



Dear Cláudia,

Now that the elections are over, how should the results be interpreted? Will the next government be a stable one?



The results:

Portugal has voted and here (here) are the results: it is a strange victory for the PaF, the governing centre-right coalition, who gained 38,34% of the vote and 99 mandates, out of the total 230), but lost the absolute majority it had conquered in the 2011 election, when the bailout of Portugal had just started. No other party on the right won seats in Parliament.

On the left, the centre-left socialist party, as second major party, lost the election with a result of 32,38% and 85 seats . The BE (the Portuguese twin to Syriza in Greece) obtained a historic result of 10,22% and won 19 seats, while none of its direct competitors (the small parties that splitted from it) managed to win any seats. The habitual coalition between the Communist and the Green party earned 17 seats with 8,27% of the votes. Finally, one seat went to a newcomer: the PAN ('People, Animals and Nature').

Turnouts were low – 56,93%, and lower than for the previous legislative election.

How should one interpret these results?

As expected by the pre-election surveys, the parties at the centre of the political spectrum did not register a loss as big as in other southern European countries. Having said this, the governing coalition seriously regressed from its 2011 result (129 MPs in total) to a much more modest outcome. At the same time, its main direct competitor, the PS, only increased from 73 to 85 seats. This means that the Portuguese socialist party did not disappear because of the economic crisis, but was profoundly hurt by it, and that it remains connected, in the perception of public opinion, with the origins of the crisis, while the government is seen to have contributed to overcoming the crisis.

The BE capitalised on leftist discontents, a terrain the socialists were not able to win. And voters from the centre who were disenchanted did not move to the left, but increased the abstention rate.

What does the future look like?

It is up to the President of the Republic to appoint the Prime Minister and this will normally be the leader of the party winning more seats in Parliament – hence the extant PM, Pedro Passos Coelho. But this means – unless some unexpected agreement emerges (as a centre coalition with the PS, which seems unlikely given the history of both groups, but which the President may wish to see) – Portugal will have a minority government that will depend, on a case-to-case basis, on negotiations with the other parties represented in parliament. All in all this might be a positive experience for Portuguese democracy, where minority governments often meant instability, unlike the proven experience of other Western European countries.

The other (im)possible alternative: a coalition of the left. After all, the left actually won the clear majority of seats, but the three parties do not seem to have enough in common – apart from disliking each other.

Conclusion:

The tendency observed in other Southern European countries – the decline of pro-European centre parties – is also showing in Portugal, although in a more subtle manner than in other countries. Protest politics (as embodied by the BE most notably) is also now getting the floor.

All the best,

Cláudia

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