2023).

Although António Costa has not been identified as a suspect or formally charged with a crime, the Supreme Court is investigating his actions, and prosecutors are gathering evidence that might lead to an official inquiry into influence peddling, embezzlement, and fraud (Jopson, 2023) (Llach, 2023). Nonetheless, the revelation that some suspects used the Prime Minister's name, position and involvement to unblock proceedings harmed his reputation (Jopson, 2023).

Operation Influencer, which resulted in Antonio Costa's resignation, was a highly publicised scandal that dominated public media from the end of 2023 to the beginning of 2024, as it was the cause of the early election in March 2024.

The accusation against José Sócrates

It is similarly significant to address a case that has been ongoing for ten years, in which a former Portuguese Prime Minister was arrested for the first time, contributing to the country's perception of widespread political corruption. José Sócrates, the Socialist Prime Minister from 2005 to 2011, was arrested in November 2014 on allegations of corruption, tax fraud, and money laundering. The former Prime Minister spent almost a year in prison and was later under house arrest before being granted conditional release at the end of 2015, and has been waiting for trial since.

The accusation states that, during his time as Prime Minister, José Sócrates accepted bribes from Ricardo Salgado, former head of the Espírito Santo banking group, to facilitate deals with Portugal Telecom, which reportedly earned the banking group over €8 billion (Ames, 2021). Espírito Santo group and Portugal Telecom collapsed during the Eurozone crisis, forcing the Government to bail out the bank, leaving Portuguese taxpayers with a multi-billion euro debt (Ames, 2021). The Public Prosecutor's Office also accused Sócrates of accepting bribes to facilitate the awarding of contracts to a construction company, including housing projects in Venezuela, and the former Prime Minister is also implicated in questionable investments in an Algarve beach resort (Ames, 2021).

The former Socialist Prime Minister's severe corruption accusations, which included obtaining €34 million in bribes, were dismissed in 2021, but José Sócrates continued to face prosecution for money laundering and document falsification (Ames, 2021). The Lisbon Court of Appeal overturned this judgement in 2024, confirming the decision to charge José Sócrates with passive corruption (Lusa, 2024). The Public Prosecutor Office's accusation was nearly totally retrieved, charging Sócrates with three offences of corruption, thirteen of money laundering, and six of fraud (Lusa, 2024).

Despite this, three forgery charges against José Sócrates are approaching the statute of limitations, and in a few months, some of the accusations can drop permanently (Costa, 2024). As mentioned, the Lisbon Court of Appeal remitted the judgement to the pre-trial stage. A new investigating judge must review the case and determine if there is enough evidence to continue with the accusations. However, to avoid the statute of limitations, Sócrates must be convicted for these crimes until August 2024 (Costa, 2024).

EDP Case

Another well-known case involves the former Sócrates's Minister of Economy, Manuel Pinho, who has been accused of, as the former Prime Minister, favouring the interests of the Espírito Santo banking group in deals with various companies and has been under house arrest since December 2021. (Guerreiro, 2023). He is a defendant in the EDP (Portuguese Energies Group) case and faces charges of money laundering, passive corruption and tax fraud (Guerreiro, 2023). Manuel Pinho served as Minister of Economy between 2005 and 2009 and is one of eight ministers from Socialist governments who have been accused in the last six years (Guerreiro, 2023).

The investigation into the EDP case focused on allegations that the José Sócrates government had granted preferential treatment to the Portuguese Energies Company (Pires, 2023). As the investigation progressed, concerns emerged regarding the former leader of Espírito Santo banking group, Ricardo Salgado, accused of bribing Manuel Pinho with more than five million euros (Pires, 2023). The relationship between Manuel Pinho and Ricardo Salgado allowed a series of decisions that have benefited the Espírito Santo Group (Pires, 2023). These include classifying two properties owned by Ricardo Salgado's family, Herdade da Comporta and Herdade do Pinheirinho, as Projects of National Interest, giving them fiscal benefits and European Union funds (Pires, 2023). The indictment also concerns the support provided by Manuel Pinho to the company Brisa, which at the time was one of Espírito Santo's largest debtors, to increase its stake in Autoestradas do Atlântico (Atlantic Highways), a measure initially rejected by the Portuguese Competition Authority (Pires, 2023).

Tutti Frutti Case

The case in question also significantly impacts the high perception of political corruption in Portugal, as it accuses members of the most diverse political positions, from former ministers to mayors, of criminal offences. Since 2018, the Tutti Frutti case has been investigating alleged benefits to members and political executives of the Socialist (PS) and Social Democratic (PSD) parties through tenders and public contracts (Lusa, 2024). These benefits are thought to have been obtained through passive corruption, influence peddling, economic participation in business and prohibited financing involving Lisbon local authorities and Lisbon City Hall (Lusa, 2024); (Diário de Notícias, 2023).

A report by TVI/CNN alleged that an exchange of favours occurred between the PS and PSD in the definition of candidates for the 2017 local elections, intending to ensure political permanence in certain Lisbon councils (Diário de Notícias, 2023). According to the same report, which cites an investigation

by the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Judicial Police, Fernando Medina, former Minister of Finance, is a suspect in this case that dates back to his time as Mayor of Lisbon, concerning alleged offences of corruption, abuse of power and the unlawful use of political office (Diário de Notícias, 2023). Numerous wiretaps and hundreds of emails involve the former Finance Minister and the former Environment Minister, Duarte Cordeiro, who was Medina's number two in the Lisbon City Hall at the time (Diário de Notícias, 2023).

Nepotism and internal scandals in the last Socialist governments

Regarding the government structure, the period during which António Costa served as Prime Minister was controversial and had periods of instability. António Costa's governments, which lasted for eight years, gradually lost credibility due to accusations of nepotism and forced reshuffles caused by incompatibilities.

Concerning the accusations of nepotism, in 2019, after four years in charge of the government, António Costa's cabinet included Interior Minister Eduardo Cabrita and his wife, Sea Minister Ana Paula Vitorino, as well as Presidency Minister Mariana Vieira da Silva, daughter of Labor Minister José António Vieira da Silva (Oliveira, 2019). Until that year, 27 people with family connections to one another or to key Socialist leaders had or used to occupy positions in State institutions during Costa's term as Prime Minister (Oliveira, 2019).

Of the 27 people with family links to Socialist politicians, Infrastructure Minister Pedro Nuno Santos's wife was chief of staff of Duarte Cordeiro, the Secretary of State for Parliamentary affairs. In parallel, Duarte Cordeiro's wife managed a public fund since earlier that year. Still related to these 27 people, when Ana Catarina Mendes was the Socialist Party's deputy Secretary-General, her brother António Mendonça Mendes served as Secretary of State for Fiscal Affairs and his wife was part of the Prime Minister's staff.

These cases have led to accusations of nepotism, even from Rui Rio, the leader of the Social Democratic Party between 2018 and 2022, who compared the Council of Ministers to a Christmas dinner (Oliveira, 2019). The appointment of family members to public offices, a practice maintained by António Costa's government until its last mandate, negatively impacted the public perception of politics and the associated perception of merit in selecting individuals to State positions.

From 2022 to the end of 2023, the Socialist Party, led by António Costa, held an absolute majority of seats in the parliament, but the executive experienced a period of instability. A significant fraction of senior officials had resigned during the preceding two years, with several of them named as suspects in corruption and malfeasance investigations (Hernández-Morales, 2024). Costa remained firm in his support of people he considered to be the most reliable, even in cases where his government members faced criminal accusations.

An example of this firm support is Vitor Escária, mentioned previously in Operation Influencer. Escária was an adviser to Prime Minister José Sócrates before being appointed by António Costa to serve in his first government. In 2017, Vitor Escária resigned following allegations that he had accepted gifts in the form of trips to the UEFA Euro football final, which were paid for by Galp, a Portuguese oil company (Hernández-Morales, 2024). Despite this, Prime Minister António Costa rehired him in 2020 as his chief of staff. Costa's trust was again damaged when 75,000 euros in cash were discovered in Vitor Escária's office in November 2023, forcing the Prime Minister to resign. António Costa expressed similar support for a Defence Minister who was a suspect in an arms theft scandal, an Internal Administration Minister who was involved in a tragic car accident, and an Infrastructure Minister accused of lying to a parliamentary commission (Hernández-Morales, 2024).

The various internal scandals of the Socialist governments and António Costa's apparent lack of scepticism regarding members of his cabinet involved in judicial cases have only served to discredit democratic institutions and exacerbate the growing alienation of the Portuguese from traditional political forces.

Section II

Chega's fight against corruption and its political capitalisation in the 2024 election

This section will present evidence of how Chega took advantage of the Portuguese high perception of political corruption in its campaign and how the party's message concerning the fight against corruption resonated with the public.

The Operation Influencer, which resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister António Costa and the consequent 2024 election, brought corruption to the forefront of political discourse, influencing the campaign and shaping public opinion. In a Pitagórica survey published in February 2024, less than a month before the parliamentary elections, 68% of Portuguese respondents defined the fight against corruption as a priority for the new government (Pinto, 2024).

Before the 2024 election, Chega had already established its core campaign message, which focused on combating corruption and exposing political fraud perpetrated by the governing Socialist Party (PS) and the Social Democratic Party (PSD). The abovementioned cases of bribery, money laundering, nepotism, and internal scandals in recent governments, for which members of the PS and PSD are accused, have been capitalised by Chega and contributed significantly to its electoral growth.

A study released by Pordata, based on 2023 Eurobarometer data, shows that 62% of Portuguese citizens express a lack of confidence in the Portuguese Parliament, above the European average of 56% (RTP, 2024). The study additionally indicates that 80% of respondents in Portugal exhibit a lack of trust in political parties, and 73% perceive the political system as being either unable or only partially capable of facilitating citizen influence (RTP, 2024). These numbers indicate a country that, affected by legal cases that have involved relevant figures within the Portuguese political sphere, places limited confidence in democratic institutions and in those who represent them in such bodies. This lack of credibility leads to a general disengagement from the political process, followed by a search for solutions that challenge the established order.

The political party Chega presents itself as an anti-establishment party, appealing to the votes of those discontent with the two parties that have governed Portugal in the last 50 years. The legal cases involving members of the governing parties, the PS and PSD, are one of their principal weaknesses. For this reason, the Chega party has made the fight against corruption an essential element of its 2024 campaign. At the presentation of its electoral programme, Chega leader André Ventura claimed that corruption is related to the fall of António Costa's absolute parliamentary majority since the Prime Minister was unable to separate himself from private interests that have influenced the Government (Diário de Notícias, 2024).

Chega has capitalised on the most high-profile court cases involving the political elite by incorporating several anti-corruption measures into its electoral platform, attempting to persuade voters that it is the party with the most initiatives in this regard. In the chapter dedicated to this topic, entitled Clean Portugal of Corruption, Chega proposes to extend the prescription period for some crimes, such as influence peddling, receiving or offering undue advantage, corruption, and economic participation in business (CHEGA, 2024). This measure addresses some of the legal issues identified in the José Sócrates case, in which some of the charges against the former Prime Minister can expire this year, even though he never faced trial for them.

Chega also proposes limiting judicial appeals available, which the party claims serve as a guarantee that no one will be convicted (Diário de Notícias, 2024). The protracted resolution of cases involving prominent political figures, such as José Sócrates, Manuel Pinho, and those accused in the Tutti Frutti case, has prompted public discontent and perceptions of impunity. Several investigations have been ongoing for over a decade, yet the defendants' resources permit the trial to remain unresolved.

During the presentation of the electoral programme, the Chega leader also emphasised the necessity of implementing measures to combat illicit enrichment and took the opportunity to recall public officeholders who have inexplicably increased their wealth (Diário de Notícias, 2024). The cases involving Portuguese high-ranking political figures allow Chega to use the fight against corruption as a party banner, distancing itself from the crimes for which PS and PSD members are on trial (Image 1).

Image 1: Translation: “#Shame. Portugal needs to be cleaned!”.

Individuals on the billboard, from left to right: André Ventura, Ricardo Salgado, José Sócrates, António Costa and Fernando Medina.



Source: Chega's Twitter Account.

Chega also took a populist position on the matter. André Ventura argued during the debates and election campaign that the State, to punish economic crime and corruption, should seize the accused's assets before a final conviction. Ventura mentioned that this would enable him to finance the social programmes of a future government of his party (Diário de Notícias, 2024). The aim would be to seize 20% of the 20 billion euros that corruption costs Portugal annually, according to Chega leader, who based this on an unidentified study (Diário de Notícias, 2024).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented survey evidence indicating that Portuguese voters viewed corruption as a significant problem, with most of these perceptions linked to multiple scandals involving PS and PSD members, including the most recent that resulted in Prime Minister António Costa's resignation and the consequent early election. Chega's campaign in 2024 centred on concerns about corruption, capitalising on the Portuguese's prevalent perception of political misconduct in the two mainstream parties to win votes.

It becomes more difficult for the Portuguese to trust those who have represented them over the last 50 years, given that unfair advantages and favourable treatment seem inherent to political office. Individuals who have held the highest political positions are under suspicion for crimes such as corruption or illicit enrichment, with their cases still unresolved after several years. When governing parties fail to guarantee exemplary transparency and ethics, the electorate is more likely to be persuaded by a party like Chega, which presents itself as distinct from the others and demagogically prioritises anti-corruption. Even more so when the 2024 elections were a fallout of the investigation that led to Prime Minister António Costa's resignation and raised suspicions of corruption over his closest circle.

The fundamental issue is not that voters are captivated by Chega but rather that the political parties that represent democracy and have previously held office have not fulfilled the expectations associated with the role of elected officials.

Chapter II

Economic weaknesses, consequent discontent and the temptation to accept simplistic solutions to complex problems

Introduction

Portugal has experienced prolonged economic stagnation over the last two decades. Furthermore, from 2009 to 2014, the country was severely impacted by a financial crisis, forcing the PS government, due to the prevailing economic conditions, to seek and negotiate an external bailout, that defined several necessary measures that the PSD government that followed had to implement. Some were quite unpopular and still impact the party's electoral results today. The Portuguese are dissatisfied with the low purchasing power, salaries that do not reflect the qualification of the workforce, and emigration, which drives many young people to seek a better life outside the country.

A poll conducted in the beginning of 2024 revealed that 65% of Portuguese respondents perceived a deterioration in the country's economic situation over the past year, and only 8% believed the situation improved (Sondagem ICS/ISCTE, 2024). The prevailing negative perceptions continue to outweigh the positive ones, a pattern that has persisted for the last few years (Sondagem ICS/ISCTE, 2024). As a result, the Portuguese look for options outside the two parties, PS and PSD, that have governed the country for the last 50 years. Chega promises solutions for everything in an overly simplistic and irresponsible style, appealing to voters disappointed with the country's current economic situation. Given Portugal's consistently poor economic performance compared to other European Union countries, guarantees of imminent improvements with no apparent difficulty generate hope among Portuguese voters.

In this chapter, I will establish a connection between the main economic weaknesses of the country and the dissatisfaction of a growing percentage of Portuguese, who blame the two political parties that have ruled Portugal in the last five decades and, consequently, look for alternatives to the governance solutions used up to this point. Chega's accelerated growth in 2024 is also a result of a country where disappointment with the economic situation prevails, and the prospects offered by a party claiming to be outside the system are convincing. A country that does not thrive economically and whose citizens do not perceive any improvement in their living conditions will always be susceptible to the appeal of demagogues and populists.

Development

Section I

The 2010-2013 financial crisis, the Troika, and the PSD's unpopular measures

Before the 2024 legislative elections, the Socialist Party governed for 15 of the last 20 years. Due to that, the Portuguese mainly blame the PS for the country's economic situation. The Social Democratic Party ruled the country for the remaining five years, four of which were affected by Portugal's worst crisis and a financial bailout conditioned on supranational institutions demands. Even though it was only four years, positions about the PSD government's actions during that time remain widely divergent in Portuguese society. Despite some considering the PSD measures as necessary, others believe the government went too far in imposing restrictions, particularly on the retired population and the public sector workers, which still has electoral implications for the party.

The international financial crisis, which began in the United States in 2007, significantly impacted the Portuguese economy, which was already vulnerable to external shocks (Reis, 2024). Before the crisis, Portugal's public debt exceeded 72% of GDP, public finances were highly inflexible in expenditure, and the unemployment rate was above 7% (Reis, 2024). The Portuguese economy was defined by high levels of indebtedness and dependence on access to credit, with Portuguese banks relying on their ability to obtain funding from international markets (Reis, 2024).

The European proposal to respond to the international crisis in a coordinated manner, advising governments to increase public spending, completely ignored the differences in starting points among EU countries (Reis, 2024). In 2009, Portugal's PS government followed European directives and increased public consumption, launching public works projects and raising public sector salaries, using additional public debt to finance it (Reis, 2024). However, a sovereign debt crisis followed and Portugal faced significant difficulties with the shortage of international funding (Reis, 2024). In fact, it was unrealistic to expect the country to have enough wealth to support this increase in public spending, given Portugal's high levels of public and private debt and slow economic growth over the previous decade. To meet its obligations, the country was forced to seek funding from the Troika, which consisted of the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

José Sócrates' government attempted to avoid this external financial intervention by repeatedly presenting packages of measures to the Portuguese Parliament and the European Commission to prevent more severe austerity actions. However, the rejection by the parliament of one of these packages resulted in the collapse of the government, which, before resigning, accepted the unavoidable need for the 78 billion euro Troika's bailout (Reis, 2024).

To receive the Troika's financial bailout, the Portuguese government had to implement measures to correct the economic and financial imbalances and restore Portugal's capacity to finance itself on the market. The government led by Passos Coelho of the Social Democratic Party, who won the elections in 2011 following José Sócrates' resignation, implemented the financing plan and the necessary measures to achieve it. The need to comply with the Troika's measures and, in some cases, impose more restrictions than requested defined PSD's four years of governance.

The Memorandum of Agreement with the Troika, which was negotiated by the PS government and received the support of the PSD and CDS, delineated several priorities. These included a rapid reduction in the budget deficit, an ambitious privatisation programme that included companies such as Energias de Portugal (EDP) and Redes Energéticas Nacionais (REN), reforms to liberalise the labour market, a reduction in unemployment benefits and the restructuring of the financial sector (Jorge, 2017). In return, the Troika guaranteed a 78 billion euros loan over three years, with 12 billion euros allocated to Portuguese banking institutions.

In the 2011 elections, Pedro Passos Coelho, the PSD leader, promised that there would be no need to reduce State salaries or lay off public workers (Jorge, 2017). Contrary to what he had promised, the PSD government announced in its first year in office an extraordinary tax that took half of the Christmas subsidy from all Portuguese, effectively ending the idea of an easy financial adjustment (Jorge, 2017). In the same year, it also determined that State employees and pensioners would lose part of their salaries, in addition to an existing 5% cut that the previous government of José Sócrates had already applied (Jorge, 2017).

The financial adjustment programme was followed by a recession and an unemployment rate higher than anticipated in 2011, resulting in successive budget target modifications and clashes with the Constitutional Court (Jorge, 2017). On several occasions, the Constitutional Court ruled PSD's austerity measures unconstitutional due to their disproportionate impact on public sector workers and pensioners (Jorge, 2017). In its inaugural State budget in 2012, the Passos Coelho government eliminated holiday

and Christmas subsidies for all public sector workers and public administration pensioners earning more than 1,000 euros per month (Cabrita-Mendes, 2018). The government implemented a similar policy for those who received more than 600 euros, but it was declared unconstitutional in 2013. Opposed to Passos Coelho's initial promises, the contracts of 63,000 State employees were terminated during the government's four-year term, contributing to an unemployment rate that reached 17% at its worst (Pereira, PÚBLICO). Implementing these measures harmed the PSD's relationship with the public sector workforce and pensioners, with electoral consequences still visible today in those sectors of society. This damaged relationship has prevented the PSD from capitalising on votes from those discontented with the PS, as it used to occur in previous elections.

Despite this, the financial adjustment was successful in its privatisation programme, in the flexibilization of the labour market, and in reducing energy prices and excessive rents (Jorge, 2017). At the same time as the government addressed some measures to solve the Real Estate problem that was pressuring the banks, it also ensured a continuous reduction of the public deficit, recognised by the financial markets and European institutions, which allowed Portugal to end the Troika intervention in 2014 with access to funding on the international financial markets (Jorge, 2017). This austerity period revealed the inherent weaknesses of the Portuguese banking sector, which remained unresolved during the four-year term of the Social Democratic government. It ultimately led to the collapse of Espírito Santo bank and the implementation of a recapitalisation plan for the State-owned bank, Caixa Geral de Depósitos.

In this century, the Social Democratic Party's legacy has been associated with the necessary austerity measures that Passos Coelho's government had to implement to fulfil the agreement reached with the Troika and regain, as soon as possible, the trust from the financial markets. Especially for pensioners and public sector workers, the PSD government chose a more austere path than the one some considered necessary, namely the PS, with several actions proving to be unconstitutional. Given this legacy, Luís Montenegro, the PSD leader in the 2024 elections, emphasized that pensioners should receive the attention they deserve and that it was time to reconcile (RTP, 2024). Luís Montenegro even recognized that some pensioners might be reluctant to vote for the PSD because of the years Passos Coelho governed (RTP, 2024).

Section II

Portugal's economic weaknesses and the Socialist Party's responsibility

It is also important to emphasise the responsibility of the Socialist Party. The current Portuguese economic situation cannot dissociate itself from the PS, which governed from 2005 up to 2011 and from 2015 until the 2024 elections.

In February 2024, a survey revealed that 55% of Portuguese respondents perceived living from their household income as challenging or very challenging (Sondagem ICS/ISCTE, 2024). According to Pordata, Portugal is the fifth country in the European Union with the lowest average salary, considering the cost of living, only higher than Slovakia, Greece, Hungary, and Bulgaria (Santos, 2024). Workers in agriculture, fishing, hotels, and restaurants earn the least. The disparity is so significant that in the European Union, the salaries of the bottom ten countries, including Portugal, are at least twice as low as those of the top ten (Santos, 2024). Salary disparities are also evident between Portugal and its neighbour, with the average in Spain being one-third higher (Santos, 2024).

The Portuguese minimum wage is also precarious in purchasing power parity, ranked among the ten lowest of the 22 European Union countries with a minimum salary (Santos, 2024). According to the Pordata report, in the last 20 years, the Portuguese minimum wage was surpassed by that of Poland, Lithuania, and Romania and is now 47% lower than the French and only 5% higher than the Greek (Santos, 2024). Another negative sign in this report is that the Portuguese minimum wage is approaching the average salary of 1,368 euros, which already includes overtime, holidays, and Christmas bonuses (Santos, 2024). In 2002, the Portuguese minimum wage was 43% of the average, but it has risen to 52% in 2022 (Santos, 2024).

One of the Pordata report's main conclusions is that the Portuguese workforce is getting older, and the low salaries help to justify it. Twenty years ago, only a third of the workforce was between 44 and 64, but now that proportion has increased to half (Santos, 2024). Workers under 24 decreased by more than 40%, while between 55 and 64 years rose 66% (Santos, 2024). Portugal is the fourth country in the European Union with the highest proportion of older workers in its labour force (Santos, 2024). For every 100 workers under 35, there are 99 workers over the age of 54, only surpassed by Bulgaria, Latvia and Italy (Santos, 2024). This situation worsened with the emigration of qualified young people, who compare Portuguese salaries with those in other European Union countries and prefer to seek a better quality of life outside Portugal. In 2022, the average annual income per capita in the EU, in purchasing

power parity, was 18,706 euros, considerably higher than the 12,266 euros registered in Portugal and much lower than the 33,000 euros per year in Luxembourg, a country with a considerable percentage of Portuguese emigration (Mateus & Rosa, 2024).

Portugal will remain a low-wage country until its labour productivity rises, which still is among the lowest in the European Union. According to Eurostat, labour productivity in Portugal was 72% of the levels registered in the Eurozone in 2022, implying that productivity per worker is 28% lower than the average in the Euro currency area (Leitão, 2023). From these, Greece and Slovakia are the only countries with lower labour productivity than Portugal, at 66% and 71%, respectively (Leitão, 2023).

The past decade in Portugal has been characterised by a persistent decline in labour productivity, accompanied by a lack of improvement or even convergence with the countries of the European Union and the Eurozone (Leitão, 2023). Portugal's labour productivity was higher in 2016, at the beginning of the Socialist Party's eight-year governance, than it is now. It corresponded to 72.8% of the Eurozone average, placing Portugal ahead of five other countries (Leitão, 2023). The country was outperformed in just six years by the three Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as well as Croatia, which only joined the Eurozone in 2022, Romania, and Poland (Leitão, 2023).

There are various metrics and indicators for measuring a country's productivity level, but the conclusions concerning Portugal are relatively consistent. The results of Portuguese competitiveness indicate a modest performance in recent decades, with the indicator level in 2020 remaining similar to that observed in 1995 (Leitão, 2023). The fiscal policy, the business management practices, the labour market, and public finances are some of the factors that continue to penalise the assessment of the Portuguese economy (Leitão, 2023). Governments, specifically those of the Socialist Party, bear responsibilities for the Portuguese economy and labour productivity situation, because it did not address effectively these problems. Other countries, over the last decade, have adopted policies that prioritise labour productivity, such as Ireland, which multiplied its productivity levels by 1.6 times in ten years and is now the country in the Euro currency area with the highest degree of labour productivity, approximately 32% above the second country in the ranking, Luxembourg (Leitão, 2023). The same is true for the three Baltic countries, which had productivity levels lower than Portugal in 2012 but are now, on average, 7.4% more productive (Leitão, 2023).

Portugal's low productivity severely limits its growth and development, preventing it from achieving greater economic efficiency and higher average wages (Leitão, 2023). Increasing productivity will allow salary incomes to grow sustainably without compromising Portuguese companies' competitiveness, resolving a long-standing issue (Leitão, 2023). Only this way will Portugal be able to compete with the countries that in recent years have been attracting its qualified labour, who consider working abroad an opportunity to be better paid and have a better quality of life.

In contrast with the country's relatively low wages and labour productivity, Portugal has the eighth highest tax rate on work among the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries (SIC Notícias, 2024). This rate has risen in the last five years and currently stands at 42.3% (SIC Notícias, 2024). The combination of low salaries, a low-productivity business sector that is unable to provide better conditions for its workers and one of the highest tax burdens in the OECD consequently lead to unsurprising Eurostat figures of young people in Portugal being among those who leave their parents' homes the latest, compared to other European Union countries. In 2022, only seven EU countries had a higher average age for leaving the family home than Portugal, which was 29.7 years, considerably exceeding the European average of 26.4 years (Patrício, 2023). Nevertheless, it was more pronounced in 2021, when 33.6 years was the age registered in Portugal (Patrício, 2023).

All of the above factors contribute to the growing desire among young Portuguese to seek independence and a better life outside of their country of origin, with 30% of them living already abroad. Portugal has the highest emigration rate in Europe and one of the highest in the world, which in the last decades has accelerated the loss of young people living in Portugal.

An estimate by the Emigration Observatory indicates that more than 850,000 Portuguese between the ages of 15 and 39 are currently residing abroad (Bastos, 2024). Since 2001, an average of 75,000 individuals have emigrated from Portugal annually (Bastos, 2024). The period of highest emigration took place between 2010 and 2019, with the peak in 2013, when 120,000 Portuguese left the country (Bastos, 2024). Over these nine years, one and a half million people emigrated. The total number of Portuguese emigrants is estimated to be around 2.3 million, with 70% being within the age bracket of 15 to 39 years (Bastos, 2024).

With Portugal's crises and economic fragility, young people cannot expect an easy future if they remain in the country. Job offers and corresponding salaries abroad appeal to young Portuguese, who often earn at least twice as much there. Portugal's difficulty retaining its young generation creates long-term

problems in its demographic trajectory and labour market. Almost one-third of Portuguese women of fertile age live abroad, and the number of children born to Portuguese mothers in another country accounts already for 20% of all births in Portugal (Bastos, 2024). This percentage worsens the country's demographic problem of an ageing population. The Portuguese labour market is also impacted by emigration, with an increasingly older workforce and a significant loss of qualified workers.

Portugal is experiencing a rise in the number of people coming to live there, which has never been higher (Bastos, 2024). Over the last six years, more foreigners have entered than Portuguese have left, resulting in a positive migratory balance (Bastos, 2024). Although the influx of foreigners is helping to boost the birth rate and reduce the demographic impact of one-third of Portuguese women living abroad, there are still issues with the qualifications available in the labour market. The number of qualified Portuguese professionals emigrating remains higher than the number of skilled immigrants arriving in Portugal, which affects the future of companies and the development of the country.

Even among those who return to Portugal, 60% admit they will leave again (Bastos, 2024). Without much hope or prospects for living in their country, there is a sense of discontent among those who emigrate, their families, and all those who wish Portugal's economic situation would allow them to live in better conditions. With rising living costs and only slight increases in real wages, the Portuguese have problems covering their expenses (Bastos, 2024). As a result, in 2021 and 2022, between 120 and 130 thousand Portuguese emigrated (Bastos, 2024).

Portugal cannot retain young people or provide better salaries without economic growth. Over the last 50 years, GDP has grown at an average real rate of only 1.9% per year, owing primarily to the 1980s and 1990s, when the economy grew at an average annual rate of 3.4% and 3%, respectively (Eco, 2024). This century has been synonymous with economic stagnation. Between 2001 and 2013, the country experienced an average annual GDP growth rate of zero, with 38% of these 13 years being in economic contraction, caused by five years of negative growth in 2003, 2009, 2011, 2012, and 2013 (Eco, 2024).

The lack of Portugal's economic growth is also a reason for the country's high dependence on European funds, which no other EU member state has. An European Commission report on Cohesion indicates that when comparing the influence of the money received by Portugal from the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund with the Portuguese public investment, the ratio increased from approximately 50 per cent during the 2007-2013 period to almost 90 per cent in 2014-2020 (Mateus, 2022). In the less developed countries of the European Union, this

ratio has also increased, but from 34 to 52 per cent (Mateus, 2022). Croatia and Lithuania are the second and third countries most dependent on European funds, with ratios around 70 per cent, which are still way below the Portuguese percentage (Mateus, 2022).

The Socialist Party, which has governed for 15 of the last 20 years, shares responsibility for the country's economic situation in 2024. In the 21st century, Portugal's economy did not grow as it needed to, remaining mainly dependent on European funds. Its salaries and labour productivity are low, and it has one of the highest tax burdens in the OECD. Consequently, large-scale emigration, especially of young and qualified people, continues to impact Portugal's future. In power for the past eight years, the PS policies are perceived as one of the causes of Portugal's lasting economic delay compared to the rest of the European Union countries. In a poll conducted in January 2024, prior to the elections, 69% of Portuguese respondents rated the government's performance as poor or very poor (Sondagem ICS/ISCTE, 2024).

The country's current economic difficulties and the enduring memories of the PSD's unpopular measures have contributed significantly to voter distrust in both the PS and the PSD. The European Social Survey's barometer, which evaluates government performance on a scale of 0 for extremely dissatisfied and 10 for extremely satisfied, highlights the dissatisfaction with the PSD's years in power, mainly because of the party's economic austerity measures (Leal, 2023). The Portuguese rated the PSD's governance in 2012 and 2014 at 2.19 and 3.04, the worst results for a Portuguese government in this barometer (Leal, 2023). In a survey conducted one year before the 2024 elections, 66% of Portuguese respondents thought the economic situation was worse than in 2022, while only 12% believed it was better (Silva & Rosa, 2023). Inevitably, as a vote of discontent and protest, the Chega party achieved a substantial result, allowing it to break the bipartisanship that defined Portuguese democracy until now.

Section III

Promising everything to everyone, how Chega took advantage of the country's weak economic situation

Portugal has been in an ongoing situation of economic fragility for the past two decades, constantly being outperformed by other European Union countries on various indicators. The absence of economic growth creates the perfect conditions for the rise of populist parties that capitalise on public discontent. The lack of confidence and dissatisfaction with the main parties, PS and PSD, regarding the economic situation fostered space for Chega, who mobilised the electorate by promising everything to everyone.

A vote for Chega in the 2024 election, as outlined in the party's programme, would result in pensions at the level of the minimum wage, increases for health professionals, improvements in teachers' careers, supplements for security forces and cuts in taxes like the Municipal Property Tax and the Vehicle Circulation Tax (Camilo, 2024). Chega made these commitments without considering the impact on public finances, which would cost the State more than 13 billion euros per year, 5% of the national GDP (Camilo, 2024).

Of these, the most expensive promise would be to equalise the value of all pensions to the minimum wage. According to data from the Social Security Administration for 2022, approximately 1.7 million pensioners received a pension below the minimum wage, with an average of 523 euros (Camilo, 2024). Chega's proposal would require spending between 4.5 and 9 billion euros over six years, depending on the increase in the minimum wage during that period (Camilo, 2024). It would represent a cost between 2.9% and 3.5% of Portugal's GDP, significantly superior to the budget of most Ministries in 2024, except for Finance, Labour and Health (Camilo, 2024). Given that Portugal has one of the oldest populations in the European Union, pensioners have a considerable electoral weight that is exploited frequently by political parties to win votes. With this in mind, Chega's irresponsible promise to increase pensions captivates the retired population, who feel prioritised and look to the party as a guarantee of better reforms.

Another of Chega's promises is to eliminate taxes such as the Vehicle Circulation Tax (IUC) and the Municipal Property Tax (IMI). In a country where the tax burden is among the highest in the OECD, measures that include reducing taxes are always well received by the electorate, but that does not mean that they are prudent from the point of view of public finances. In 2022, revenues from the IUC amounted to 772.6 million euros, representing a considerable funding source for Municipal Governments, which received from this value 303 million euros (Camilo, 2024). Regarding the IMI, its revenue in 2022 equalled 1.488 million euros, which is also given to Municipalities to implement measures such as extraordinary rent support and the rehabilitation of buildings (Camilo, 2024). The cessation of these taxes would have detrimental effects on the financial resources available to local authorities, which would no longer be able to fulfil their current responsibilities.

Taking advantage of the discontent in various public services, Chega has promised to increase health professionals' salaries by up to 20%, resulting in an extra 1.54 billion euros in the annual State budget (Camilo, 2024). Chega has also committed to address teachers' exigencies regarding their careers, which would result in an additional 300 million euros of expenditure to the government (Camilo, 2024).

Additionally, to meet the demands of the security forces, the party proposed raising wages and reviewing their careers, which André Ventura believes could be accomplished with the 400 million euros that nowadays are allocated to tackle gender inequality (Camilo, 2024).

Chega proposes three unrealistic ways to fulfil all the promises listed while maintaining public financial stability. Firstly, with the 400 million euros that André Ventura's party claims promote gender ideology (Camilo, 2024). This budget is intended to tackle gender inequality but also includes measures such as expanding free childcare and strengthening child benefits, being utopic to consider that these priorities would disappear to give additional funds for the security forces (Camilo, 2024). Secondly, the party proposes taxing bank profits, which it views as excessive. The measure is not original since Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, a member of the Chega ideological family, had previously proposed it but was forced to back down after warnings from the European Central Bank (Camilo, 2024). In an unlikely scenario in which the proposal to tax bank profits by 40% was feasible, and given that Portuguese banks made nearly 3.3 billion euros in profits in the first nine months of 2023, Chega would generate 1.3 billion euros in revenue, far short of what would be required to, as they want, raise all pensions to the minimum wage (Camilo, 2024). Lastly, the party's promises would finance itself with money collected from the fight against corruption. Chega claims that it causes the Portuguese State to lose up to 20 billion euros annually (Camilo, 2024). However, during the electoral campaign, there was insufficient clarity about the procedure to recover these funds lost to corruption.

Conclusion

Even without any substantial solutions to fulfil its promises, Chega reached the Portuguese electorate through populist rhetoric that persuaded the dissatisfied and those seeking a change in government. Portugal's economy has not improved significantly in 20 years, falling short of expectations for a country that joined the European Union in 1986. The Socialist Party, which had government responsibilities for 15 of the last 20 years, and the Social Democratic Party, which had four years of governance shaped by unpopular measures, lost the support of many Portuguese, who, as a consequence, were easily convinced by the appealing proposals of Chega and voted for this protest party in the 2024 election.

In February 2024, a survey revealed that 78% of sympathisers of the political party Chega expressed a negative assessment of the economic situation, in contrast with only 48% of PS sympathisers with a negative opinion (Sondagem ICS/ISCTE, 2024). Low salaries, in comparison to a high tax burden, the

lack of opportunities for those starting their professional careers and who see emigration as the only possibility of a better life or simply leaving their parents' home, are factors that have a considerable influence when it comes to voting. The Chega party has been the most successful in capitalising on the frustration of the Portuguese electorate, convinced that this party is the best solution to break with the two political forces that have governed Portugal until now.

Chapter III

The crisis in public services and the failure of Socialist policies

Introduction

For many, the 2024 legislative elections presented an opportunity to express the growing discontent in recent years with the crises in various public services. In previous chapters, I identified political corruption and the country's economic weaknesses as reasons for Portuguese dissatisfaction and loss of trust in the Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Party. In this chapter, I intend to seek a connection between the unsustainable condition of public services and the rise of the protest vote, which substantially favoured Chega in the most recent election. Demonstrations, strikes, and demands from various sectors of society predominated in 2023, with evident electoral implications in the March 2024 elections.

Portuguese identify severe problems in education, health, and security forces and professionals in these sectors have also expressed fatigue and discouragement due to the poor working conditions and their inability to respond to the problems directed at them. Public services have deteriorated significantly, with António Costa's government incapable of preventing the transfer of many professionals to the private sector, the accelerated ageing of these professional classes, and the inability to achieve equity in the quality of services provided to all Portuguese residents. The rise of rents and acquisition costs due to the shortage of housing supply and the increasing number of immigrants, which are also pressing issues, demonstrate that the Socialist government's policies failed to have the desired impact. As a result of the failure of public policies in recent years, social tensions have risen, with demands and strikes from various professional classes in the public sector, as well as demonstrations by the Portuguese demanding improvements in the quality of services.

With almost a decade of governance, the Socialist Party is primarily responsible for the lack of significant improvements in these structural sectors of society. The growing discontent with the results presented after eight years penalised the Socialist Party in the 2024 elections. One year before the elections, a survey conducted by Expresso revealed Portuguese dissatisfaction with public services and public policies. Respondents were 88% dissatisfied with the housing situation, 74% with the quality of public health care, 68% with the quality of public education, and 67% with the number of immigrants (Correia & Rosa, 2023). The following sections will consider the evolution of several public services and public policies in the years leading up to the 2024 election. In each case, I aim to determine if a deterioration in that service or policy had implications for the 2024 electoral result.

Development

Education

One of the public sectors in which the discontent of its professionals has been most evident is education. In recent years, teachers have demanded better working conditions and career improvements through demonstrations and strikes that affect directly Portuguese families. The problems in public education are profound, not only because they require budget expenditure that the government cannot cover but also due to the increasingly ageing teaching workforce, which will soon no longer be able to provide quality teaching conditions for all students.

The current dissatisfaction with the state of education in Portugal allows Chega to broaden its support base by positioning itself as the main opponent of the Socialist Party's policies and promising to meet teachers' demands without regard for the impact these measures would have on the State budget. After eight years in power, the PS is perceived as the primary contributor to the current situation in education, unable to meet the demands of this professional class during its term. The Portuguese radical left parties, which usually supported these demonstrations and strikes, lost their credibility after supporting, for the first six years, the Socialist government and their policies on education, no longer being able to benefit from it, giving room to Chega to take their place.

The fundamental demand, which explains most protests, is the complete reimbursement for their years of service, a measure that would impose significant financial burdens on the State budget and the increase of public debt. Between 2005 and 2017, the government froze teachers' careers, preventing them from advancing through its different levels and receiving a salary according to the years they worked (Fernandes, 2023). Despite this, the government partially recovered their service time in 2018, but there are still six years, six months, and 23 days remaining from the period of Troika's intervention in Portugal (Fernandes, 2023).

The teaching career comprises ten levels, each corresponding to a different remuneration scale. In 2023, the gross salary of pre-school, primary and secondary school teachers ranged from €1,589.01 at the first level to €3,473.19 at the last (Fernandes, 2023). These salary levels only apply to those already inside the teaching profession structure. However, according to a study by the Nova School of Business & Economics, it usually takes 16 years to reach the first stage of this career (Fernandes, 2023). During the first 16 years, the teacher is employed on a temporary contract and receives a relatively low salary. This precarious initial phase does not align with the expectations of those embarking on their professional

journey, being a significant deterrent to attracting young people to the field and one of the main problems of the teaching profession.

The slow career progression and low salaries are obstacles to new teachers entering the profession. The number of individuals who have completed the requisite preparation to become teachers is an indicator of this phenomenon. There has been a notable decline in the number of people who have pursued the master's degree that provides the qualification to be professionally certified for a teaching career. In 2022, only 1,674 individuals completed the course, a figure considerably below the 5,965 graduates registered in 2005 (Fernandes, 2023). These figures demonstrate the absence of new teachers in the education system and the growing ageing of this professional class. In 2021, the average age of teachers was 50, with only 1 to 3 per cent being under 30 (Fernandes, 2023). The ageing of the teaching workforce also implies that a significant proportion will soon approach the retirement age. A study by the Nova School of Business & Economics indicates that 34,500 teachers will leave national schools by the end of this decade (Fernandes, 2023).

The retirement of 34,500 teachers and the lack of candidates for teaching positions will translate into an even further decrease in the numbers of this professional class and an education system incapable of guaranteeing the normal functioning of schools. Except for higher education, the number of teachers reached its maximum in 2005, with 185,000 (Fernandes, 2023). This number has gradually decreased, with just 150,000 by 2022 (Fernandes, 2023). The situation affects thousands of students, in many cases without full-time teachers for all subjects (Lusa, 2024). Teachers are also penalised by the lack of professionals, forcing them to relocate to districts where they don't reside to teach.

Public education in Portugal is becoming unsustainable, with teachers lacking decent working conditions and students affected in a moment crucial for their development. The year before the elections, 2023, was marked by the teaching class's constant discontent. During that year, different teachers' unions handed in more than half a thousand strike notices, demanding that the PS government take different measures regarding the recruitment system, vacancies, and changes to their working conditions (SIC Notícias, 2023). In January 2023, a union structure successfully organised two national demonstrations in Lisbon, each with over 100,000 participants (SIC Notícias, 2023).

National strikes and protests, mainly due to the frozen teachers' careers, dominated the period before the 2024 elections. Students are the most affected by the current state of public schools, as they do not receive the quality education they deserve due to strikes or lack of teachers to fill vacancies. The Socialist and

the radical left parties that supported António Costa's government for the first six years were held accountable by the Portuguese electors for the situation, which has undoubtedly jeopardised the parties' results in the 2024 elections. PSD was also seen as responsible for the current state of public education since they froze teachers' careers during the Troika period. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Passos Coelho's policies were unpopular among those working in the public sector, which includes teachers. Consequently, there is resentment towards the PSD because of the austerity measures implemented during its term that affected public education.

The discontent among the teaching class and the Portuguese, who perceive no improvement in their country's public education system, presents an opportunity for Chega. This protest party appeals to those disillusioned with the prospect of continued socialist or social democratic governance. Following their populist nature, Chega's priorities are always in line with the most prevalent issues in public opinion, with their policies being flexible and dependent on what can benefit them electorally. The party's stance on education serves as a clear illustration of this.

The Chega political programme for the 2022 elections did not mention the unfreezing of teachers' careers once, did not propose any concrete measures to increase the salaries of this professional class, and did not address the issue of displaced teachers (Ferreira, 2023). After 2023, in which teachers' demands were in the spotlight, Chega went into the 2024 elections with a different programme that would allow them to win the votes of those dissatisfied with the situation in public education. In just two years, the unfreezing of careers went from being a non-issue to becoming one of the party's key campaign priorities, demonstrating their opportunistic approach and irresponsibility to promise a measure with unbearable financial costs for the State budget. The electoral growth of Chega in 2024 can be attributed, at least in part, to the PS and PSD being held responsible for the current state of education in Portugal and to the party's strategy, characterised by an excess of promises, to secure the votes of those who were dissatisfied.

Health

Portugal is also experiencing a crisis in the health sector, with a shortage of medical staff that causes discontented professionals, emergency rooms closed and patients on endless waiting lists. The unsustainability of the health service provided by the state does not allow access to quality care for everyone, so those who can are resorting to private health services and insurances. According to an Intercampus poll, 63.6 per cent of Portuguese respondents consider António Costa's government

primarily responsible for the current crisis in the health sector (Sousa, 2023). The 2024 election results reflected this dissatisfaction with the Socialist Party, which has been in power since 2015.

Although the number of doctors has increased by 30 per cent since 2015, the healthcare provided by the state is still insufficient for two main reasons. Firstly, the increased demand for health services, which Portugal's increasingly ageing population and the still-present consequences of COVID-19 have contributed to (Mamede, 2023). Secondly, the growing number of health professionals choosing to be employed part-time in the public service to also work for the private system (Mamede, 2023). The increased demand for public healthcare and the decline in the number of doctors working full-time in the public healthcare system has led to a shortage of medical staff to cover the number of existing cases.

One of the main concerns is the lack of appeal of the public health system for those starting their professional careers and those seeking enhanced working conditions. During the last years, several vacancies in medical speciality recruitment processes have remained unfilled, with one-fifth of medical graduates opting not to pursue further opportunities within the public system (Mamede, 2023). Additionally, an increasing number of medical practitioners within the public system are requesting to reduce their working hours to pursue employment opportunities in the private sector since it offers higher remuneration and better working conditions. The low wages in the public health system are one of the significant factors driving doctors' protests, since Portugal is one of the few OECD countries to experience salary losses over the past decade, in contrast to the average annual increases observed in most countries (Mamede, 2023).

The lack of attractiveness of the public health system and the desire of many medical practitioners to work in the private sector has negative consequences for the number of hours that health professionals in the public sector are required to work. Doctors are working overtime that exceeds the duration established in their contracts to compensate for the shortage of personnel (Mamede, 2023). This situation creates a vicious circle, as the lack of professionals in the public sector leads to worse working conditions, which makes doctors prefer to work in the private sector.

In addition to the challenging circumstances currently faced by health professionals, the shortage of doctors in public hospitals has resulted in a reduction of the capacity to meet the needs of all patients, which in turn has undermined the public provision of healthcare, which in many cases is the only option available to patients. Between January and August 2023, doctors in the public health service worked over four million hours of overtime (Teixeira, 2023). Because of that, in September, approximately 2,000

doctors refused to work beyond the scope of their contractual obligations, leaving numerous hospitals with significant operational constraints and creating a chaos in the emergency services (Teixeira, 2023). The gravity of the circumstances resulted in the suspension and cessation of emergency services throughout the country, having repercussions mainly for the Portuguese population without alternative options and unable to afford private healthcare.

The diagnosis made by the Public Finance Council's report indicates that the Portuguese public health service has deteriorated over the past two years (Arreigoso, 2023). This report identified that the capacity of the State to respond to the needs of its citizens has diminished, increasing the number of Portuguese individuals without the healthcare services required (Arreigoso, 2023). In June 2023, 14% of the 10.5 million citizens registered in health centres, 1.5 million Portuguese, did not have a family doctor (Arreigoso, 2023). In addition to the incapacity to guarantee a family doctor for all Portuguese, this report also identified more weaknesses in primary care. Medical appointments decreased by 1.5 million compared to 2021, as did the number of nursing appointments (Arreigoso, 2023). From June to the end of 2023, the number of Portuguese citizens without an assigned family doctor increased further, reaching 16% of the registered patients, approximately 1,711,982 individuals (Teixeira, 2023).

The Portuguese public health system is a source of concern. Given the shortage of health professionals, services are not functioning properly in some districts, aggravating many people's access to appointments and emergency rooms. According to 74% of Portuguese respondents to the Intercampus poll, health should receive the most attention and reforms from the government (Sousa, 2023). Considering the priority given to health by citizens, the conditions it is in, and the responsibility of the Socialist Party together with the radical left parties that supported the government, the 2024 elections were marked by a protest vote that allowed the Portuguese to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the state of public services, with health being one of their main complaints.

André Ventura, the leader of Chega, capitalised on the challenging circumstances currently faced by public services. In the context of the 2024 elections, he has promised the elimination of health waiting lists within six months (Ferreira, 2024). The implausible proposal to resolve a chronic issue of the public health sector in only half a year is illustrative of the party's strategy of seeking electoral victory at any cost, exploiting the disillusionment of those who have not witnessed meaningful improvements. Additionally, Chega capitalised on the PS being held accountable, highlighting that the Socialists' incompetence has been particularly evident regarding the public health system (Ferreira, 2024). The party Chega (= Enough) also affirmed that the government's policies have been ineffective and that the

Portuguese people can no longer wait (Ferreira, 2024). Chega positioned itself as the main opposition force to the government, taking advantage of the PS's inability to demonstrate tangible results on several issues, including health.

Given the prevailing dissatisfaction and lack of motivation among health professionals to work in the public system, coupled with the alarming number of citizens without access to the healthcare they require, it becomes increasingly appealing to vote for those who use protest as their strategy and make promises that resonate with the Portuguese, including unrealistic calls for changes and improvements to the public health system.

Housing

The housing crisis is one of Portugal's structural problems, particularly in the largest cities of Lisbon and Porto, and it disproportionately affects the poorest and most vulnerable populations, as well as young people seeking their first home. Despite housing issues being a concern across most European Union countries and are not solely the responsibility of governments, the Portuguese case presents unique characteristics that have contributed to the Portuguese population's discontent with António Costa's government.

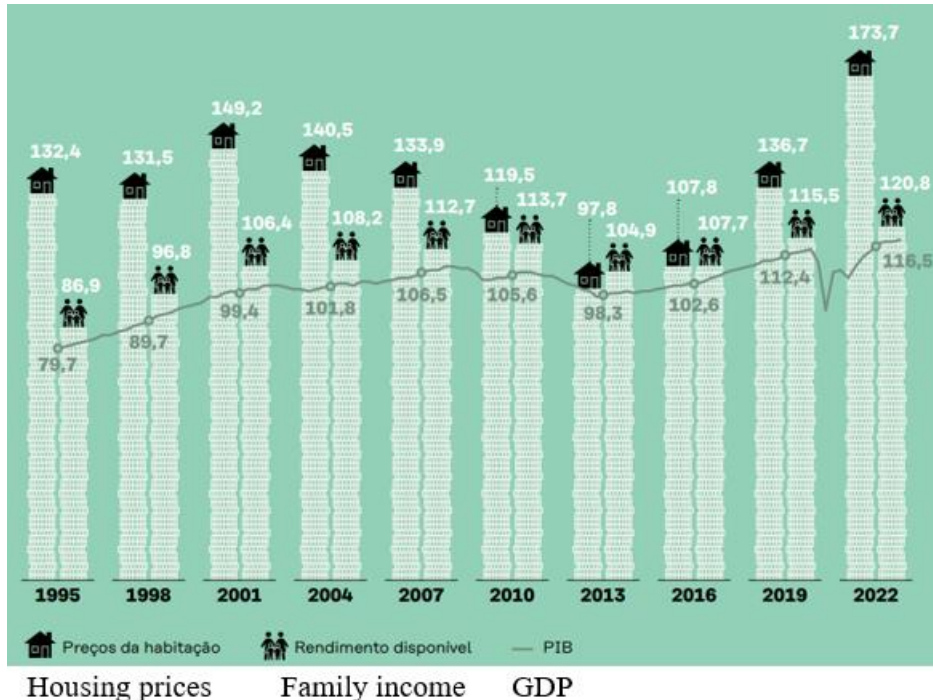
A poll conducted by Aximage revealed that 90% of Portuguese citizens perceive the housing crisis to be a significant or severe issue, particularly among younger individuals aged 18 to 34 (60%) and adults aged 35 to 49 (62%) (Inácio, 2023). The concern among these two age groups is mainly because of the difficulty they have in finding long-term housing. This situation affects 36% of young people and 33% of adults aged between 35 and 49 (Inácio, 2023). The challenges in accessing credit and the inability to afford the prevailing market rents are the main obstacles to finding a house. Of those interviewed who are unable to afford stable housing, 36% is due to the prices, 16% do not have access to credit, 15% pay the rent with difficulty, 13% have already resorted to parents and friends to pay the instalments to the bank, 7% have already admitted handing over the house, and a further 7% have already needed to share accommodation with relatives or third parties (Inácio, 2023).

One-quarter of the Portuguese population is in a precarious housing condition (Inácio, 2023). According to the same Aximage poll, 49% of Portuguese respondents believe that low wages are at the origin of the housing crisis (Inácio, 2023). The remaining 36% of respondents attributed the housing crisis to the prices of rent, 31% to inflation, and 11% to a lack of market supply (Inácio, 2023). The housing crisis is especially severe in Portugal's two largest cities, Lisbon and Porto, where the residents' salaries are

usually insufficient to afford the rents or the mortgage instalments. According to a Century 21 Portugal Agency study, the average rent in Lisbon exceeds 1,400 euros, which is close to the Portuguese average gross wage of around 1,500 euros, according to the National Statistics Institute (Inácio, 2023).

The average price of a square metre in Lisbon is only lower, compared to other South European cities, to Paris, which, for most Portuguese families, represents an unaffordable price (Inácio, 2023). For a significant proportion of the population, the financial burden of housing costs exceeds 50% of their income, with many facing difficulties maintaining their accommodation, highlighting the unsustainability of the housing situation in Portugal, aggravated by the rise of the interest rates and the inflation in 2022 (Inácio, 2023) (Figure 12). The population's discontent was evident before the 2024 elections, with numerous demonstrations for housing occurring throughout 2023, where the government was perceived responsible for the lack of results of its measures to address this structural problem. The protests happened in Lisbon, Porto and other cities, including Coimbra, Braga, Aveiro and Faro, where rising prices are already being felt (Inácio, 2023).

Figure 12: The evolution of housing prices, family income and GDP in Portugal

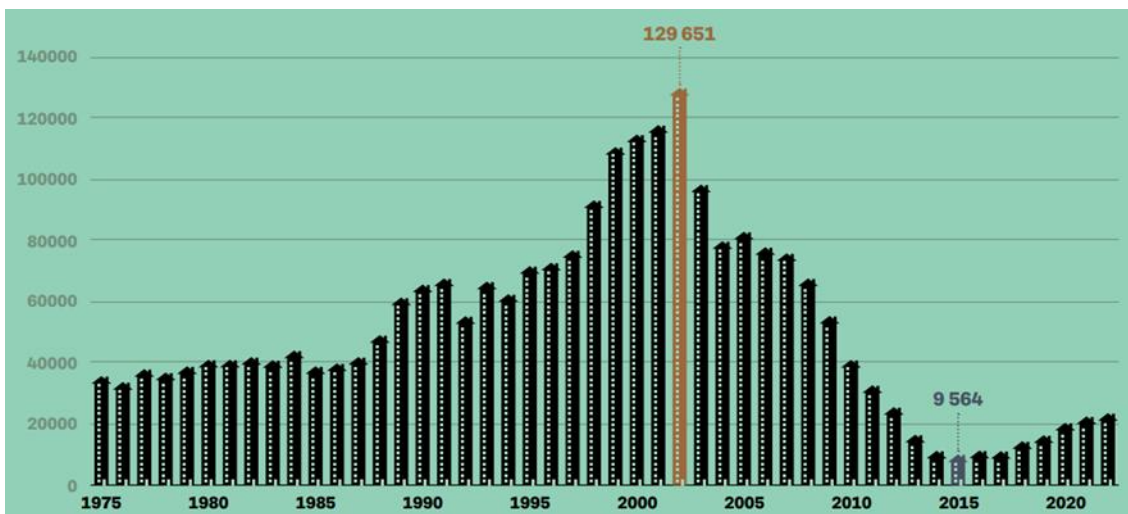


Source: Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos

There are factors that governments cannot control internally. Housing in Portugal was impacted severely by the financial crisis of 2009-2014 due to the restrictions in the construction sector, with banks forced to reduce credit for private real estate projects, enormously reducing the number of new houses constructed during that period (Rodrigues et al., 2023).

The situation has worsened, with responsibilities addressed to the Socialist Party, which governed from 2015 to 2024 and did not invest in public housing to compensate. According to the National Institute of Statistics, in Portugal, between 2013 and 2022, there were only 150,000 houses built, in contrast to the previous decade's 630,000 (Rodrigues et al., 2023) (Figure 13). This decrease in construction occurred in every region of Portugal (Rodrigues et al., 2023). The Socialist government's lack of investment in public housing and their focus on promoting urban rehabilitation, which is inherently more time-consuming, did not align with the urgency of the housing situation, resulted in a loss of capacity to meet the current demand and, as a consequence, higher prices for the available houses (Rodrigues et al., 2023).

Figure 13: Number of new construction completed for family housing



Source: Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos

Additionally, the slowness of licensing procedures, excessive bureaucracy in the development of real estate projects and a high tax burden in the construction sector also define the legacy of António Costa's government in housing (Rodrigues et al., 2023). The time required to obtain licences and approvals for the construction of new homes deters potential investors (Rodrigues et al., 2023). Aside from failing to persuade investors, the lengthy procedure undermines the development of new projects, making it impossible to respond promptly to Portugal's housing shortage.

The PS is also accountable for the high taxes in the Portuguese property sector. The value-added tax (VAT) rate on new construction is 23%, which raises costs for promoters and removes the incentive for investors to get involved in the Portuguese housing market (Rodrigues et al., 2023). The housing sector is also affected by municipal property tax (IMI) and municipal transaction tax (IMT), contributing to Portugal's heavy tax burden. The more taxes paid by promoters, the higher house prices will be.

The number of foreigners living and investing in Portugal rose substantially in recent years, resulting in a significant increase in property investment, from 4% in 2008 to 13% of GDP in 2022 (Rodrigues et al., 2023). Despite some government policies discouraging it, attracting non-residents was a priority for the PS and PSD. Gold visas, which guaranteed non-EU citizens the benefits of European citizenship in exchange for a considerable investment in Portugal, were implemented by the PSD in 2012 and maintained by the PS until 2023. The non-habitual resident programme, also used as an incentive measure by the PS and PSD, ensures that these citizens pay lower taxes on their income.

Over the last decade, the arrival of foreigners and Portugal's focus on tourism have led to the repurposing of a significant portion of the housing supply for tourist activities, such as local accommodation, which affected house prices (Rodrigues et al., 2023). The increase in foreign investment from individuals with far greater purchasing power also contributed to the boost in property values since foreigners buy houses for values not reachable to Portuguese. The Portuguese housing market underwent a process of adaptation to align with the price range that foreigners can afford, resulting in increased challenges for the Portuguese population in securing housing. This shift can be attributed to the policies and measures the PS and PSD introduced to attract foreign investment. If in 2012 this policy was successfully implemented to solve the real estate problem, its continuity created the bases for the housing crisis.

The consequences of the housing crisis for young people who want to become independent and for those who do not have enough money to rent or buy a house are at the root of Portuguese discontent. During its eight years in power, the PS government did not address the escalating housing crisis as it should have. The hopelessness of those who do not have a home and the lack of improvements in the housing sector were determining factors in the Socialists' significant loss in the 2024 elections and the rise of the protest vote, which Chega capitalised on with its populist promises.

Security Forces

In addition to the discontent expressed by other public service professionals, such as teachers and doctors, the security forces have also demonstrated dissatisfaction with their labour conditions in the months leading up to the 2024 elections. The issue at stake is the demand by the National Republican Guard (GNR) and the Public Security Police (PSP) for equal treatment with the Judicial Police (PJ). In particular, the matter concerns an additional mission salary supplement given to Judicial Police professionals, not extended to the other security forces.

The remuneration of a PJ professional was already significantly higher than that of the GNR military and PSP officer, a discrepancy further accentuated by the addition of the supplement. At the outset of their careers, police officers receive a base salary of approximately 960 euros, with additional subsidies (Costa, 2024). The gross wage of the PSP varies between 1,300 and 1,600 euros (Costa, 2024). For a PJ inspector, the starting salary is 1,200 euros, before adding the subsidies received by this security force (Costa, 2024). The starting salary for police officers, including allowances, is comparable to PJ's entry-level salary without any subsidies, highlighting the discrepancies in labour conditions between these two security forces. The current remuneration package for PSP officers sent to areas distant from their residences is inadequate to enable them to live without experiencing significant financial difficulties (Costa, 2024).

The amount of this new supplement approved by António Costa's government guarantees PJ inspectors an additional 540 euros at the end of the month, which in some cases can exceed 700 euros (Costa, 2024). The gap between the Judicial Police and the rest of the security forces widened, prompting protests from thousands of PSP and GNR officers in late 2023 and early 2024. Dissatisfaction with the Socialist government's actions became prominent in the months leading up to the 2024 legislative elections. Both the departing PS Minister of Internal Affairs, José Luís Carneiro, and the PSD leader, Luís Montenegro, chose not to commit before the elections on the inclusion of the supplement for the remaining security forces, leaving the issue to be negotiated after the voting results. Equalising the supplement would cost the State 154 million euros annually (Costa, 2024).

The security forces' problems are not recent. The PS's decision to increase the supplement only for the PJ has allowed the PSP and GNR's demands to resurface as a preeminent public concern. The low salaries given to the police have consequences for the future of the Portuguese security forces, contributing to the unattractiveness of this professional class, the increasing ageing of these professionals, and the search by many for job opportunities outside the public sector (Da Silva, 2024). The PSP and GNR face a critical

personnel shortage, with 5,000 officers over 55 years old set to retire in the next two years (Araújo, 2024). The future of Portugal's security forces is at risk, with 60% of the workforce being 45 years old and recruitment difficulties remaining a structural problem (Araújo, 2024).

The current situation of PSP and GNR professionals is alarming, given their responsibilities in civil protection, crime prevention (accounting for 80% of investigations), and border control (Da Silva, 2024). The decline in the number of professionals and the inability to attract new agents reduces the capacity to guarantee security in Portugal. António Costa's government bears responsibility for failing to reverse the security forces' unsustainable situation after eight years. By the end of its term, the PS government had worsened its relationship with the PSP and GNR even more. In addition to the government not updating their supplements since 2009, except for the risk supplement, the PSP and GNR witnessed at the end of 2023 the PS giving PJ a raise in their salary package that was not allocated in the same way to them (Da Silva, 2024).

The growing discontent of PSP and GNR officers, just a few months before the 2024 legislative elections, sparked demonstrations in Lisbon and Porto that drew thousands of security officers, being the largest ever (Rogado, 2024). Given their border control responsibilities, security forces also protested at Lisbon, Porto, Faro, Ponta Delgada, and Funchal airports along with Lisbon's seaport (Rogado, 2024). According to Bruno Pereira, the representative of the Platform of Unions and Associations of the PSP and GNR, security has never been a priority or a topic of discussion for the government, and the protests provide an opportunity for the police to reverse this tendency (Rogado, 2024). One of the most impactful demonstrations occurred during the legislative campaign debate between leaders Pedro Nuno Santos of the PS and Luís Montenegro of the PSD. Thousands of police officers gathered at the debate location to draw the attention of Portugal's biggest political parties to the problematic situation the security forces find themselves in.

Dissatisfaction with the government's handling of Portugal's security issues over the previous eight years contributed to the PS's crushing defeat in the 2024 elections. The demands of the PSP and GNR were one of the main themes of the election campaign, dominating public debate because of the escalation of protests in the months leading up to the vote. Chega was the most successful in capitalising on this discontent. While the PS and PSD refused to commit to equalising supplements for all security forces, André Ventura's party promised it during the campaign and used it as an electoral banner. The PSP and GNR's protest, the Portuguese's subsequent dissatisfaction with the situation, and the legacy of the PS in

the security field all contributed to the Portuguese's attraction to the protest vote full of promises characteristic of the Chega Party.

Immigration

The increasing number of immigrants was also one of the most influential issues in the 2024 elections. Although most Portuguese consider the growth of this phenomenon beneficial to the country, the Socialist Party's policies during its eight years in power have not resulted in greater integration and acceptance of immigrant communities. Portugal is less divisive on immigration than the United States or the Netherlands, given the structural issues in health, housing, salaries, security forces, and education that draw more attention from the public debate. Nonetheless, the Chega party has used the country's rising immigration to promote insecurity and demand stricter border controls, which many voters support.

According to the Portuguese Agency for Integration, Migration, and Asylum, there are already over one million immigrants in Portugal (Moleiro, 2024). Foreign citizens with residence permit currently account for 10% of the national population of 10 million (Moleiro, 2024). The highest number of immigrants ever was reached at the end of 2023, and it has only increased since then, with the most represented countries being Brazil, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Angola, and Cape Verde (Moleiro, 2024). Regarding recent years, approximately 300,000 people arrived from Nepal, Bangladesh, and India in 2023, with these communities becoming more prevalent (Moleiro, 2024). The increasing number of immigrants is reflected in the 1000 new applications for legalisation per day that Portugal receives (Moleiro, 2024).

In Portugal, data from October 2022 indicates that immigrants provide 44% of unskilled labour in agriculture, animal production, fishing and more than a third of all meal preparation tasks (Moleiro, 2024). The same is true for home food deliveries, where 55% of Bolt Food, Glovo, and Uber Eats drivers are foreigners, and for cleaning, at least 20% of the work is performed by immigrants (Moleiro, 2024). The role of these workers is also becoming increasingly important in providing care for older people. Approximately half of those employed in this sector are not Portuguese nationals (Moleiro, 2024). Employers across various sectors, such as agriculture, fishing, construction, transportation, cleaning, and social care, acknowledge the importance of immigrants in sustaining their businesses and seek to attract more to work in these fields (Moleiro, 2024).

The growth in immigration in recent years can be attributed, at least in part, to the changes made by the PS government to the immigration law. These changes enabled individuals to enter the country without a work visa and foreign citizens who have crossed the border irregularly to become legalised if they register with the Finance Department and contribute to Social Security. The increasing number of immigrants seeking to reside in Portugal, the decision by António Costa's government to abolish the Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF), and the delay in replacing it with the new Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA) have collectively resulted in an unsustainable situation. Consequently, there are approximately 350,000 pending regularisation processes for immigrants, with a minimum of two years necessary to obtain a residence permit in Portugal (Moleiro, 2024).

The non-regularisation of many immigrants increases the number of cases in which these communities find themselves in conditions of homelessness, overcrowding and exploitation. Immigrants' human rights are not being safeguarded, with Portugal seeing an increase in the number of foreigners in a situation of homelessness (Branco, 2023). In February 2023, a fire in a small flat in the historic centre of Lisbon, in which two migrants died and 14 were injured, pushed the issue of immigration onto the public agenda (Branco, 2023). The flat was used as a dormitory for 22 people, revealing the precarious conditions of many immigrants living in Portugal (Branco, 2023). The housing crisis, which narrows access to decent living conditions, is a problem that predominantly affects the most vulnerable, including migrants looking for a better life in Portugal. The growing number of immigrants who do not have their situation regularised and find themselves homeless or living in precarious conditions creates an opportunity for Chega to foster a feeling of insecurity towards these communities.

The Socialist government pursued an immigration policy that facilitated the entry of new migrants from economically disadvantaged countries without considering Portugal's serious situation in various sectors of society. The difficulties in ensuring quality access to health, education, and housing for Portuguese citizens make it impossible to integrate immigrants successfully upon arrival. The State's inability to respond in a dignified manner to the influx of immigrants arriving in Portugal worsens illegal immigration and labour exploitation (Branco, 2023). With no control over how immigrants live in Portugal, as a result of the PS's policies, violations of migrants' human rights have increased, with human trafficking and deteriorating health conditions prevalent in these communities. When migrants' visas expire, they become illegal and more vulnerable to criminal activity (Branco, 2023).

The Socialists' changes to the immigration law contributed to increased immigration to Portugal without the government providing the necessary support, reception, and integration of these communities. As a result, migrant segregation and social tensions related to this issue have increased (Branco, 2023). Populist parties, such as Chega, took advantage of this situation to mobilise voters, using disinformation to create a feeling of fear and insecurity about immigrants. The unsustainable situation in Portugal powered anti-immigrant movements, leading to multiple protests over the past year. These movements are concerned with the potential loss of Portuguese identity and the adoption of cultural customs that are not Portuguese (Lopes, 2023). The current immigration phenomenon in Portugal, given the diverse number of communities arriving, favours a more intense cultural clash than in the past, when immigrants were primarily from Portuguese-speaking countries (Lopes, 2023).

Chega manifested this inflexibility and insecurity towards immigrants by using the issue as one of its main banners in the 2024 election campaign. "Ensure Controlled Borders" was the title of one of the chapters in Chega's electoral programme, in which the party links the rise in immigration over the last 30 years to an increase in organised crime in Portugal, pressure on the public health service, and the housing crisis (Moleiro, 2024). Despite acknowledging the importance of migrants in particular sectors of the national economy, André Ventura's party opposes the current immigration situation, claiming that it does not integrate or respect Portuguese traditions and attempts to culturally subjugate Portugal (Moleiro, 2024). Chega's chapter on immigration concludes by emphasising the importance of preventing the spread of Islamic fundamentalism (Moleiro, 2024).

The PS's immigration policies have proven to be ineffective, resulting in a deterioration of the immigrants' situation, heightened social tensions surrounding this issue, and contributed to more prejudice against these communities. Chega took advantage of the immigration situation in Portugal, using misinformation and fear to promote its policy of closed borders.

Conclusion

After analysing the different crises that Portuguese public services are facing and the consequences for those who live in Portugal, one must attribute responsibilities to the failure of the PS's public policies, which in recent years have been unable to stop the worsening of these problems. With 2023 marked by demonstrations and a deterioration in the conditions of public services, the Portuguese population used the 2024 elections, 50 years after the 25 April Revolution, to clearly express their disapproval of the path followed so far.

The populist protest party Chega won the support of many who wanted a change in government after being ruled by only two parties since the beginning of Portuguese democracy. Regarding the failure of public policies, despite André Ventura's party's promises to everyone and guarantees of immediate improvements in people's living conditions, discontent prevailed, implying that most Portuguese did not vote for Chega or its proposals but against the PS's governance.

The question I leave for the final chapter of the Analysis is: How did Chega, and not another political party, capitalise on the votes of protest and dissatisfaction that were decisive in the 2024 election results?

Chapter IV

A new way of doing politics

Introduction

Political corruption, economic weaknesses, and the failure of public policies and services contribute to Portuguese disappointment with the PS and PSD. However, it does not fully explain why Chega was the party that benefited from these circumstances. André Ventura's party capitalised on widespread dissatisfaction in Portugal, distinguishing itself by its populist nature of promising everything to everyone and adapting its position according to what can be most favourable to them. Nonetheless, Chega's rapid growth would not have been possible without the critical role of social media, its campaign strategy, and its leader.

In this campaign, Chega took advantage of social media to communicate its message more effectively, without filters and targeting specific audiences. The strategy of prioritising social media resulted in Chega becoming the party with the most followers and having its leader and a member of parliament among the four most influential politicians on these digital platforms. The focus on this type of campaign followed the recent transformation in how citizens obtain political information, with a substantial number of voters, especially young people, following national politics solely through social media channels. Besides benefiting from the way many Portuguese get their political facts, social media also favours Chega's populist discourse full of inaccuracies, manipulations and falsities, which allows the party to promote disinformation without any journalistic contradiction.

In an interview, André Ventura claimed the concepts of truth and lies do not exist but rather distinct narratives for the same situation (Matos, 2024). The Chega leader and other party members frequently criticise journalism, claiming it misleads and manipulates Portuguese citizens (Matos, 2024). They perceive traditional media as the dominant narrative in Portugal, but the party does not regard it as a credible source (Matos, 2024). As a result, digital platforms have always been Chega's most popular channel since they allow the party to publish everything without restrictions. Chega's social media influence has a significant role in reaching voters who do not follow traditional media and communicating its message more directly. The party's impressive electoral performance in only five years is attributable to its new approach to politics, which is distinct from that of other Portuguese political parties and aligns with the specific characteristics of Chega.

In this chapter, I seek to establish a connection between Chega's campaign strategy for the 2024 elections, focusing on social media, and the electoral benefits it brought to the party. To this end, I will provide evidence of the discrepancy between Chega's social media presence compared to the other parties, of Chega's use of misinformation, the personalised campaign of its leader, André Ventura, and the mainstream parties' inability to adapt to the evolution of political communication.

Development

An election campaign different from any other

Chega approached the 2024 election campaign differently than the other parties. Although several political analysts initially questioned the strategy's effectiveness, it was crucial for the party's growth during these elections. While most political parties chose to run traditional campaigns, with political rallies and door-to-door campaigning, Chega focused on communicating its message to specific audiences via social media. During the campaign, the party spent its mornings recording videos for TikTok, X, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, which are many voters' primary sources of political information (Matos, 2024). Since there is no counterpoint, social media benefits populist parties like Chega, which use disinformation to gain votes. Without the filter of journalism, political parties can easily promote their narratives and attract votes from those not informed by traditional media (Matos, 2024).












Section I

Chega's prevailing presence on social media and its use to spread disinformation

The number of followers was critical to the success of the social media-based campaign. According to a University of Beira Interior study, Chega has 590,000 followers across the five major social networks (Figure 14). No political party comes close, with the Iniciativa Liberal in second with 331,000 followers (Figure 14). When comparing the level of interaction on the parties' publications, the difference becomes even more pronounced. The same study, conducted between 9 November 2023 and 19 February 2024, registered 2.3 million interactions on Chega's posts, significantly more than the second place, Iniciativa Liberal, which had 408,000 (Figure 15). These figures demonstrate Chega's clear advantage in reaching voters disengaged from newspapers or television news. Chega's publications have the broadest reach on social media, bringing voters closer to the party.












Chega's strategy is different for each public the party is trying to appeal to. In the case of young people, the approach is centred on TikTok, as it is the social network most used by this age group. Chega has 32,900 followers (Figure 14), and its leader, André Ventura, stands out with 219,000 (Matos, 2024). With young people tending to abstain, the party's message on TikTok consisted of calls for electoral participation, with André Ventura emphasising the importance of voting to change the country's situation (Matos, 2024). With this strategy, Chega obtained votes from the young electors and convinced people who do not usually vote to participate and support them. When the aim is to reach pensioners, the party focuses its message on Facebook (Matos, 2024).

Figure 14: Number of Followers of Portuguese Political Parties - The data covers the period between 9 November 2023 (the dissolution of parliament) and 19 February 2024 (the television debates between party leaders ended).

Partido	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	TikTok	X	Total
 CH	189.573	156.956	155.000	32.900	55.808	590.237
 IL	125.853	97.339	23.600	6.165	78.400	331.357
 PSD	168.129	42.010	17.000	1.508	69.515	298.162
 PAN	165.056	37.886	184	660	13.288	217.074
 PS	105.901	33.561	10.100	1.717	62.524	213.803
 B.E.	14.418	59.009	15.800	31.200	15.581	136.008
 PCP	42.092	24.738	13.600	3.016	28.545	111.991
 L	33.293	28.667	3.380	3.438	37.196	105.974
 CDS-PP	42.732	16.788	11.300	1.038	31.495	103.353
 PEV	15.106	3.277	874	0	8.017	27.274
 PPM	0	3.049	12	7	33	3.101

Source: Thais Longaray (Infographic), LabCom - Universidade da Beira Interior (Data)

Figure 15: Number of Interactions in Portuguese Political Parties' social media publications - The data covers the period between 9 November 2023 (the dissolution of parliament) and 19 February 2024 (the television debates between party leaders ended).

	Partido	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	TikTok	X	Total
	CH	1.335.553	1.037.006	-	4.618	-	2.377.177
	IL	35.979	349.065	-	23.063	-	408.107
	PCP	136.582	162.894	-	11.891	-	311.367
	B.E.	27.402	154.581	-	60.824	-	242.807
	PS	105.555	99.380	-	3.976	-	208.911
	PSD	78.601	111.167	-	361	-	190.129
	CDS-PP	16.494	79.126	-	318	-	95.938
	L	8.108	63.668	-	5.784	-	77.560
	PAN	9.866	58.757	-	1.248	-	69.871
	PEV	8.885	23.433	-	0	-	32.318
	PPM	0	11.938	-	0	-	11.938

Source: Thais Longaray (Infographic), LabCom - Universidade da Beira Interior (Data)

In the case of social network X, Chega's messages do not have the characteristics the party promotes on TikTok. On X, the party's main strategies are disinformation and generalisation. During the campaign, Chega shared videos and messages on this platform to spread fear and insecurity towards the Roma community and raise doubts about the electoral process's integrity (Matos, 2024). The party used videos of Roma people assaulting firefighters and of a police officer being attacked in Lisbon to convince voters that only André Ventura as Prime Minister could restore “Law and Order” in Portugal (Matos, 2024).

As previously stated, disinformation played a critical role in the 2024 campaign. Chega used this strategy to victimise itself after alleged shots fired near a party meeting in Famalicão, but the police confirmed that the sounds were only from motorbikes (Matos, 2024). Despite this confirmation, the party maintained its complaint and used the incident as an opportunity to martyr itself. Chega also used disinformation to raise uncertainty about the electoral process, as other populist leaders, including Jair Bolsonaro and Donald Trump, have done (Matos, 2024).

This suspicion about the elections originated from posts on the social network X of members of two political parties, in which a Bloco de Esquerda militant and another from the Livre party suggested removing the ballot papers of those who voted for Chega from the polling stations (Matos, 2024). In the case of the Bloco de Esquerda, the person in question was immediately removed from the list of potential candidates for the polling stations, and the Livre member assumed it was a joke and that he was not even permitted to participate in the vote count (Matos, 2024). Despite solving the situation, the Chega theory about the dangers of electoral manipulation strengthened and remained a topic until the end of the campaign. Even though those targeted would not be at any polling stations, disinformation spread through social media, with videos of André Ventura questioning future election results and instilling doubt in Portuguese citizens (Matos, 2024). As the political party with the most followers, Chega benefits from its hegemony on social media, which allows it to disseminate its narrative without any verification of the information shared, contributing to the growing prevalence of disinformation in the political sphere.

Section II

André Ventura's personalised campaign

Social media also brings politicians closer to the electorate, but not all have taken advantage of this. In the case of André Ventura, his dancing and singing videos contrast with the behaviour expected of a candidate for Prime Minister (Matos, 2024). The Chega leader benefits from transmitting a more genuine side, more relatable to the Portuguese, different from the more institutional behaviour assumed by the leaders of the mainstream parties. The personalisation of politics, driven by social media, has created a celebrity status for political leaders (Almeida, 2024). The more popular politicians are on social media, the closer they get to voters, especially the youngest generation, since 70% of higher education students follow the current national political situation on social media and admit that it influences how they vote (Almeida, 2024).

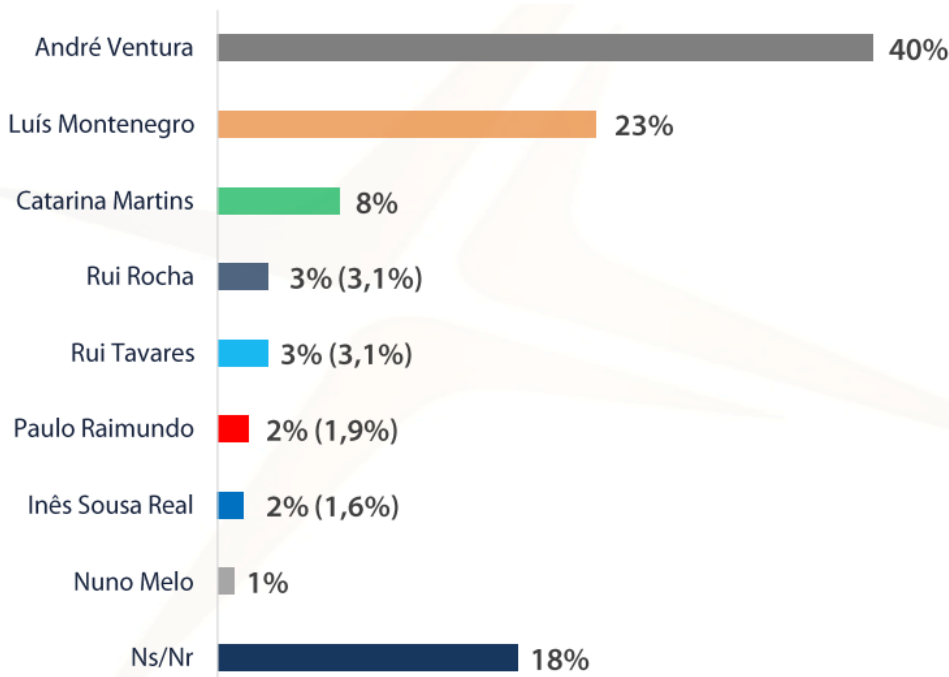
Chega outperforms the other parties in the popularity of its members. André Ventura has one million followers across all platforms, far more than second-placed Marisa Matias of the Bloco de Esquerda, who has only 235.7 thousand (Almeida, 2024). Rita Matias, a young member of parliament for Chega, is also among the four politicians with the most followers, with 177.2 thousand (Almeida, 2024). The two largest parties, PS and PSD, have failed to benefit from the growing importance of social media, with their leaders, Pedro Nuno Santos and Luís Montenegro, not even featuring in the top 10 most-followed politicians (Almeida, 2024).

This new form of political communication, in which the politician speaks directly to the citizen, creates a platform that is even more suitable for political personalisation (Pedersen & Rahat, 2019). It also contributes to more irrational elements in political discourse and consequently weakens the accountability mechanisms (Pedersen & Rahat, 2019). The success of a political party is no longer primarily dependent on the competence of its members in parliament. Instead, the personal qualities and decisions of the party leader increasingly influence electoral preferences (Pedersen & Rahat, 2019).

André Ventura's populism gains more from the polarised and emotional political debate fostered by social media (Almeida, 2024). The party's strong presence on these digital platforms allows the charismatic leader of Chega to personalise the party's political message even more. In Portugal, André Ventura was the first to understand the potential of new forms of political communication to foster a personal relationship with voters and to influence their more irrational intuitions. For the Portuguese electorate, André Ventura is the political party Chega, and vice versa.

The Chega leader's influential presence on social media is a fundamental factor in the party's electoral growth. In a survey conducted less than a year before the 2024 elections, 40 per cent of Portuguese respondents considered André Ventura the principal opposition figure to the government, well above the 23 per cent who named PSD leader Luís Montenegro (Figure 16). Chega's strategy centred on social media, which other parties disregard, helped the party to become recognised as the most vocal against the PS governance, allowing it to attract a substantial number of votes from those dissatisfied with Portugal's current situation.

Figure 16: Portuguese perception of the principal opposition figure to the government



Source: Aximage Survey - Political Barometer April 2023.

Section III

The evolution of political communication: Chega's advantage and the mainstream parties' inability to adapt

Chega's strategy on social media, through its messages aimed at specific audiences, has contributed to the rapid electoral growth of this political party established just five years ago. Voters dissatisfied with traditional politicians and media chose Chega and André Ventura for their unconventional political approaches. Its success in the 2024 elections was due to the party's ability to adapt to social media, tailoring the content to the specific platforms and audiences it sought to reach (Almeida, 2024). The other political parties, particularly the mainstream, failed to acknowledge the impact these new forms of communication have on the direction of the vote and electoral results (Almeida, 2024).

The PS and PSD social media accounts are merely an extension of their institutional websites, failing to adapt to the new way of communicating political information. (Almeida, 2024). This lack of engagement with digital platforms distances voters typically informed through these channels. The mainstream parties are losing the opportunity to broaden their electoral base and provide a counterpoint to the messages

disseminated by Chega. PS and PSD limit their publications to content without a language developed for social media, preventing them from influencing the political debate on digital channels due to their low interaction rates (Figure 15)(Almeida, 2024).

Considering the 2024 election results, with the PS and PSD having comparatively low results compared to previous polls, one can conclude that these parties' lack of social media presence negatively impacted their number of votes. Political parties must adapt to the current changes in political communication if they wish to maintain their influence on the electorate. Chega was the party that recognised and adapted to this new situation first, benefiting from it in the most recent elections. The party's social media strategy contributed to Chega winning the votes of those who tend to accept the misinformation disseminated, the less educated and the younger voters. In the 2024 elections, only 22% of Chega's electorate had a university degree, and Chega was the second party with the most votes in the age group between 18 and 34 (Dinis, 2024) (Nilsson-Julien, 2024).

In addition to adapting quickly to this new reality, Chega also benefits more than the other parties from the prevalence of social media in modern political communication. Today, political parties' messages mainly rely on videos, photographs, and quotes rather than television debates or door-to-door campaigning (Almeida, 2024). With a considerable part of the electorate dependent on short, personalised videos with no journalistic filter for their political information, there is a greater tendency for voters to be for or against the majority of the issues presented to them, which increased the radicalisation of political discourse, favouring Chega's strategy (Almeida, 2024).

Conclusion

The politicians' use of technology and social media has enabled them to engage with citizens more personally and directly, overcoming the limitations of traditional media (Pedersen & Rahat, 2019). The short videos shared on social media allow politicians to set and influence the political agenda with absolute autonomy to address the topics of their choice (Pedersen & Rahat, 2019). The populist Chega party has been the most effective in adapting to these new circumstances, with the most followers on social media and being the most successful at mobilising them, leaving the traditional governing parties behind.

The political discourse has also become increasingly emotional and focused on the political leader rather than being primarily based on the ideas presented. Chega benefits from this new way of doing politics because of its charismatic leader, who has far more followers than any other politician, and because the

party's communication strategy relies on the emotional impact of its messages on voters rather than the rationality of its positions (Almeida, 2024).

The influence social networks have on people's lives and, in this case, on how they become informed about politics make Chega's strategy and campaign increasingly relevant, contributing to their accelerated electoral growth.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have analysed the reasons for Chega's accelerated growth and success in the 2024 parliamentary elections in Portugal. Based on my analysis, four factors determine the party's success:

1. The cases of political corruption involving members of the PS and PSD, in particular Operation Influencer, which led to the resignation of Prime Minister António Costa and the subsequent early elections, played a fundamental role in the loss of voter confidence in these two parties. The attention given by Chega to the issue of corruption during the campaign reflects the party's capitalisation on the issue, which benefited it electorally.

2. Economic weaknesses in Portugal, even though the political parties do not have total control or responsibility, have also contributed to the dissatisfaction with the PS and the PSD. In the case of the PSD, there is still resentment, especially among public sector workers and pensioners, over the austerity measures that the party implemented during the Troika period. In the case of the PS, after eight years of government, low wages, high taxes, low productivity, dependence on European Union funds and the consequent need for many young Portuguese to emigrate were also reasons for the party's loss of votes in 2024. Chega exploited Portuguese dissatisfaction with their living conditions to attract voters with its irresponsible and populist discourse, promising immediate improvements that benefited the party's electoral results in the 2024 elections.

3. In the case of public services and public policies, the electorate considered the Socialist Party to have the predominant responsibility for the situation preceding the 2024 elections without neglecting the PSD's role in the current dissatisfaction. In areas such as education, health, housing, the security forces and immigration, there has been a high level of discontent, protests and strikes in recent years. In particular, in 2023, the year before the parliamentary elections, the growing dissatisfaction with the PS government was evident. Chega positioned itself as the primary opponent of António Costa's government's policies and, again with the sole aim of winning votes, promised immediate solutions for these issues.

4. Social media was Chega's main strength in these elections. While the other parties stuck to traditional campaigning, Chega took advantage of the changes in how voters get their political information and focused its strategy on promoting content on digital platforms. Chega and André Ventura are outstandingly the party and leader with the most followers, which allowed them to spread their message more effectively and directly to social media audiences than the other parties. Moreover, this change is totally in line with the characteristics of the party since Chega promotes a discourse based on

disinformation, which is not controlled on social media, giving it total autonomy to spread any information it wishes.

It is impossible to predict Chega's future election results. The 2024 elections occurred during widespread dissatisfaction among Portuguese citizens and exhaustion with the Socialist Party's nearly decade-long political cycle. It was an election that prioritised protest and irrationality over a constructive debate of ideas. Chega benefited from this context since the party never had executive responsibilities, therefore unaccountable for its unrealistic promises and considered by electors as a party through which they could express their discontent.

After the 2024 elections, the AD, a coalition formed by PSD, CDS and PPM, established a minority government without negotiating with Chega. Despite this disregard, Chega's 50 deputies in parliament have a decisive role in preventing the collapse of the AD government. The minority government's continuity depends on the negotiations with Chega and the PS, which will be decisive in the approval of the 2025 State budget and can determine new early elections.

The PS has already stated that it will not approve the State budget, forcing Chega to decide whether this government remains in office. This situation will have electoral consequences for André Ventura's party. If Chega does not negotiate and votes against the State budget, voters can perceive it as irresponsible and the cause of the AD/PSD government's collapse. On the other hand, if Chega negotiates and votes in favour, it might lose its reputation as a protest party, which has always characterised it and benefited it electorally. This situation is just an example of the political instability the 2024 election results brought to Portuguese politics.

One thing is clear: if the so-called moderate and democratic parties do not stand up for the principles they claim to represent and fail to deliver improvements in Portuguese life conditions, the maintenance and growth of Chega as an influential force in Portuguese politics will continue to be a reality.

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