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PORTUGAL'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN 2024: A SHIFT IN THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION OF 25 APRIL 1974

Posted on 17 Settembre 2024 by [Rui Tavares Lanceiro](#)

1. The [recent parliamentary elections in Portugal](#), held on 10 March 2024 to elect members of the [Assembly of the Republic](#), mark a significant moment in the country's political history, coinciding with the [50th anniversary of the 25 April Revolution](#). This historic event, also known as the [Carnation Revolution](#), symbolizes the overthrow of the [Estado Novo](#) dictatorial regime and the establishment of a democratic government. The 2024 snap elections, however, took place in an [atmosphere of pessimism](#) and distrust on the political elites and brought a notable shift in the political landscape, putting an end to a 9 year period of government by the centre-left [Socialist Party](#) (PS) and with the far-right gaining impressive results. The elections were won by the centre-right [Democratic Alliance](#) (*Aliança Democrática*, AD), which is a [political alliance](#) composed of the confusingly named [Social Democratic Party](#) (PSD, centre-right), [CDS – People's Party](#) (CDS-PP) and [People's Monarchist Party](#) (PPM). However, no party achieved an absolute majority of seats, with AD holding a wafer thin majority of 80 members of Parliament to the Socialists' 78, [leaving Portugal with a "hung Parliament"](#).

2. The 25 April Revolution of 1974 remains a cornerstone of Portugal's democratic identity. This bloodless coup, led by the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), ended nearly five decades of authoritarian rule, Europe's longest-lived dictatorship, and 13 years of colonial wars in Africa, paving the way for democratic reforms. Free and democratic elections for a Constituent Assembly took place the following year. The revolutionary period was marked by internal fighting between factions that [brought Portugal to the verge of civil war](#) but ended with the approval and entering into force of the new [democratic Constitution in 1976](#). The revolution is commemorated annually, reminding the Portuguese people of their enduring commitment to democracy, freedom, and social justice. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the revolution. This year's elections, therefore, carried a special weight, serving as a reminder of the democratic values that the revolution instilled in the nation. The anniversary underscored the progress made over the past five decades and highlighted the ongoing challenges in maintaining a robust and inclusive democratic system.

3. The Portuguese Parliament (*Assembleia da República*, [Assembly of the Republic](#)) has 230 members elected to four-year terms. The number of seats assigned to each constituency depends on the [district magnitude](#) and seats are awarded proportionally, according to the [d'Hondt method](#). Governments do not require the absolute majority support of the Assembly to hold office, as even if the number of opponents of the government is larger than that of the supporters, the number of opposers still needs to be equal or greater than 116 (absolute majority) for both the Government's Programme to be rejected or for a [motion of no confidence](#) to be approved.

The 2024 elections took place two years ahead of schedule. In the [previous election, in January 2022](#), António Costa's Socialists won an absolute parliamentary majority with over 41% of the vote and 120 members of parliament. The snap elections were called when Socialist Prime Minister António Costa [was forced to resign](#) in November, after being named in a public prosecutor's office investigation into alleged graft in his government's handling of multi-billion-euro investment projects

(named "[Operation Influencer](#)"). The Prime Minister's chief of staff was briefly arrested after searches in its office.

Shortly after the resignation of the Prime Minister, in January 2024, it came to light that the President of the Regional Government of the Autonomous Region of Madeira, Miguel Albuquerque, [was in the spotlight for corruption offences](#), which also led to his resignation.

Because of these cases, the parliamentary elections were marked by heightened public scrutiny and public perception of widespread corruption. The resulting scandals have eroded public trust in established parties and institutions, providing fertile ground for anti-establishment and far-right parties like [Chega](#) (meaning 'enough') to gain traction.

4. One of the most striking outcomes of the 2024 elections was the impressive performance of the far-right party, Chega. Founded in 2019 by [André Ventura](#), Chega has rapidly gained traction, capitalizing on growing discontent with traditional political parties and concerns over immigration, economic stability, and national identity.

The foundation of Chega has sparked a significant debate regarding its constitutionality and the potential for its control by the Portuguese Constitutional Court. [Critics argue that some of Chega's positions and rhetoric may violate Portugal's constitutional principles](#), particularly those related to equality, non-discrimination, and the [prohibition on fascist organisations](#).

In the [2019 Portuguese legislative election](#), Chega won one seat in the Assembly of the Republic, taken by Ventura. This was the end of the "[Portuguese exception](#)" of [not having parliamentary representation of the far-right](#). However, this was only the beginning. Chega received 7.2% of the vote in the [2022 general election](#), increasing its seat count to 12, coming third behind the Socialists (centre-left) and PSD (centre-right). The 2024 election saw Chega securing a significant increase in parliamentary seats, [quadrupling its seat count to a final total of 50 after it received 18.07% of the vote](#), signalling a shift in the political landscape. This means that [Chega, that sometimes appears to be nostalgic of the Estado Novo period](#), now has as many MPs as the Portuguese democracy has years.

Chega's success reflects broader trends seen across Europe and America,

where far-right parties have been gaining momentum. Their rise in Portugal raises important questions about the factors driving voter support and the potential implications for the country's democratic institutions and policies.

5. In the Portuguese system, it is up to the President of the Republic to designate someone to form Government as Prime Minister after consulting the parties with seats in the *Assembleia da República* and "in the light of the electoral results" (Article 187(1) of the Constitution). After that, the remaining members of the Government are also appointed by the President and the Government must present its programme to the Parliament. The Constitution does not establish the need for the programme to be voted – a vote is only held if any party proposed a motion to reject it or the Government itself requests a confidence vote. The Government can only be brought down by the rejection of the programme by an absolute majority of the MPs (Article 192(3-4) of the Constitution). Additionally, the Constitution prevents the President from dissolving the Parliament during the first six months of the parliamentary term (Article 172 of the Constitution).

After the 2024 elections, due to the absence of an absolute majority of a party or coalition, there was [some discussion](#) on which party leader should be invited by the President of the Republic to form government. The centre-right [Democratic Alliance](#) (*Aliança Democrática*, AD) narrowly [won the parliamentary elections](#), [securing](#) 80 seats in the 230-seat parliament but failing to secure a governing majority. The centre-right coalition was closely followed by the Socialist Party with 78 seats, and far-right Chega party with 50 seats. An alliance between AD and Chega would create an absolute majority, but Luis Montenegro, leader of the AD, [dismissed any agreement with Chega](#), echoing his promise during the campaign ("No is no"). An alliance with the liberal party [Iniciativa Liberal](#) would not bring enough votes to form an absolute majority. On the other hand, a reedition of the [Geringonça](#) (the alliance formed by the then Socialist leader António Costa with the [Portuguese Communist Party](#), the [Greens](#), and the [Bloco de Esquerda](#) - Left Bloc - in 2015 that allowed the PS to govern, despite losing the elections) did not gather enough votes to

form an absolute majority either – even if you added the new MP's of the more recent centre-left [Livre](#) or the ecologist [PAN](#).

The [President of the Republic decided to invite Luís Montenegro](#), leader of the centre-right AD coalition, to form a government on the 21 March, following the publication in the official journal of the final tally of the election. The new Prime Minister and Ministers were [sworn in on 2 April](#). On 12 April, after the debate on the new Government's programme, the [Parliament voted down two motions to reject it](#) put forward by the Portuguese Communist Party and the Left Bloc – with the main opposition Socialists abstaining in both votes and the far-right Chega voting against them. After this vote, the Government completed its investiture and took on its full powers under the Constitution.

However, the divided Parliament may be the source of instability and passing government proposed legislation may prove to be extremely difficult. This happened even before the discussion of the Government's Programme, when Chega went back on an agreement with AD to elect the President of the Parliament, which ended up [being elected only after a fourth round of vote](#), after AD and the Socialists agreed that the Social Democrats will only preside over Parliament in the first two legislative sessions, until September 2026, and the Socialists will nominate a candidate for the rest of the legislature. This also happened with [Chega voting in favour of Socialist's legislative proposals on tax matters](#) against the will of the Government, putting in question its ability to see the Parliament approve the State Budget.

6. Only three months after the [10 March 2024 legislative election](#), Portugal went back to the polls to vote for the 21 seats of the Portuguese delegation to the [European Parliament](#), on 9 June. [The Socialist Party narrowly won](#), with 32% of the vote and eight Members of the European Parliament (MEP) being elected, including former health minister Marta Temido, who was the main candidate of PS for these elections, and the first woman to win elections in Portugal. The AD centre-right coalition came in a close second with 31% and holding their seven seats won in 2019.

Chega remained the third political force in Portugal, but its share of votes

fell dramatically when compared to March's elections. The extreme right-wing party had 9.79% of the votes, comparing with the 18% of the legislative elections. In any case, Chega elected two MEP, marking their presence in the European Parliament for the first time. This defeat can be seen as the first of several future setbacks, now that the party has achieved more importance and can be held accountable for instability in the Parliament, but it can also reflect the lack of importance attributed to European elections by the far-right electorate.

After the elections, the [Prime Minister announced that the Government would back António Costa](#) if he decided to run for President of the European Council. This was only possible because the Portuguese Public Prosecutor's Office case that brought down Costa's Government became [deflated](#). Days after António Costa's resignation, it emerged that prosecutors had [wrongly mixed up](#) Costa's name with that of Economy Minister António Costa Silva in wiretap transcripts. The case later appeared to largely fall apart after [judges at Lisbon's Court of Appeal](#) and [Portugal's ombudswoman](#) said the investigation was based on speculation, not evidence. Critics of the Public Prosecutor's Office said it had interfered politically, bringing down a sitting Prime Minister for the first time in Portugal's history, without having a watertight case. António Costa has denied wrongdoing and was never charged with any crime.

In European-level talks after the elections, [Costa became one of a trio of candidates proposed](#) – as a candidate to be President of the European Council, together with Ursula von der Leyen, for President of the Commission and Kaja Kallas, for High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. His election was far from certain, with [Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk \(EPP\) stating on 17 June that Costa was competent but there was a need for “public clarification, what is the legal situation.”](#) Despite this, on 27 June, the [European Council elected António Costa](#) as its new President, with the [Italian Prime Minister Meloni as the only member voting against him](#). António Costa is the first Portuguese and the first Socialist President of the European Council.

7. The far-right's surge in the Portuguese parliamentary elections could have several implications, increasing instability and political polarization.

The polarization could affect social cohesion, with debates around national identity, immigration, and social policies potentially creating divides within the society.

The election results serve as a test of Portugal's democratic resilience. The ability of the country's political system to accommodate diverse views while maintaining democratic norms and values will be crucial in the coming years. Understanding and addressing the underlying causes of voter discontent that have fuelled the rise of the far-right is essential. This might involve economic reforms, improved social services, and policies that address inequality and social justice. Investing in education that promotes democratic values, critical thinking, and civic engagement can help build a more informed and active citizenry that supports democratic governance.

As Portugal navigates this new political terrain, the legacy of the 25 April Revolution remains a guiding light. The principles of democracy, freedom, and social justice that emerged from the revolution are as relevant today as they were 50 years ago. The challenge lies in ensuring that these values continue to inform and shape Portugal's political future, even as new forces and dynamics emerge.