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Is there significant erosion of political system support in Portugal? A longitudinal and comparative analysis (2000–10)

ABSTRACT

In this article, we study how Portuguese citizens see and assess the democratic regime in a longitudinal and comparative perspective. This individual-level study is based on the assumption that mass attitudes have a clear and direct impact on politics, especially on democratic polities. Inspired by the original theoretical and conceptual Easton's framework, developed and reformulated later by other authors (Norris, Kingemann and Dalton), we explore the multidimensional perspective of the concept of political support, its levels and components. Building on a wide range of national and cross-national survey indicators for evidence, concerning both the Portuguese case and some European countries included in the fifth wave of the World Values Survey, we analyse and try understanding the longitudinal trends concerning each political

KEYWORDS

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system's dimensions or components. The main objective of this article is to find out to what extent it is possible to speak of an erosion of Portuguese citizens' support for the political system during the last decade, and if there has been to discern its nature, cumulative effects and magnitude. The time series analysis allowed us to conclude that the hypothesis of a crisis of legitimacy in Portugal during this period must be rejected. Thus, what seems to be contested in Portugal, as in other European democracies, are the political objects that comprise a more specific level of support, including regime performance, regime institutions and political actors, due to an increasing level of frustration of accumulated unfulfilled expectations of democracy processes.

CENTRAL ARGUMENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of democratic regimes in comparative politics has suffered significant change over the last 40 years. During the mid-1970s there were only about 50 democracies in the world, mostly wealthy industrialised Western societies. Democracy as a political regime was thus seen as a 'cultural construction of the West', a privilege unachievable by the poorer countries from Southern Europe and Latin America. However, in 1974 Portugal's dictatorial regime was overthrown by a military coup, in 1975 Greece changed once again to a democratic civilian government, and in 1976 Spain switched from a dictatorship to a constitutional and democratic state under the rule of law (Pinto 1995; 2000). Shortly thereafter, the Latin American military dictatorships gave place to civilian regimes, a phenomenon that was also observed in some Asian countries during the 1980s.

These events were part of a phenomenon Samuel Huntington (1991) described as the 'third wave of democracy', which continued into the 1990s with the 'velvet revolutions' in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union (Huntington 1997). With the 'third wave of democracy' expanding to include an ever-increasing set of countries, the main concern of political scientists quickly focused on the analysis of the processes of transition to democratic consolidation, that is, to the longevity, stability and capacity of new democratic regimes to persist (Linz and Stepan 1996; O' Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead 1986). However, several authors noted that if the consolidation of democracy consists of a discernible process by which the rules, institutions and constraints of democracy come to constitute 'the only game in town', the truth is that democracy as the only game in town does not preclude the possibility the 'games' played inside political institutions, and those played by political actors in the democratic process are different from those dictated by their formal principles and rules.

While some authors have warned against confusing 'façade democracies' with 'effective democracies', reflecting the insight that consolidated democratic regimes do not work everywhere with similar effectiveness (Morlino 2008), others have proposed different attempts to move beyond the procedural definition of democracy, by noting the distinction between – 'defective' and 'embedded' democracies (Merkel 2004) while yet others have tried to construct a measurable concept of the 'quality of democracy' in order to emphasise that idea that consolidating democracy is one problem while improving its quality is another. Therefore, every analysis of the 'quality of democracy' should assume that within the category of consolidated democracies, as in the case of European countries, there is a *continuum* from 'low' to 'high' quality democracies (Morlino 2004a; 2004b).

Given all that has been said above, it is easily understood that the triumphalism associated with the expansion of the Western democratic model during the early 1990s soon gave way to a more realistic approach concerning the unfinished and incomplete nature of the new democratic regimes. At the same time, the longest established democracies, somewhat paradoxically, also faced challenges and contests, ones that were no longer exogenous but endogenous. Challenges and threats posed by their own citizens, who were increasingly sceptical and cynical with respect to the politicians and who were gradually suspicious of the regimes' political institutions and disappointed and frustrated with the performance of the democratic political system. In the academy and media, talk of democratic crisis became common and recurrent, noting the growing distance separating the voters from the elected politicians.

This paradox results in the appearance of many symptoms of a growing erosion in the support electors have for politicians, parties and parliaments in advanced industrial democracies; however, these feelings have not carried over to the democratic values, principles and goals of these regimes. The new and original phenomenon is precisely the fact that these trends were taking place in established democracies simultaneously. On the one hand, there are citizens who value democracy as an ideal, and, on the other, there are citizens who remain strongly dissatisfied with the performance of their political system, and particularly the core institutions of representative government, which makes the present moment unique and which is responsible by the emergence of what many have called a new kind of citizen: 'critical democrats, critical citizens or disaffected citizens have appeared as new figures in the political arena' (Kinglemann 1999; Norris 1999; Dalton 2004). They are characterised by the interplay of strong support for democratic ideals, on the one hand, and a large variety of critical attitudes toward democratic performance, on the other (Torcal and Montero 2006).

On the basis of a review of the relevant international literature on this topic, particularly the work of Russell Dalton (2004), Hans-Dieter Kinglemann (1999) and Pippa Norris (1999; 2011) who equated this theme of a more or less similar theoretical and conceptual framework – although reaching conclusions that do not always coincide in some important aspects, both in terms of the uniqueness or the 'transversality' of trends in different countries, and the more cyclical or structural nature of this phenomenon, or even about how to interpret the continuity or regression of this process of erosion of public support in advanced industrial democracies. It is our goal here to replicate and update much of what these authors have developed in their studies and thus contribute towards enriching an interesting line of investigation that enjoys great vitality within contemporary political science and comparative politics. By virtue of the constraints in developing scientific surveys of public opinion, with questionnaires including questions that are comparable with standardised questions comprising some of the most important international cross-national public opinion surveys, in Portugal there exists a gap in the theoretical and empirical knowledge in this area. The lack of these valuable tools limits the possibilities for research both in terms of comparability, and with regards the spatial dimension of these kinds of studies.

Through highlighting the pioneering work of Pedro Magalhães on the theme 'Democrats, discontent and disaffected: The attitudes of Portuguese citizens in relation to the political system' (2004), in which he sought to

clarify the attitudinal map of Portuguese towards democracy, its institutions and political actors, we also adopt the theoretical and conceptual structure initially conceived by David Easton (1965; 1975). The study's main results, based on Portuguese representatives, conducted in 2002 and co-ordinated by a research team from the University of Lisbon's Institute of Social Sciences, show that at that time in Portugal, there was massive support for the democratic regime, which co-existed with high levels of citizen's discontent or dissatisfaction regarding regime performance, as well as a profound distrust with its political institutions and authorities (Magalhães 2004).

In this article, we propose to develop a longitudinal and comparative analysis, based on latest available data for Portugal and for European democracies in its geo-cultural area. We do this to answer the following questions:

- How have Portuguese citizens viewed and judged the political system in the last decade?
- Does existing empirical evidence allow us to talk of a growing and significant erosion of citizens' support to the democratic system, and if so, must we recognise that a crisis of democratic legitimacy is a reality in Portugal, or is this a fallacy or a misconception of the challenges facing Portuguese democracy at the beginning of the 21st century?
- Finally, are we alone? Is the erosion of public support for the political system unique to Portugal, or does it affect almost all European democracies, therefore representing a consistent and general trend?

In this article we proceed as follows. After the introduction of our central argument and the review of some key literature we address the meaning of the term 'political system support', establishing the conceptual and theoretical framework. In the third and fourth sections, we test the empirical validity of the multi-dimensional definition of the concept of support for the political system, initially using principal component factor analysis, then confirmatory factor analysis (with AMOS). In the fifth section, we analyse and compare longitudinal trends in Portugal and in European democracies in each dimension or component of political system support during the past decade, ranging from the most specific to the most diffuse levels.

MEANING OF POLITICAL SYSTEM SUPPORT: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We will begin by clarifying some theoretical and conceptual matters. The concept of 'political system support' is far from simple. On the one hand, its measurement is not straightforward (Kinglemann 1999; Norris 2011: 19), while on the other, the interpretation of many authors with respect to cross-national evidence has sometimes contributed to transform this concept into something more complicated, and often contradictory (Fuchs, Guidorossi and Svensson 1995).

We try identify the idea of the different dimensions of 'political system support' from the premise that the concept has a multi-dimensional nature (Easton 1965; 1975; Dalton 1999; 2007; Kinglemann 1999; Norris 1999; 2011), that is to say, it is composed of several dimensions that, although related, have distinct theoretical and empirical causes and consequences. It should be made clear that this concept must be looked at as 'psychological or emotional



feelings, and evaluative judgments from citizens about political system and towards democratic government' (Norris 2011: 20), that are commonly derived from national and international surveys that are conducted in accordance with rigorous scientific standards.

Easton's conceptual framework was built upon the idea that any nation state can be regarded as a political system. He first drew an important conceptual distinction between two different levels of citizen support (Easton 1965; 1975). First he tells us 'diffuse' political support represents more abstract feelings towards nation states, political systems and their agencies. The diffuse support towards community and regime helps citizens accept the legitimacy of the state, its agencies and officeholders, even when people are highly critical of certain political processes, party leaders or public policies and their outputs. Therefore, the performance of national governments is expected to fluctuate over time, but generalised attachments to the nation state and political regimes should remain stable, providing office holders act in accordance with a 'long-term reservoir of favourable attitudes' or 'affective citizens goodwill' (Easton 1965: 273).

In contrast, 'specific' support focuses on the elected and appointed office holders who are responsible for taking and implementing political decisions. Support for specific parties (government or opposition), as well as attitudes towards leadership elites and authorities, is expected to fluctuate over time in response to short- and medium-term contextual factors, such as the performance of particular governments, major shifts in public policies, leadership changes or a cyclical economic crises. On that account, in democratic states approval of office holders fluctuates over time as part of the normal political process. However, while a persistent lack of specific support may have consequences for governance, it is also true it does not undermine the legitimacy of the nation state or erode the fundamental authority of its agencies and actors.

Equally important is Easton's conceptual distinction of three different dimensions or components of the political system: the nation, the regime and the incumbent authorities (Easton 1965; 1975; 1976). In accordance with Dalton (1999; 2007) and Norris (1999; 2011), we not only acknowledge the multi-dimensional nature of the concept of 'political system support', but we also reformulated Easton's original framework to recognise five dimensions or components of system support ranging from the most diffuse to the most specific, which corresponds to a series of different operational empirical measures.

As can be seen in Figure 1, it is apparently theoretically and empirically possible to distinguish five dimensions of 'political system support', specifically: (1) the support for the nation state, i.e. the most general and fundamental attitudes of citizens are toward the political community; (2) support for the political regime, which refers to public attitudes regarding the nation state's constitutional and legal order, i.e. the agreement with normative values and core principles upon which the regime is based; (3) support in relation to the day-to-day functioning of democratic process, i.e. the evaluation of the regime's overall performance, exemplified by satisfaction with the democratic regime put into practice; (4) confidence in political institutions, such as evaluations of the three branches of government, as well as of political parties and other institutional actors; and finally (5) approval of political authorities or incumbent officeholders, including attitudes towards prime ministers, party leaders, legislators and other public officials.

Levels of support	Dimensions or objects of support	Survey measures and operational indicators
>> Most diffuse >> << Most specific <<	Support for regime principles and values	Despite having some problems, democracy is the best form of government (democratic ideal) The importance of having a democratic system
	Evaluations of regime performance	Judgments about democracy workings: processes and practices
	Trust in regime institutions	Confidence and trust in public institutions at national level, including the legislative, executive, judiciary and courts, and political parties.
	Approval of political authorities	Approval of specific incumbents, including national party leaders

Figure 1: Operationalising indicators of political system support.

SOURCES, DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The next step of our research consists of presenting evidence and selecting the indicators and survey questions commonly used in international research to operationalise and measure each of the five dimensions of political system support, starting from the most specific to the most diffuse. Figure 1 combines the levels of system support, represented by a vertical arrow with two heads: the bottom of the arrow corresponds to more specific levels of political support while the uppermost part indicates more diffuse levels. The first column shows the five dimensions or components of political support, while the second contains typical operational indicators and survey measures for each dimension.

The sources of evidence for this research are essentially four public opinion surveys that have allowed us to describe the opinions people have about democracy in its various dimensions, from an evaluative point of view, both cognitive and affective, and which indicates all its limitations. First, we must mention the main source of evidence used in this research, the 2008 Portuguese Representative Mass Survey, which is part of a research project entitled, ‘Portuguese MPs in a Comparative Perspective: Elections, Leadership and Political Representation’, carried out within the Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), CIES-IUL (Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology) and integrated into other international research networks, such as PARANEL and PARTIREP. In the context

of this research, this survey is of particular importance because it is the first questionnaire in Portugal to integrate a set of questions that allow us to systematically and comparatively deal with the theme of public support for democracy in a manner consistent with international work in this area of comparative politics.

The survey universe comprises 1,350 individuals aged 18 or over and residing in continental Portugal. This is a representative sample of the Portuguese population, stratified by region and habitat. As for the fieldwork, the sample selection and data collection was carried out by TNS Euroteste, and coordinated by the CIES-IUL project team. The interviews were face-to-face and were based on a previously structured and tested questionnaire. Finally, the survey had a response rate of almost 70 per cent.

To measure the evaluation of regime performance we used a standard question from the Eurobarometer (2000–10) survey: ‘On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in your country?’ The other level of system support concerns trust in the democratic regime’s core political institutions, including all major branches of government and political parties as essential pillars of contemporary representative democracies. Also here we can compare annual trends in institutional trust and provide a longitudinal picture by using Eurobarometer data.

The approval of core democratic regime principles and values is measured through two questions. Respondents were first asked about the extent to which they agreed with the following statement: ‘Democracy may have problems but is the best form of government.’ Then, in order to explore in a more effective way whether democratic attitudes are robust and to measure more nuanced choices, we used trade-off items in which citizens were asked to express their preference for different types of democratic and autocratic regimes:

Which of the following statements do you agree with most? Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. In certain situations military rule, rule by bureaucratic elites or experts and a strongman leadership unchecked by parliament and elections are preferable to a democratic regime.

(World Values Survey 1981-2008; 2009)

In order to compare Portuguese attitudes towards democratic regime principles with other European democracies, we also used the data available through the fourth wave of the World Values Survey 1981–2008 (2009).

DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL SYSTEM SUPPORT: FROM THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TO EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Our next step is to determine whether the theoretical distinctions between different levels of political system support are empirically observable in public opinion. In the Portuguese case, we chose to use principal component analysis as we expect to obtain measures on a number of observed variables and to develop a small number of artificial variables that will account for most of the variance in the observed variables. This principal component analysis may then be used as a criterion for independent variables and predictors in the subsequent analyses targeting only the Portuguese case.

As can be seen in Table 1, attending exclusively to the Portuguese case, the first dimension reflects approval for the democratic regime and rejection of autocratic regimes, including the alternative of rule by the military, dictatorship and bureaucratic elites unconstrained by electoral accountability. The second set of items corresponds to evaluations of regime performance by Portuguese citizens. We wish to stress that this item seeks evaluations of democratic processes and practices rather than broader principles or values. The third cluster of citizens' attitudes reproduces the confidence in regime institutions. The fourth dimension taps authority support, i.e. trust in the political incumbents or official officeholders. In comparative terms, and on the basis of data from the World Values Survey for European countries, the question is: 'What reading we can do of the factorial principal component analysis?'

Survey items	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III	Factor IV
	Regime – Principles and values	Regime – Performance	Institutions	Authorities
Democratic best	0.875			
Approve of having a democratic system as 'very/fairly good'	0.742			
Anti-bureaucratic elite rule (experts take decisions)	0.693			
Anti-dictatorship rule (strong leader without elections)	0.698			
Anti-military rule	0.532			
Evaluation of performance of democracy in own country		0.856		
Trust in parliament			0.813	
Trust in government			0.772	
Trust in political parties			0.684	
Trust in president			0.670	
Trust in legal system			0.543	
Trust in PCP national leader				0.671
Trust in BE national leader				0.628
Trust in CDS-PP national leader				0.579
Trust in PS national leader				0.557
Trust in PSD national leader				0.487
Percentage of variance explained	14%	9%	25%	11%
Total variance explained %				59%

Source: Representative Public Survey (2008); World Values Survey (2009).

Notes: (1) The coefficients represent the loadings of Principal Component Factor Analysis with Varimax rotation and Kaiser normalisation (missing data were replaced by mean scores). (2) PCP – Portuguese Communist Party; BE – Left Bloc; CDS-PP – Popular Party; PS – Socialist Party; PSD – Social Democratic Party.

Table 1: Principal components analysis. Dimensions of political system support in Portugal (2008).



Survey items	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III
	Endorsement of democratic regime	Rejection of autocratic regimes	Regime – Performance and Institutions
Importance of democracy	0.809		
Having a democratic political system	0.758		
Anti-bureaucratic elite rule		0.772	
Anti-dictatorship or populist rule		0.773	
Anti-military rule		0.636	
Democraticness in own country			0.695
Confidence: parliament			0.860
Confidence: political parties			0.822
Confidence: government			0.841
Confidence: justice system			0.654
Variance explained %	16%	17%	27%
Total variance explained %			60%

Source: World Values Survey (2009).

Note: The coefficients represent the loadings of principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation and Kaiser normalisation.

Table 2: Principal components analysis: Dimensions of political system support in Europe (2005–8).

Table 2 indicates that the answer to this question is apparently simple. Also here the results of the factor analysis of the World Values Survey pooled data for European countries confirm theoretical distinctions are indeed reflected in public opinion, including 60 per cent of the total variance explained. The first dimension shows approval of democratic regimes, including attitudes reflecting both the importance of democracy as a political system and the significance of living in a democratically governed country. The second dimension corresponds to the rejection of autocratic regimes, also including here the alternative of rule by military, dictatorships and bureaucratic elites unconstrained by electoral choice and accountability. Finally, the third dimension concerns citizens' evaluations of democratic regime performance and its political institutions, comprising once again the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government, as well as political parties. The most specific level was not included in the model because the World Values Survey does not have a direct survey measure on the approval of incumbent office holders.

In this section, we had chosen to complete the exploratory factor analysis with a confirmatory factor analysis. Comparatively, more than to identify the number of latent constructs and the underlying factor structure of a set of variables, here we used confirmatory factor analysis to test the hypothesis that the relationship between observed variables and their underlying latent constructs exists. Or, to put it another way, we used knowledge of the theory and empirical research, or both, and we postulated the relationship pattern a priori and then we tested the hypothesis statistically, as Figure 2 illustrates.

1. The value of chi-square is affected by the large size of the sample and the failure of the assumption of normality.

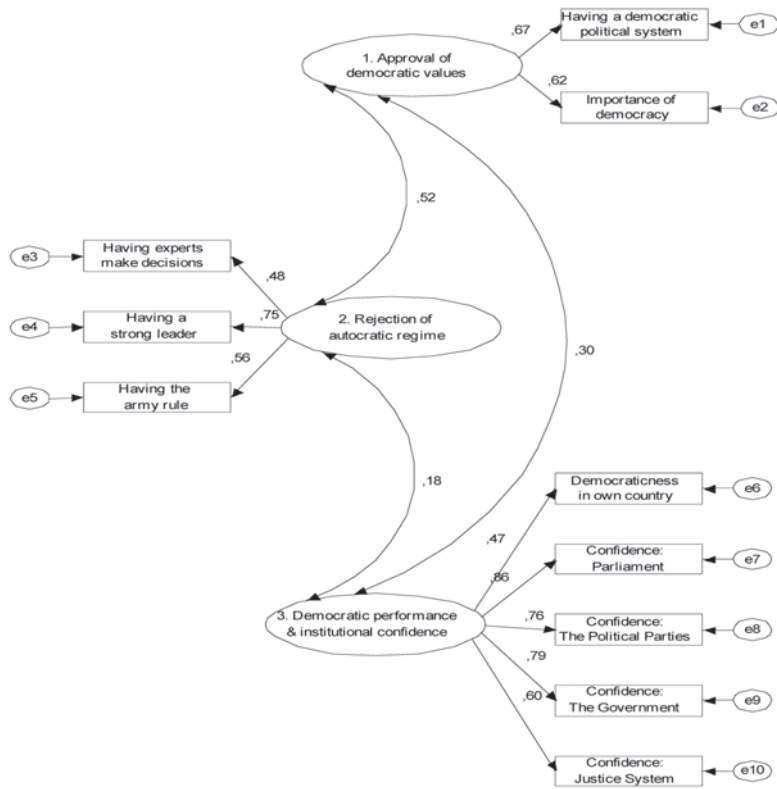


Figure 2: Confirmatory factor analysis of political system support: the global model (Standardised Parameter Estimates).

The interpretation of the data reproduced in Table 3 (see Annex A) clearly shows the convergent validity of the model tested, to the extent there is a statistically significant and very strong correlation between the different survey items and their dimensions, which is in all cases $p < 0.001$. This relationship is stronger the greater the value of standardised loadings. In addition to the convergent validity of the global model, Table 4 (see Annex A) also shows that the inter-relationships between the model's three dimensions have a statistically significant and very strong relationship ($p < 0.001$). Finally, apart from the Chi-square (p), which should be greater than or equal to 0.05 and which is lower ($p < 0.001$),¹ if we take into account the Comparative Fit Index (> 0.90), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (< 0.08) and Normed of Fit Index (> 0.80), all these statistics indicate a good adjustment of the proposed model to the data collected.

Can we really observe substantial erosion in Portuguese political system support?

In the previous section we saw that support for the political system is a multi-dimensional phenomenon ranging from the most diffuse to the most specific levels, which is valid for both Portugal and the European countries included in this research. At this point, we are interested in discovering

ANNEX A

Dimension	Variable	Loadings		SE	T test	p
		Unstandardised	Standardised			
1. Approval of democratic values	Having a democratic political system	0.411	0.669	0.011	36.081	<0.001
	Importance of democracy	1.000	0.621		*	
2. Rejection of autocratic regimes	Having experts make decisions	1.080	0.483	0.026	40.921	<0.001
	Having a strong leader	1.861	0.752	0.044	42.279	<0.001
	Having the army rule	1.000	0.556		*	
3. Democratic performance & institutional confidence	Democraticness in own country	2.118	0.465	0.041	51.173	<0.001
	Confidence: parliament	1.343	0.865	0.017	78.943	<0.001
	Confidence: political parties	1.075	0.761	0.015	74.076	<0.001
	Confidence: government	1.261	0.795	0.017	76.002	<0.001
	Confidence: justice system	1.000	0.596		*	

Source: *World Values Survey (2009)*.

Note: * Parameter set to 1, without *t* value.

Table 3: *Confirmatory factor analysis: Dimensions of system support in European democracies (convergence validity).*

whether public support for the political system in Portugal has declined in the last decade and whether this decrease has manifested itself in a systematic and consistent way in all its dimensions or components. If this decline has been significant in Portugal, are we facing a phenomenon that is unique or exceptional, or is it part of a trend that extends to many other European countries?

Concerning trust in political institutions, in comparing the case of Portugal with other European democracies, we will use the descriptive evidence provided by bi-annual Eurobarometer surveys between 2000 and 2010.

The data in Table 6 (see Annex B) shows the proportion of Portuguese citizens who express trust in their national government every year and the overall net change since the start of the end of this decade (showing any overall net losses or gains). The final columns in Table 6 (see Annex B) measure the strength and significance of the unstandardised OLS regression β coefficients (which summarise the direction of linear trends). In average terms,

Dimension	Dimension	Net Change (a)		S.E	t	P
		Unstandardised	Standardised			
2. Rejection of autocratic regime	1. Approval of democratic values	0.240	0.520	0.008	29.364	<0.001
2. Rejection of autocratic regime	3. Democratic performance & institutional confidence	0.036	0.176	0.002	16.075	<0.001
3. Democratic performance & institutional confidence	1. Approval of democratic values	0.166	0.296	0.007	23.937	<0.001

Source: World Values Survey (2009)

Table 4: Confirmatory factor analysis: dimensions of political system support (interrelations).

Chi-square (p)	Degrees of freedom	CFI	RMSEA	NFI
2838,674 (p<0,001)	32	0.937	0.071	0.936

Source: World Values Survey 1981-2008 (2009).

Legend: CFI – Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA – Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; NFI – Normed of Fit Index.

Table 5: Confirmatory factor analysis: Dimensions of political system support (goodness of fit model).

ANNEX B

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Net Change (a)	Year	Sig.
Germany	47	37	31	23	27	39	40	42	45	32	-15	-0.216	0.802
Austria	47	47	40	39	49	55	53	50	58	47	0	0.968	0.111
Belgium	51	43	43	34	44	47	43	36	35	29	-22	-1.433	** 0.023
Bulgaria					20	24	16	15	17	34	14	0.774	0.485
Cyprus					60	56	49	65	56	45	-15	-0.951	0.389
Czech Republic					23	34	21	20	28	26	3	0.064	0.938
Denmark	63	57	58	44	55	56	57	60	61	39	-24	-0.763	0.147
Slovakia					22	21	40	46	38	36	14	2.047	0.115
Slovenia					40	38	32	36	31	18	-22	-2.047	** 0.028
Spain	55	48	37	42	40	44	49	44	34	21	-34	-1.903	** 0.023



Estonia					44	54	62	48	38	55	11	0.113	0.935
Finland	60	54	59	59	68	65	58	68	64	51	-9	-0.155	0.803
France	43	30	43	29	24	20	42	31	29	22	-21	-1.223	0.170
Greece	50	39	43	55	40	43	46	33	25	21	-29	-2.396	** 0.013
Hungary					32	48	21	16	14	48	16	0.435	0.860
Ireland	49	43	32	39	40	42	32	33	20	10	-39	-2.910	*** 0.003
Italy	41	33	34	26	29	34	23	26	25	23	-18	-1.450	** 0.004
Latvia					35	25	19	16	10	20	-15	-1.982	* 0.072
Lithuania					25	21	24	16	19	15	-10	-1.031	** 0.039
Luxemburg	73	70	68	61	68	65	65	60	77	67	-6	-0.199	0.724
Malta					40	38	45	50	41	34	-6	-0.258	0.772
Netherlands	70	61	44	39	40	42	49	66	56	48	-22	-0.503	0.179
Poland					11	22	17	20	21	29	18	1.450	** 0.050
Portugal	52	44	44	34	33	34	30	31	28	19	-33	-2.683	*** 0.000
United Kingdom	43	33	33	19	34	30	30	29	21	28	-15	-1.162	* 0.085
Romania					43	32	21	25	22	12	-31	-2.917	** 0.011
Sweden	56	54	45	48	33	36	41	56	57	63	7	0.669	0.535
Total	53	46	43	39	37	39	38	38	36	33	-20	-1.566	*** 0.000
Western Europe	53	46	42	35	41	42	44	43	43	35	-18	-0.830	* 0.063
Northern Europe	60	55	54	50	52	52	52	60	61	51	-9	-0.017	0.971
Baltic Countries					35	33	35	27	22	30	-5	-1.064	0.131
Eastern Europe					27	31	24	25	24	29	2	0.161	0.724
Southern Europe	50	41	40	39	40	42	40	42	35	27	-23	-1.295	*** 0.014

Source: Eurobarometer Surveys Series (2000–10).

Note: ^(a) From first year with data until last year (2001–10 | 2005–10). Year: unstandardised β co-efficients; level of significance: * ≤ 0.05 ; ** ≤ 0.01 ; *** ≤ 0.001 .

Table 6: European trust in national governments, 2000–10.

between 2000 and 2010 around 35 per cent of Portuguese citizens claimed to trust the national government: a very low and particularly worrying proportion. However, and in average terms, this is a lower proportion than that observed in other southern European countries, with the exception of Italy, where only 29 per cent of citizens said they trust the national government. However, we need to note that in countries such as the United Kingdom (30 per cent), Ireland (34 per cent), France (31 per cent) and Germany (36 per cent), the proportion of citizens tending to trust the national governments

does not reach 40 per cent. Moreover, only in five countries was the citizens' trust in government between 40 and 50 per cent, exceeding 50 per cent in just five other countries: namely the Netherlands (52 per cent), Denmark (55 per cent), Cyprus (55 per cent), Finland (61 per cent) and Luxemburg (67 per cent).

In a time-series analysis, if we take into account the overall net losses or gains over the decade, of all 27 EU member states, we see a more or less sharp decline in trust in 19 countries, while in 14 countries the decline of confidence in the national government sets a moderate or strong trend that is statistically significant. Apart from the seven countries that experienced a positive (although not statistically significant) net change in the confidence its citizens have in national governments, the analysis of this data seems to confirm that in Portugal and most of the established democracies in Portugal's geo-cultural area, the assumption that trust in government has eroded is transversal and consistent over the last decade.

Of course the time-series is relatively short and it may be that trust in government eroded during earlier periods. However, the overall data suggest three important points: in Portugal the citizens' trust in government is not only low on average, and experienced the largest decrease between 2001 and 2010 (a decline of approximately 33 per cent). Moreover, this distrust of government is not a phenomenon unique to Portugal, being transversal across to many European countries, especially to all southern European countries as well as to many Western European countries, including Belgium (-22 per cent), France (-21 per cent), the Netherlands (-22 per cent), and the United Kingdom (-15 per cent), among others.

What interests us now is to determine whether citizens support the executive branch of government, or if any erosion of confidence in the legislature and political parties during this period has occurred. Tables 7 and 8 (see also Annex B) show the Eurobarometer evidence of when citizens were asked directly about their trust in parliament and parties during the last decade. This data shows that on average in the case of Portugal, as in most European countries, citizens tend to rely a little more on the parliamentary institution (43 per cent) than on the executive (40 per cent). In the case of Portugal, while confidence in the government averaged 35 per cent, confidence in parliament rises to 42 per cent. However, other results confirm the observations largely made concerning government.

Trends in European trust in national parliaments indicate several important points. Taking all countries analysed into account, it is possible to talk about a significant negative trend over the last decade. In 19 of the 27 EU member states there was a decline of citizens' trust of national parliaments between 2000 and 2010. This decline is greater and statistically significant in Southern Europe, mainly in Spain (-36 per cent), Greece (-20 per cent) and Portugal (-14 per cent), as well as in Ireland (-26 per cent) and some Eastern European countries, including Romania (-26 per cent) and Slovenia (-23 per cent). This trend is statistically significant, albeit much more moderate, in the cases of France (-12 per cent) and the United Kingdom (-7 per cent).

This tendency of a decline of trust in national parliaments is reversed, especially in the cases of Denmark and Sweden where public trust shows a statistically significant increase of 8 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively. The results largely confirm the observations made concerning government, once the general trend in all European countries sets up an almost cross-national decrease in citizens' confidence in national parliaments (-13 per cent),



regardless of its structure, mode of election or operation, with this decline being more evident in the countries of southern Europe (-15 per cent), as Table 7 (see Annex B) shows.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Net Change (a)	Year	Sig.
Germany	41	52	42	35	29	35	40	41	41	46	40	-1	-0.082	0.895
Austria	46	54	50	42	41	52	56	54	54	58	49	3	0.745	0.172
Belgium	42	55	43	44	38	49	50	49	40	41	36	-6	-0.664	0.250
Bulgaria						11	17	11	8	10	20	9	0.338	0.643
Cyprus						54	44	49	63	53	44	-10	-0.145	0.900
Czech Republic						17	22	16	16	20	17	0	-0.097	0.805
Denmark	58	63	63	69	63	74	75	74	75	75	66	8	1.327	**0.016
Slovakia						23	27	37	41	38	14	-9	1.724	**0.054
Slovenia						39	37	31	34	27	16	-26	-2.289	* 0.012
Spain	58	56	46	38	42	37	41	47	40	32	22	-36	-2.518	***0.002
Estonia						41	41	46	37	31	39	-2	-0.790	0.286
Finland	57	58	53	52	58	67	69	65	71	60	54	-3	0.764	0.247
France	40	47	32	44	35	33	31	40	36	33	28	-12	-1.055	** 0.051
Greece	44	63	51	56	63	47	56	52	32	33	24	-20	-2.655	** 0.021
Hungary						29	47	21	16	15	47	18	0.177	0.940
Ireland	38	50	45	35	40	40	44	33	36	23	12	-26	-2.409	** 0.008
Italy	35	43	38	41	32	35	40	25	27	27	26	-9	-1.509	** 0.006
Latvia						27	21	16	9	6	15	-12	-1.805	* 0.068
Lithuania						15	14	13	11	10	6	-9	-0.951	***0.002
Luxemburg	64	72	65	64	56	64	58	56	56	67	58	-6	-0.827	0.106
Malta						38	40	42	57	47	35	-3	-0.338	0.788
Netherlands	58	67	58	51	43	53	55	54	64	56	55	-3	-0.209	0.749
Poland						8	13	10	13	18	25	17	1.660	** 0.016
Portugal	41	55	50	54	37	40	41	34	38	36	27	-14	-1.982	***0.006
United Kingdom	34	47	37	37	25	36	36	34	30	17	27	-7	-1.555	* 0.027
Romania						35	21	18	19	16	9	-26	-2.321	***0.015
Sweden	49	55	59	59	58	46	56	57	64	64	71	22	1.409	** 0.023
Total	47	56	49	48	44	39	40	38	38	36	34	-13	-1.859	***0.000
Western Europe	45	56	47	44	38	42	46	45	45	43	39	-6	-0.709	0.119
Northern Europe	55	59	58	60	60	62	67	65	70	66	64	9	1.145	***0.001
Baltic Countries						28	25	25	19	16	20	-8	-1.177	** 0.028

(continued)

in countries such as Austria (22 per cent), Sweden (21 per cent), Denmark (13 per cent), Luxemburg (10 per cent) and Poland (25 per cent). The important point is that the overall direction of satisfaction with the performance of democracy among EU member states is negative and statistically very significant (-11 per cent). The statistically significant increase in citizens' satisfaction with the performance of democracy in northern Europe is not enough to counteract the moderate and strong dissatisfaction of their counterparts in either Western or Southern Europe. In other words, the overall pattern shows

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Net Change (a)	Year	Sig.
Germany	17	17	17	11	11	18	22	18	18	18	19	2	0.382	0.234
Austria	21	25	25	20	19	31	38	30	30	40	40	19	1.900	** 0.003
Belgium	21	19	22	22	20	30	29	29	28	28	20	-1	0.655	0.120
Bulgaria						11	10	7	9	13	15	4	0.500	0.228
Cyprus						21	20	17	33	27	23	2	0.755	0.383
Czech Republic						11	15	11	11	15	12	1	0.081	0.798
Denmark	32	36	35	37	32	51	49	40	50	58	49	17	2.191	** 0.003
Slovakia						11	10	13	11	15	25	14	1.388	* 0.060
Slovenia						23	19	13	13	11	11	-12	-1.354	** 0.010
Spain	28	23	26	23	27	24	31	32	40	23	14	-14	-1.055	** 0.016
Estonia						17	21	22	15	16	20	-3	-0.113	0.806
Finland	20	22	21	21	21	37	36	26	31	32	30	10	1.318	* 0.021
France	15	15	13	15	13	14	10	17	10	13	14	-1	-0.191	0.371
Greece	19	25	16	17	28	23	25	21	14	15	9	-10	-1.027	* 0.025
Hungary						12	29	8	9	10	29	17	0.467	0.770
Ireland	22	28	24	20	23	24	32	22	27	19	17	-5	-0.355	0.416
Italy	13	13	15	15	13	19	26	16	13	19	18	5	0.527	0.177
Latvia						10	6	7	5	5	4	-6	-0.564	* 0.022
Lithuania						10	10	7	7	8	6	-4	-0.419	0.041
Luxemburg	41	32	32	31	31	46	41	30	29	50	40	-1	0.600	0.414
Malta						29	25	29	35	31	25	-4	0.064	0.916
Netherlands	39	34	35	33	27	35	42	35	40	41	45	6	0.836	0.080
Poland						5	9	8	7	12	15	10	0.935	* 0.029
Portugal	18	22	21	21	16	19	19	15	19	18	15	-3	-0.418	0.080
United Kingdom	14	16	15	13	10	22	18	15	13	12	18	4	0.091	0.791
Romania						22	14	11	18	12	10	12	-0.951	0.137
Sweden	16	22	23	20	21	22	23	25	28	36	37	21	1.709	*** 0.000
Total	22	23	23	21	21	22	23	19	21	22	22	0.00	0.145	0.209
Western Europe	24	23	23	21	19	28	29	25	24	28	27	3	0.509	* 0.088

(continued)

Northern Europe	23	27	26	26	25	37	36	30	36	42	39	16	1.718	***	0.001
Baltic Countries						12	12	12	9	10	10	-2	-0.306	*	0.077
Eastern Europe						14	15	10	11	13	17	3	0.161		0.694
Southern Europe	20	21	20	19	21	23	24	22	26	22	17	-3	-0.145		0.563

Source: Eurobarometer Surveys Series (2000–10).

Note: ^(a) From first year with data till last year (2000–10| 2005–10). Year: unstandardised β co-efficients; level of significance: * $\leq .05$; ** $\leq .01$; *** $\leq .001$.

Table 8: European trust in political parties, 2000–10.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2009	2010	Net Change (a)	Year	Sig.
Germany	53	62	66	59	51	53	55	66	68	62	9	0.678	0.303
Austria	56	63	72	65	64	68	75	80	76	78	22	1.970	*** 0.002
Belgium	60	63	71	66	62	65	22	66	62	56	-4	-0.995	0.502
Bulgaria						20	68	26	21	25	5	1.999	0.591
Cyprus						68	63	61	60	54	-14	-1.432	** 0.019
Czech Republic						48	58	51	48	45	-3	-0.836	0.326
Denmark	79	87	88	90	91	92	93	94	91	92	13	0.965	** 0.014
Slovakia						26	25	35	40	36	10	1.679	0.071
Slovenia						56	54	48	37	38	-18	-2.588	*** 0.005
Spain	75	64	70	58	65	67	70	77	58	53	-22	-1.044	*** 0.009
Estonia						44	42	53	41	45	1	0.109	0.903
Finland	64	62	70	77	77	77	79	77	69	69	5	0.616	0.344
France	60	58	59	69	55	52	46	65	51	54	-6	-0.817	0.255
Greece	53	48	53	50	64	53	55	63	49	31	-22	-0.927	*** 0.004
Hungary						27	45	24	23	35	8	0.349	0.841
Ireland	70	73	69	66	70	71	74	69	56	57	-13	-1.281	** 0.029
Italy	36	38	33	38	35	43	53	40	44	47	11	1.347	* 0.032
Latvia						43	41	43	21	32	-11	-2.217	0.107
Lithuania						23	23	24	18	17	-6	-0.872	* 0.041
Luxemburg	73	75	79	80	81	82	84	73	90	83	10	1.025	* 0.046
Malta						48	48	53	49	45	-3	-0.298	0.572
Netherlands	81	71	66	71	65	71	75	80	72	75	-6	0.222	0.698
Poland						29	39	48	44	54	25	2.450	** 0.043
Portugal	51	38	35	38	31	41	30	36	40	29	-22	-1.018	*** 0.002



United Kingdom	57	68	60	60	58	61	60	62	58	59	2	0.223	0.488	
Romania							29	27	36	18	20	-9	-1.490	0.205
Sweden	63	72	72	75	74	71	74	80	81	84	21	1.595	*** 0.001	
Total	62	63	64	64	63	53	55	57	51	51	-11	-1.432	*** 0.001	
Western Europe	64	67	68	67	63	65	61	70	67	66	2	0.074	0.796	
Northern Europe	69	74	77	81	81	80	82	84	80	82	13	1.025	** 0.011	
Baltic Countries							37	35	40	27	31	-6	-1.091	0.180
Eastern Europe							34	45	38	33	36	2	0.487	0.577
Southern Europe	54	47	48	46	49	53	53	55	50	43	-11	-0.157	** 0.044	

Source: Eurobarometer Surveys Series (2000–10).

Note: ^(a) From first year with data until last year (2000–10| 2005–10). Year: unstandardised β co-efficients; level of significance: * ≤ 0.05 ; ** ≤ 0.01 ; *** ≤ 0.001 .

Table 9: European satisfaction with the functioning of democracy.

a spreading disenchantment and dissatisfaction with the way democracy has functioned during the last decade: not only in Portugal, but also in other European countries, with the exception of northern Europe.

Now that we have been able to draw a general picture, we are left with the question of whether these negative trends in trust of institutional regimes and public satisfaction with democratic performance in Portugal and in some (mainly Southern) European countries. In an environment characterised by a deep scepticism and cynicism towards politicians and a deep distrust and suspicion of political parties and the undeniable decline in citizens' confidence in parliament and government, and their dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in Portugal, it is entirely legitimate for these trends to lead us to ask the extent of Portuguese, and European, public disenchantment. Does it touch core beliefs in democracy and commitments to the democratic process? Does it constitute a real and serious challenge to citizens' support for the democratic regime, its values and principles? Is it possible to talk of a 'contagion effect' in which the erosion of more specific levels of support places in doubt the level of more diffuse support for the political system, including democratic principles and regime goals?

In the last wave of the World Values Survey 1981–2008 (2009) people were asked whether they approve of democracy as 'the best form of government', whether democracy is 'preferable to any other form of government' and whether it is important 'to live in a country that is governed democratically'. Inspired by the World Values Survey's standard questions, the Portuguese Representative Survey, withdraw from World Values Survey 1981–2008 (2009) included the same standard questions in order to observe citizens' approval of democratic and autocratic forms of governance. As it happens, in the fourth wave of the WVS, and with the purpose of strengthening the analysis

of whether democratic attitudes are robust, trade-off items were used in our public opinion survey. These items ask citizens to express their preference for different types of democratic and autocratic regimes, including public preference for democratic governance, military rule, rule by bureaucratic elites, and strongman leadership unchecked by parliament and elections. The available evidence, however, only allows us to compare Portugal with some old and new European democracies.

Table 10 (see Annex c) shows the distributions of respondents' preferences for democratic and autocratic regimes in Portugal and some European democracies included in the World Values Survey 1981–2008 (2009). Therefore, when asked whether they agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Democracy may have its problems, but is still the best regime form', in the old European democracies 93 per cent of respondents on average agreed fully with this statement, while in the new democracies that proportion was 91 per cent. A total of 92 per cent of Portuguese citizens approved the democratic regime in normative and core principle terms. This proportion is, on average, greater than in such countries as the UK (89 per cent), France (89 per cent) and Finland (85 per cent). Table 9 also shows that the approval of the democratic regime by Portuguese citizens is, on average, slightly higher than in some of younger democracies in Eastern Europe, such as Bulgaria (87 per cent) and Poland (84 per cent), and lower than the normative support for the democracy in Spain (95 per cent) and Cyprus (96 per cent).

In the 2008 Portuguese Representative Survey the following question was asked:

I'm going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad way

ANNEX C

Old Democracies (%)		New Democracies (%)	
Sweden	97	Cyprus	96
Norway	97	Spain	95
Italy	96	Romania	92
Germany	96	Slovenian	92
Switzerland	95	Bulgaria	87
Netherlands	94	Poland	84
France	89		
UK	89		
Finland	85		
Average	93	Average	91
Minimum	85	Minimum	84
Maximum	97	Maximum	96
		Portugal (2008)	92

Table 10: Endorsement of democratic regime in European democracies (World Values Survey 1981-2008, 2009).



of governing this country? (a) Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections; (b) Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country; (c) Having the army rule; (d) Having a democratic democracy political system .

Table 11 (see Annex c) shows the distribution of the answers both for Portugal (2008) and for other European democracies included in World Values Survey 1981–2008 (2009). Analysis of this table reveals that in Portugal there is a massive preference for democracy (95 per cent); a higher preference than the average values checked found in the old democracies (93 per cent) and in the new democracies (91 per cent), especially if we take into account the newer democracies of Eastern Europe. It should be noted here that the level of attachment expressed by citizens towards different forms of regime, particularly democracy, cannot fail but take into account the countries' past, the different types of regime change and its consequences (Welsh 1994).

The second type of political regime preferred by the Portuguese is a regime led by specialists or experts (54 per cent), compared to the results found in the older democracies (47 per cent) and the new democracies (35 per cent). However, given the fact that more than half of the Portuguese are sympathetic towards this type of regime, as is also the case for Italian, French, Dutch, German and Finnish voters, we cannot avoid taking this evidence

Rule by a strong leader		Rule by expert elites		Military rule		Democratic system	
Netherlands	43	Germany	59	UK	13	Sweden	98
France	34	Finland	53	France	12	Norway	97
UK	28	Netherlands	52	Finland	9	Switzerland	97
Finland	22	France	51	Netherlands	9	Germany	95
Germany	18	UK	48	Norway	5	France	90
Sweden	18	Switzerland	44	Sweden	5	Finland	90
Switzerland	18	Sweden	37	Germany	4	UK	90
Norway	10	Norway	30	Switzerland	4	Netherlands	90
Average old democracies	24	Average old democracies	47	Average old democracies	8	Average old democracies	93
Romania	34	Poland	30	Poland	21	Romania	95
Bulgaria	68	Romania	40	Romania	20	Slovenian	88
Poland	30	Bulgaria	36	Bulgaria	18	Bulgaria	87
Slovenian	20	Slovenian	32	Slovenian	4	Poland	84
Average new democracies	38	Average new democracies	35	Average new democracies	16	Average new democracies	89
Portugal (2008)	48	Portugal (2008)	54	Portugal (2008)	16	Portugal (2008)	95

Source: World Values Survey (2009).

Note: The response options considered in the table were: 'Very Good' + 'Fairly Good'.

Table 11: Citizens' preferences for different types of regimes in Europe, 2005–8.

into account, and that 'technocracy' is a potential challenger to contemporary European democracies, particularly in the present climate of institutional distrust, disillusionment and scepticism vis-à-vis political actors. Consequently, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the dangers of the regime change Max Weber spoke of at the turn of the 20th century seems to gain equal accuracy at the turn of the 21st century (Weber 1994 [1919]). Moreover, in respect of Portuguese preferences for different forms of alternative regimes to democracy it is noted that almost half of the population (48 per cent) approves government by a strong leader who is not accountable to Parliament or concerned with elections. A proportion that puts Portugal on a par with the third wave democracies (46 per cent), which is explained by the historic legacy of totalitarian, authoritarian and dictatorial political experiences.

Through the analysis of the empirical data, we have shown that support for the different parts of the political system is not necessarily cumulative. Although there has in fact been an erosion in the level of specific support for the political system, particularly in respect of the degree of confidence Portuguese citizens have in the politicians, political institutions, and the disappointment with the way democracy works, they continue to massively support the values, norms and principles that are inherent to democratic rule. This is a phenomenon that, as we have seen, is not peculiar to the Portuguese case, but one that extends to many other European democracies during the period being analysed.

As some authors claim, contemporary democracies are facing a 'malaise of the spirit' arising from their own citizens (Dalton 2008: 1), that is eroding the very foundations of democratic regimes. Consequently, more than a 'crisis of legitimacy', Portuguese democracy seems to be facing a more urgent and basic issue: namely, the inability to match its structures and political institutions to democratic ideals, which explains why many authors refer to contemporary citizens as 'dissatisfied democrats', who are unhappy with the politicians, institutions and performance of the political system, but who are, nonetheless, supportive of democratic principles. This phenomenon is not unique to Portugal, but is rather a common attitudinal pattern in many democracies within Portugal's geo-cultural area during the last decade (Kinglemann 1999; Norris 1999; 2011; Dalton 2007; 2008; Torcal and Montero 2006).

FINAL REMARKS

The findings of this longitudinal and comparative analysis provide powerful and consistent evidence that in Portugal and some other European democracies support for democracy 'is not all of a piece' (Easton 1975: 437) and that its two essential components can vary independently of one another: diffuse and specific political support. The first takes perceived decisions, policies, actions and the working of political authorities into account. Under certain conditions it will fluctuate according to people's rational calculation of how their needs and demands will be satisfied. The second relies on the general meaning given to political objects within the community and can be defined as a 'reservoir of goodwill' that may also be invulnerable, despite the ups and downs of outputs and the beneficial performances of political authorities and regime institutions or even regime democratic performance.

Our analysis shows that Easton's conceptual framework, notwithstanding later enrichment by other authors, continues to be a valuable tool that allows us to look at the crisis of democracy so many speak of frequently in



academe, journalism and the media. Thus, beginning with Easton's theoretical and conceptual structure, we start by exploring the concept of support for the political system from a multi-dimensional perspective, testing the initial theoretical assumptions in the light of the available evidence. Through the application of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis we found this concept shows empirically several dimensions, ranging from more specific to more diffuse levels of support. This conclusion is valid for Portugal and the European countries included in this research, given the comparative nature of the study.

Second, a time-series analysis enabled us to establish some longitudinal trends for each of the different objects or dimensions of political systems. Through the questions listed in the Portuguese Representative Survey (2008) and standardised in the fifth wave of the World Values Survey 1981-2008 (2009), it was possible to compare specific and diffuse levels of political system support. This allows us to check for a 'contagion hypothesis' or 'cumulative thesis' between what is unique or common between the two levels of support.

Furthermore, it allowed us to demystify the fallacy of an alleged 'crisis of legitimacy' in Portugal. In Portugal's case it is correct to speak of a statistically significant 'erosion of specific support' for the political system – the government, parliament and political parties – between 2000 and 2010. As in all European countries, while there is also a statistically significant erosion in the general support of European citizens towards governments and parliaments this does not occur in the case of parties and politicians. Third, viewed individually in the context of European countries, there is a large contrast between them with regard to the magnitude, direction (positive or negative) and level of statistical significance of longitudinal trends. On the other hand, if we take Europe into account, we must also consider inter-regional differences at the level of net changes in statistical significance.

This enhances the thesis of a great contrast between them rather than a general tendency towards uniformity in most European democracies. The fourth conclusion is that all the available evidence summarised in this article proves that if democracy and its institutions and political actors are challenged from below, it is possible to speak of a growing distrust in the core political regime institutions, as well as significant political cynicism and scepticism towards politicians. Nevertheless, these trends do not yet undermine the massive support shown for the values, principles and rules of representative democracy.

From this article one can conclude that democracy's superiority stems from the fact citizen beliefs continue to consider democratic politics and democratic representative institutions as the most appropriate (and the only acceptable) framework for government. In the eyes of each citizen, democracy is the 'only game in town': this also implies that support for democracy should be based on an explicit or implicit comparison with other types of regimes.

Regarding this particular point, here we cannot compare the current situation of Portugal and other southern European democracies. At the time of writing, it is not still alarming; however, in 2012, and in the context of the sovereign debt crisis and the visible strengthening of technocracy at the expense of democracy in the management of this process, the rule of specialists has been gaining a renewed strength. Only later research can confirm the increasingly central role of technocracy. Maybe under the following title: 'Democracy versus technocracy: Who is in charge? The limits of democratic representation in political systems under stress, as in Portugal'.

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