

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2025-12-18

Deposited version:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Marchi, R. (2023). The populist radical right in 21st-century Portugal. In António Costa Pinto (Ed.), Portugal since the 2008 economic crisis: Resilience and change. (pp. 156-171). London: Routledge.

Further information on publisher's website:

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781351046916-8/populist-radical-right-21st-century-portugal-riccardo-marchi>

Publisher's copyright statement:

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Marchi, R. (2023). The populist radical right in 21st-century Portugal. In António Costa Pinto (Ed.), Portugal since the 2008 economic crisis: Resilience and change. (pp. 156-171). London: Routledge.. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with the Publisher's Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

Use policy

Creative Commons CC BY 4.0

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in the Repository
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

The Populist Radical Right in 21st-Century Portugal

Riccardo Marchi 0000-0003-2037-7027

With a certain delay, right-wing populism is on the rise in Portugal, following the Western trend. Since the 2019 general election and for the first time in Portuguese democracy, a populist party of the radical right, Chega (Enough), has entered the national parliament, thanks to the election of its leader André Ventura. Chega has grown rapidly in terms of the number of militants and its electoral performance over the past three years, going from a few hundred members to at least 25,000 and from a vote share of 1.3% in the 2019 general election to 7% in 2022 (and from one to 12 seats). Meanwhile, Ventura obtained 12% of the vote in the 2021 presidential election. In 2022, Chega was the third most important political force in parliament, behind the two historical mainstream governmental parties, the Partido Socialista (Socialist Party) and the Partido Social Democrata (Social Democrat Party). The chapter looks at the history of Chega and its leader from the beginning and analyses the political culture of the party's rank and file. The analysis is based on a survey of 3,000 party members carried out in October 2021. The data presented reveal attitudes towards Portuguese national identity and democracy.

André Ventura; Chega; Political culture; Populist radical right; Portuguese far right.

The Rise of the New Populist Right

The legislative election of January 2022 changed the centre-right structure of the Portuguese parliament in a staggering fashion. The dominant party of the centre-right, the Partido Social Democrata (PSD – Social Democratic Party), lost its historical partner, the Centro Democrático Social-Partido Popular (CDS-PP – Social and Democratic Centre-Popular Party).¹ The latter failed to win any seats after 47 years of uninterrupted representation in parliament. The seats of the CDS-PP are now occupied by parliamentarians belonging to two new and growing parties: the centrist Iniciativa Liberal (IL – Liberal Initiative) and the right-wing populist Chega (Enough). Following the 2019 legislative elections, these parties entered parliament with one seat each and 1.3% of the vote, with IL garnering 67,681 of the votes cast and Chega 67,826, which was just enough for them to win election in the Lisbon constituency as a result of the combination of the architecture of constituencies and the proportional electoral law, based on the d'Hondt method (Fernandes and Magalhães 2020). Over the next two years, the parties grew rapidly, and at the 2022 general election IL won eight seats (5%, with 273,399 votes) and Chega 12 (7%, with 399,510 votes).

¹ This research was supported by funding from Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia, I.P. as part of the project with reference number PTDC/CPO -CPO/28748/2017.

Considering Chega in particular, the results confirmed the exponential growth previously registered by its leader, André Ventura, in his bid for the presidency on 24 January 2021, when he received 12% of the vote (almost 500,000 votes) in a close call for second place. The right-wing populist party showed skill in appealing to the male electorate (two out of three voters) in the 18–54 age-group, which included people with an above average formal education: they are likely to have had at least a basic education, hold a high school diploma, and even a university degree (Cancela and Magalhães 2022; Magalhães 2020a). Such voters come from the rural areas of Portugal, are religious and conservative, but are oblivious to feelings of nostalgia for the regime of Dr António de Oliveira Salazar. They are sophisticated voters who are dissatisfied with politics but who are kept informed mainly through the tabloid newspapers and social media. Although these voters do not belong to the classes most affected economically by globalization, they are critical of certain aspects of it, such as migration and the economic stagnation of the West (Heyne and Manucci 2021).

Chega is an exceptional case in Portuguese democracy. Its success sets it apart from the traditionally irrelevant ultra-right in Portugal, which is clear even when considering the latter's past electoral peaks: 1.21% (72,514 votes) for the Partido da Democracia Cristã (Christian Democracy Party) in 1979 and 0.5% (27,269 votes) for the Partido Renovador Democrático (PRD – National Renewal Party) in 2015 (Zúquete 2007; Marchi 2019). To these figures can be added the 0.7% (40,358 votes) received by the Partido da Nova Democracia (New Democracy Party) in 2005, a failed right-wing group that split off from the CDS-PP. The limited literature dedicated to this party is nonetheless quite consensual in classifying it as belonging to the populist new radical right-wing political family. Chega can be framed within the over-arching concept of anti-system parties that are neither subversive nor revolutionary, which respect the democratic rules established by the Constitution, are strangers to the historical legacy of the right-wing authoritarianism of the inter-war period, and are the bearers of the dichotomic rhetoric of the sociopolitical reality: there is a virtuous people, and there is a corrupt and corrupting elite (Ignazi 1992; Mudde 2000). Over the past two decades, in Europe, these political parties have tripled the average number of votes received by the radical right compared to those of the old extreme right that remains marginal (Georgiadou et al. 2018).

The combination of these features in Chega results from the political entrepreneurship of its leader and founder, André Ventura. Born in 1983 and raised in the suburbs of Lisbon, Ventura joined the PSD's youth organization when he was 17. At the time, he believed the PSD to be the closest party to the popular strata from which he came, compared to the more elitist and bourgeois CDS-PP. As a teenager, his religious piety led him to attend a Catholic seminary secondary school before studying law at the NOVA University of Lisbon and obtaining his doctorate from the University of Cork in Ireland. After completing his studies, Ventura worked as a private university professor, a tax inspector and a commentator on crime and football for major national cable television networks. The window of opportunity in the political field arrived in 2017 when he led the PSD-CDS-Partido Popular Monárquico (PPM – People's Monarchist Party) coalition in Loures, an important municipality in the Lisbon

metropolitan area that the left had traditionally governed. Ventura addressed the electoral campaign with its favoured subjects, legalist and security themes, and attacked the alleged subsidization and micro-criminality of the important Gypsy community in the town. His strategy worked: left-wing parties denounced his racism, while several national PSD leaders publicly disassociated themselves from him, although the party's then president and former prime minister, Pedro Passos Coelho, continued to support him, and the CDS withdrew from the coalition. Amplified by the national media, the controversy put Ventura on the map, and from a municipal candidate, he became a national political figure with electoral consequences. Despite his expected defeat in Loures, Ventura, the PSD candidate, won 5% and 5,000 more votes than the party had won in 2013, a success that was directly attributed to Ventura's campaign performance.

Basking in his success, Ventura attempted to promote himself within the PSD in defiance of the new party leader, Rui Rio, who was following a centrist cooperation strategy with the Partido Socialista (PS – Socialist Party) government. To this end, in September 2019, Ventura launched an internal faction, which he called Movimento Chega, that sought to force the convening of an extraordinary congress that he could use to defy the party leader and push the PSD further to the right. Faced with opposition from PSD heavyweights and the impossibility of modifying internal power relations, he resigned from the party and began the process of transforming Movimento Chega into an independent political party – Chega.

The move did not represent a split from the PSD but rather Ventura's project to gather around him a handful of friends from his youth, former colleagues and students at the university and supporters converted during the Loures campaign. Formal recognition of Chega took place between October 2018 and March 2019, after several bureaucratic mishaps in the Constitutional Court: mishaps that reflect the fragility of Chega's initial structure. In addition, the party's implementation was characterized by a deep internal conflict among the founders, a trait that persisted and was compounded with the arrival of new members.

The first clash occurred between the Eurosceptic liberal-nationalist wing and the pro-European liberal-conservative wing, the latter of which eventually prevailed. Despite these rifts, the dominant political culture among Chega's founders was fairly homogeneous from the outset: economic liberalism; conservative values; a pro-American Western approach to international matters; and protest against the centrist rotation of power between the PS and the PSD. Within these boundaries, the different sensitivities became more noticeable as the party base broadened, particularly between the confessional and secular approaches. The former represents a social, Christian mobilization in defence of the values of family and life, in opposition to the post-materialistic agenda of the left. The latter is more concerned with issues such as multiculturalism, migration and the dysfunctionality within Portuguese democracy. Furthermore, the original economic liberalism – with a neoliberal propensity: i.e. the state reduced to essential functions with the market providing services including health and education – is also targeted

by supporters of a social market economy and a collaboration between the public and private sectors for the benefit of citizens.

Chega's first electoral test arrived with the elections to the European Parliament on 26 May 2019, in which it had to run in a coalition with the PPM and the Cidadania e Democracia Cristã (Citizenship and Christian Democracy Party), given that the Constitutional Court had not yet authorized it as a political party. As the head of the 'Basta' (Enough) coalition, Ventura ran the election campaign by raising the classic themes of right-wing populism: opposition to the EU's federal project and supporting the supremacy of national sovereignty within the EU; fighting illegal immigration and international terrorism; defending Europe's Judeo-Christian identity, which it claimed was being threatened by the Islamism of the growing immigrant communities and by the secularism of the left. The results it obtained – 1.5% and 49,496 votes – were somewhat disappointing, and having failed to elect any members of the European Parliament (MEPs), the coalition, which was initially perceived to be a medium-term project until the national general election, came to an end.

Having been authorized by the Constitutional Court, Chega formalized its internal structure at its first National Convention in June 2019 in preparation for the general election scheduled to be held on 6 October. During the legislative election campaign, Chega again proposed its bombastic populist themes: advocating chemical castration for paedophiles; life imprisonment for particularly gruesome murders; zero tolerance of micro-criminality in peripheral neighbourhoods; and an end to public subsidies for ethnic minorities. To these, the party added an anti-system agenda: denunciation of the alleged partisanship between the PS and the PSD; the endemic corruption of the regime; the need to establish the Fourth Republic (through constitutional reform); the adoption of a presidential system; a reduction in the number of members of parliament (MPs) and of 'useless' state departments; and revision of the electoral law and boundary changes.

The narrow election of Ventura in the Lisbon constituency with just 22,053 votes heralded the second phase of the party's history. Overnight, Chega became the focus of a media that was attracted by the unprecedented entry of the far right into parliament. The many anti-fascist warnings by its political opponents amplified the media coverage, with a result that is plain to see: in just two years, from mid-2019 to mid-2021, Chega went from being a small party with just 700 members to 25,000 members (its claims that its membership now numbers 40,000 hardly seems credible). The party was organized throughout the country and, as of July 2020, it officially joined the European group *Identité et démocratie* (Identity and Democracy), whose leaders Matteo Salvini (Lega – League) and Marine Le Pen (Rassemblement National –National Rally) came to Portugal to support Ventura's election campaigns.

As of 2020, Ventura and Chega have organized their performance on three fronts. In parliament, Ventura devotes considerable effort to promoting Chega as a protagonist in opposition to a PS government that only came about thanks to the unprecedented support of the radical left, including the Partido Comunista Português (PCP – Communist Party) and the Bloco de Esquerda (BE – Left Bloc).

Ventura is always on the look-out for harsh polemics in the media to strengthen the party's image as the antipodes of political correctness, especially over such sensitive themes as the ethnic-racial issue. Accordingly, in his role as an MP Ventura is the protagonist of harsh confrontations with other media figures. This proved to be the case with Afro-descendant MP Joacine Katar Moreira (LIVRE – FREE), who Ventura insisted should be returned to Guinea-Bissau, the country of her birth after she demanded that all African works of art in Portuguese museums be returned to their countries of origin as a means of decolonizing culture. A similar attack was made on the Portuguese international football player Ricardo Quaresma, an ethnic Gypsy, who had criticized Ventura's call for the mandatory quarantine of all Portuguese Gypsies after a specific community refused to undergo COVID-19 testing. Finally, on the streets – in an unusual move for a Portuguese right that is usually averse to social mobilization – Chega has supported a social counter-movement in opposition to the most controversial demands of Afro-descendant movements that the parties of the radical left support. The demonstrations of mid-2020, when hundreds of Chega militants mobilized against the marches by anti-racist organizations protesting against the death of George Floyd while in police custody in the United States and the murder in Lisbon of an Afro-descendant actor by a white Portuguese man, are quite significant. Under the banner 'Portugal is not racist', Chega denounced the far left's campaigns against alleged structural and institutional racism. However, on this issue, Chega has rejected the ethnic-nationalistic identity.

To drive the message home, in September 2021, Ventura co-opted the intellectual Gabriel Mithá Ribeiro, a Christian mestizo of Mozambican origin and with Islamic ancestry, to the national board of the party. A fierce critic of so-called cultural Marxism (including identity politics and the concept of 'structural racism'), Mithá Ribeiro became Chega's ideologue responsible for running its Research Office and reformulating the political programme on which the party ran in the 2022 legislative election. He gave Chega a liberal-conservative, reformist and nationalist identity, with the programmatic proposals revolving around three central axes: the distinction between society and state, with the latter being prohibited from meddling in the space of the former: for example, the nurturing of young people, which must remain a prerogative of the family, since this is different from the teaching provided by public schools; the moral principle of self-responsibility, according to which each individual is responsible for their destiny and cannot be constantly said to be a victim of society due to their sexual, religious or ethnic condition; the principle of hierarchy, authority and order in all institutions that, unlike society, cannot be spaces of freedom and total horizontal democracy.

Chega's growth has made it a target of media scrutiny, particularly concerning its ties with the evangelical lobby, dubious businesspeople and the extreme right. The press carries frequent reports about the extremist past of national leaders, such as erstwhile vice-president and current MP Diogo Pacheco de Amorim, a former member of nationalist student groups at the end of the Estado Novo (New State) authoritarian regime and of the clandestine Movimento Democrático de Libertação de Portugal (Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Portugal) during the transition to democracy. While Pacheco de Amorim's past does not raise major concerns within the party, the issue of its

infiltration by the extreme right is another story largely due to the effective affiliation of militants from nationalist groups and the consequent damage to the party's image. The overwhelming majority of Chega cadres, and Ventura himself, come from the mainstream right (the PSD and the CDS-PP) or those who have previously abstained from voting. Therefore, they are willing to replicate the radical path of fellow European leaders who also come from liberal or conservative parties, such as Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, Matteo Salvini in Italy and Nigel Farage in the United Kingdom, although they are not set on becoming protagonists of fringe right-wing extremism. Chega strengthened the screening process for new members to meet this challenge and took drastic measures, including freezing the party's youth organization, which was being infiltrated by young people close to European identity currents and the North American alt-right.

Overall, media polemics enhanced rather than damaged Chega's image. The most significant indicator of this was during the presidential election in January 2021, in which Ventura ran as the only authentic anti-system right-wing candidate. Three factors made this procedure easier: the re-election of the incumbent president – the social democrat Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa – supported by the PSD, the CDS-PP and the PS prime minister António Costa; the refusal of the candidate supported by IL to position himself on the right of the political spectrum; the convergence of all other presidential candidates denouncing the right-wing populism represented by Ventura. The fact that Ventura was once more at the centre of the election campaign explains how he obtained 12% of the vote, just behind the runner-up, former PS MEP Ana Gomes, who was herself in the front line in the struggle against Chega, including with a request to the Constitutional Court to ban the party. Chega did not change the central axes of its communication strategy in either the 2021 presidential or the 2022 legislative elections. It created new controversial formulas – such as branding as 'bandits' those suburban residents who were involved in clashes with police and who were considered to be opposed to the 'good Portuguese', precisely those who Ventura intended to represent as a presidential candidate, and at all times in line with the legalist, security-focused and anti-elitist agenda that has sustained the party's electoral growth. The successes at the ballot box paved the way for the structural consolidation of the party. The 4% of the vote it obtained in the municipal elections of September 2021 provided Chega with hundreds of representatives on councils the length and breadth of the country. Unlike IL, which favoured candidates selected for their quality in just a few constituencies, Chega adopted a strategy of widespread involvement, focusing on quantity rather than quality as it sought to measure the will of the Portuguese electorate throughout the country. The poor performance of several municipal candidates caused some embarrassment to the party; however, it also allowed it to determine its impact across the country by electing 300 candidates (19 councillors, 171 town councillors and 205 parish councillors) and creating the basis of its political-administrative staff in a vocational course. The journey was not without difficulties; however, five of the 19 elected councillors left the party over the following months and continued in office as independents. Nevertheless, the 7% share of the vote that the party obtained in the January 2022 legislative election was expected to guarantee the party around €5 million in public

funding, enabling it to hire the parliamentary advisers and party officials who would be essential to the parliamentary work of its 12 MPs. This is in line with Ventura's goal: to become the leader of the opposition within the next four years and to transform Chega from a protest group to a contender for government that the other centre-right-wing parties might accept as a partner and an alternative to the PS government.

The Political Culture of Chega's Rank and File

Research into the political culture of Chega members was carried out between May and June 2021 via an online survey, which had the consent of the party leadership of all Chega members. The survey was assembled with questions taken from the most recent national surveys of the Portuguese population, particularly the Portuguese Electoral Studies of 2005, 2015 and 2019, the 2019 ICS/ISCTE [Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa and Instituto Universitário de Lisboa] survey, the 2020 Eurobarometer and the European Social Survey of 2018. The aim was to analyse the positioning of Chega party members against the background of national political culture, with the survey consisting of sections covering ideas and attitudes on ethical and moral values, democracy, the economy, national identity and Europe. Of the 4,078 responses received, 3,183 were validated from an estimated universe of around 30,000 members. Chega did not inform the research team of the size of the party's membership, nor did it say anything about their sociographic character.

Consequently, this means that the sample is probabilistic rather than representative. It has a preponderance of men (84%), consistent with the homologous distribution registered among Chega voters in the 2022 legislative election: 64% men and 36% women (ERC 2022). By age-group, respondents are mainly in the 35–64 cohort (21% were aged 35–44; 32% were aged 45–54; 20% were aged 55–64). Those in the 18–24 age-group accounted for 3.5% of the sample, while those aged 25–34 accounted for 9%. This translates into an average membership age of 49 (standard deviation = 13.0). As for previous political identity, the survey demonstrates the ability of Chega to appeal to people who had not previously been politically active: 76% of respondents had no previous party political affiliation, while the majority of the remaining 24% came from the ranks of the PSD (45%, with another 3% from the Aliança – Alliance – party, which had split from the PSD) and to a lesser extent from the CDS-PP (22%). The traditional far right party, the PNR, contributed only 3%, although it must be remembered that this party is extremely small in terms of members. More interesting is the 9% of members coming from the PS and 3% from the PCP.

The quantitative data were scrutinized by three focus groups established in October 2021, with volunteers involved in the survey and focusing on ethical-moral values, the functioning of democracy, migration and identity issues, respectively.

The first main characteristic of the political culture of Chega members is their adherence to the populism of protest rather than to identity-based national populism (Taguieff 2007). This conclusion is provided

by answering the question about Portugal's three biggest problems. Raw analysis of the results via a WordCloud – refining the coding is an ongoing process – shows the frequency of issues related to the functioning of democracy rather than with ethnic-cultural identity as mobilization drivers for Chega's base membership. By far the most important problem for the membership is the perception of corruption, with the second being that of justice, which it thought to be easily circumvented by the rich, powerful and criminal and dysfunctional for the common citizen.

The third problem is evenly divided between the economy, education, health, social state and the performance of politicians. Only in the context of the third problem do the topics of immigration and subsidy-dependence become visible, albeit without great relevance, equated in the latter case, and due to Ventura's rhetorical strategy, with ethnic minorities. As for foreigners, and despite this being a relatively marginal issue, Chega members demonstrate an assimilationist rather than a multicultural or differential attitude: for 91% of respondents, ethnic minorities must adapt to the typical customs of Portugal; for 58%, the will of the majority must prevail over that of ethnic minorities, whose identity claims cannot clash with the Portuguese identity. These proportions match the majority of respondents (94%) when they say that following Portuguese customs and traditions is 'a very' or 'a reasonably' important condition for being considered Portuguese. In this sense, the *jus culturae* – to use an expression coined during the Italian debate on integration – remains associated with the *jus sanguinis*: Portuguese identity is determined by the fact that an individual was born in Portugal (85%) and had Portuguese ancestors (83%). However, this does not mean that a foreigner cannot acquire the quality of becoming Portuguese.

The focus group on migration and identity helps to clarify the combination between *jus sanguinis* and *jus culturae*. For focus group participant (FGP) E1, the son of an immigrant is not Portuguese just because he was born in Portugal – the *jus soli* is not decisive – but rather because the individual had grown up and lived in the country long enough to allow them to understand and respect the history, culture and rules of Portuguese society. For FGP Z1, this process allows the children of immigrants to acquire Portuguese nationality smoothly should they so wish to do so once they reach their legal majority. FGP C1 does not consider strict criteria for acquiring nationality a way of rejecting the 'other' but guarantees full and conscious integration into the Portuguese identity. For FGP F1, an immigrant born abroad who voluntarily internalizes and identifies with Portuguese culture is more Portuguese than a native with Portuguese ancestry who shows themselves completely alienated from the national identity. Moreover, none of the participants in the focus group considers the phenotypic characteristics of an individual as impediments to becoming Portuguese. This reasoning is evident in the idea expressed by a Chega member, an immigrant of Brazilian origin, according to whom immigration is 'responsible' and positive when 'immigrants adapt to the culture of the country that receives them, instead of trying to impose their own culture' (Lima 2022).

The significance of integration and assimilation is evident in the high percentage (53%) of Chega members who view immigrants as a possible threat to national culture, with only 23% of Chega

members disagreeing with this statement. In national surveys, the proportions are inverted: only 24% of the representative sample of the Portuguese population are concerned about threats to identity, while the majority of Portuguese (59%) do not consider immigrants to be a cultural threat. Among Chega members, negative perceptions in terms of culture are also confirmed by the percentage in terms of security issues, with 63% of respondents convinced of the direct relationship between immigration and an increase in criminality.

Focus group testimonies reveal how the perception of the threat is strongly linked to the liberalization of migration and nationality policies implemented over the last two decades by PS-led governments. In the words of FGP F1, the threat to national identity is represented by uncontrolled and excessive immigration. The fear, underscored by FGP M1 and FGP F1, is that Portugal will replicate the multicultural model witnessed in Paris in 1996 and Dortmund in 2021, respectively: the perception is not one of integration but of progressive population and cultural replacement in entire areas of these cities. The cultural factor prevails: referring to the Portuguese, FGP M1 recognizes that, from a biological point of view, 'we quite simply are not a pure-race people: we are a mixture of races'.

Interestingly, when research moves from cultural and security issues to economic issues, the attitudes of Chega members change significantly: only one-quarter of the sample rejects the idea that immigrants are good for the national economy, while 46% recognize the positive contribution that immigration makes to the country's economic development.

In this regard, the focus group reveals all the participants' awareness that Portugal is traditionally a country of labour emigration and that, therefore, they recognize the positive contribution of foreigners to the economies of their destination countries. According to FGP E1, these positive impacts do not avoid the negatives, such as social and wage dumping arising from receiving immigrants from developing countries, whom employers use at the expense of national workers.

For Chega members, the background for the importance of ethnic-cultural identity and its necessary preservation lies in the notion that existing cultures are very different from each other (95% agree with this) and that it is possible to rank them according to a greater or lesser degree of civilization (87% tend to agree with this statement). These culturalist positions have a somewhat limited biological correspondence: only 31% of respondents agree with the idea that there are less intelligent races, while 47% reject the notion and 22% say they neither agree nor disagree. The last category is significant: many respondents can take refuge in this neutral stance as an excuse not to overtly reveal racist beliefs. Some 73% of respondents support this hypothesis, convinced that there are more hard-working races than others. However, in this case, respondents could only refer to the types of work typical of the capitalist model and therefore linked to cultural dimensions rather than biological ones within a given population.

As for attitudes towards democracy, the responses of Chega members problematize the idea that supporters of right-wing populism embody an authoritarian and anti-democratic threat to liberal democracy. As with other right-wing parties, in Chega, some express nostalgia for António de Oliveira

Salazar and his New State regime of 1933–1974; however, these do not determine the party's official line, with the leadership rejecting this historical legacy. Also, the militant base does not endorse authoritarian revanchism: 70% of respondents agree with the idea that despite its imperfections, democracy represents the best form of government, with only 14% rejecting this assessment. Illustrative of this is the slogan 'Deus, Pátria, Família e Trabalho' (God, Motherland, Family and Work) that Chega proclaimed in its fourth congress in 2021, a slogan it intended to restore as it is typical of conservatism, from the instrumentalization made of it by the Portuguese authoritarian regime.

More problematic is support for the liberal principle of the democratic game based on a compromise between different ideas: for 54% of respondents, concessions in policies correspond to the betrayal of the upheld principles. Only one-quarter of the sample recognizes compromise as a legitimate component of the political process.

Distrust about concessions is linked to the importance of the majority principle. Data collected through the focus group on democracy helps us better to understand this characteristic of Chega members. For FGP A2, democracy works best when obstacles imposed by minorities do not distort the will of the majority. Given the starting equality for everyone to express their positions, minorities resulting from elections must accept the government of the majority until the power balance is modified in succeeding elections, under the penalty of the distortion of the democratic principle itself. All participants in the focus group on democracy prioritize the majority principle of 50% plus one if it is achieved in free elections; the basis for the determination of equal rights and duties for all citizens, regardless of their ethnic-racial, religious or sexual characteristics. Data do not reveal appreciation for the essential aspect of liberal democracies: the existence of constitutional principles that guarantee the rights of minorities, principles that are independent of the will of contingent majorities. For FGP M1, minorities should always be heard, but the final decision belongs to the majority, and there is no point in reversing this order of things. For FGP Z1, the respect due to minorities does not imply acceptance of the imposition of cultural habits that are not desired by the majority. In other words, mutual respect must be based on preserving the rules desired by the majority in the public sphere, which is different from the private sphere.

If the minority prevails over the majority, this is viewed as a betrayal of democracy. This is especially so in relation to the top of the political-institutional pyramid and determines the sharp anti-elitism and populism of Chega members. For FGP M2, contemporary Portuguese democracy is merely a tool through which a well-organized minority at the top of the pyramid acts as a sect and manipulates the masses to the benefit of its interests. For FGP F2, this distorted democracy is 'an anonymous dictatorship ... masquerading as democracy', in which the dictator's face cannot be seen but must be illuminated to recover the people's sovereign power. The idea of a betrayed democracy is clear in a dichotomic view of political realities: 82% of respondents believe that political differences between the elite and the people are greater than the differences within the people themselves. Only 6% disagree with this quintessential vision of the populist worldview: a virtuous and homogeneous people opposed

to a corrupt and corrupting elite. FGP J2 views this elite as the head of an octopus, whose multiple tentacles ensnare the entire democratic system and deceive the people consisting of hundreds and even thousands of individuals who are dependent on the very same elite. The gap between the elite in power and the people alienated from it is widened by the indifference of politicians towards the needs of the people (according to 89% of respondents) and by their subservience to the rich and powerful (according to 76% of respondents). Therefore, FGP J2 considers the present democracy a 'dictatorship of the elites', which explains why half of all voters are currently taking refuge in abstention. For FGP A2, the concentration of legislative, executive and judicial power in the hands of the elite is the clearest sign of the failure of democracy since its establishment on 25 April 1974. Despite their clear anti-elitism, Chega members do not show any particular appreciation for direct democracy as an instrument for regaining popular sovereignty. Even if the notion that important decisions have to be taken by ordinary people and not by politicians is supported by 59% of respondents, 23% disagree outright and 18% cannot make a clear statement. So, the realistic view of the imperfect ability of ordinary people to find solutions to complex problems prevails. For FGP A2, the Portuguese do not possess a sufficient level of culture and political maturity to aspire to a type of democracy other than representative. The assumption was that in Portugal, direct democracy would only generate chaos. For FGP P2, a country with ten million voters is just too big for the necessary direct democracy procedures, which are more functional when applied to small circles.

Moreover, the unsatisfactory performance of the Portuguese parliament is determined by the installed partocracy and not by the representative principle of the democratic system. FGP A2 recognizes the need for the existence of parties, for the confrontation of ideas and the achievement of consensus, although today, these are undermined by 'party dictatorship'. The clearest sign of party dictatorship is the voting discipline mechanism in parliament, which prevents each MP from casting a vote according to their conscience, forcing them to betray their principles for the party's political line. Thus, the principle of one man, one vote seems to satisfy Chega members, albeit within the rules of liberal representative democracy and not of plebiscitary formulas.

Conclusion

In the space of three years, Chega grew from a handful of activists based in Lisbon and gathered around Ventura's personal project to Portugal's third largest party in parliamentary representation and with a national political infrastructure. Despite the growth of the party's organization, Chega's main selling point continues to be its president André Ventura: his characteristics as a young media-savvy, politically pragmatic, ideologically flexible and strategically bold young leader make him an unprecedented phenomenon on the far right of the Portuguese political spectrum as well as a prominent figure among leaders on the centre-right. These features allow him to unite people from different political and non-political backgrounds. The party's top-down management structure, which is supported by Ventura's narrow circle of loyalists, and the growing internal tensions that have developed as the party base has expanded, including some of the founder members, are the main factors in Chega's fragility.

To date, the weakness of the internal opposition in terms of their ideology, organization and external image has resulted in its promoters remaining in a subordinate position or leaving the party and consequently posing no real threat to the party leadership and unable to challenge Ventura. The personalist nature of Chega, which is still very much identified with its leader, and the high degree of infighting that has been a trait from the very outset, limit the party's ability to co-opt human resources using their own social and political capital, which in turn has prevented the party from consolidating on the centre-right.

While the structural evolution of Chega still causes raised eyebrows, it has clarified its ideological position during the first three years of its parliamentary life. Ventura's strategic rhetoric, the political culture of Chega's founders, leaders and initial members, combined with the evolution of the party's programme, all position Chega within the new radical-right populist family. Presenting a dichotomic view of Portuguese political reality, opposing a virtuous people to a corrupt elite, Chega is no less than a populist party. In Ventura's discourse strategy, virtuous people are represented as the 'good Portuguese' who work, pay taxes and respect the law; in turn, the corrupt elites are the PS and the PSD that have alternated in power since 25 April 1974, with the complicity of the CDS-PP on the right and, more recently, of the PCP and the BE on the left, all of which Chega claims feeds a network of political and economic cronyism. The party's self-image as the one force that gives a voice to the virtuous people in the battle to reconquer democracy is built largely on the denunciation of political correctness: the instrument through which the elite silences the revolt of 'good Portuguese' against the corruption of partocracy, the subsidy-dependence of ethnic minorities, the social degradation caused by illegality and growing insecurity in metropolitan peripheries and certain other areas of the country. The rejection of political correctness also helps Chega to differentiate itself from competing parties on the centre-right of the political spectrum, gain media coverage and maximize the political offer for the anti-political sentiment that prevails in Portugal. Oddly, Chega's anti-system rhetoric coexists with its leader's continued calls for dialogue with the centre-right parties to form an anti-socialist front. That same can be said of the party's strategy, which combines the populist vertical axis (people versus elite) with the classic horizontal axis (right versus left).

This strategy is always translated in terms of the new right. Chega rejects nostalgia for the old regime, and while many in its ranks are nostalgic for Salazar and the New State, Ventura has, in many public statements, blamed the country's authoritarian past for its current structural backwardness. In contrast, the party has always celebrated 25 April as the foundational moment in the conquest of democratic freedoms that were subsequently secured through the success of the 25 November 1975 counter-coup against the communist threat. This is the traditional political culture of the Portuguese parliamentary right, albeit with the innovative addition of the necessary rescue of 25 April, which has been distorted by the elites who have held power over the past 50 years.

Similarities with the new right are also evident in Chega's commitment to the legalist and security-driven agenda that is based on support for the labour demands of unions representing the security forces

and legislative initiatives, including the introduction of life imprisonment and chemical castration, that are typical of punitive populism (López-Rodríguez et al. 2021). Chega's alleged authoritarianism is more easily detected in respect of its security-driven aspect than it is on institutional illiberalism. In fact, from the top to the bottom of the party, there is no particular preference for direct democracy to the detriment of representative democracy, nor is there an appetite for the concentration of powers. Despite Ventura's charismatic personality and the conservatism of the rank and file, Chega denounces the 'authoritarianism' it sees in the parties that have been in government, which promote promiscuity between political, economic, judicial and media power, to remove democracy from popular scrutiny. In this sense, the radical opposition against the parties on the left and the parties in power does not seek to replace representative democracy and nor does it seek to affect political pluralism. Controversial measures, such as reducing the number of MPs and the introduction of presidentialism in the Portuguese system, are mainly designed to dismantle the network of party clientele assembled by the PS and the PSD to secure control of power.

Furthermore, the nativist character attributed to right-wing populism also deserves some attention. Existing literature attributes Chega with a clear feature of cultural xenophobia (Carvalho 2022; Mendes 2022). The evidence for this is Ventura's comments on the Gypsy ethnic minority, which in electoral terms was a more motivating target than was immigration since the latter represents a phenomenon that still does not trouble many Portuguese, including Chega members (Afonso 2021; Magalhães 2020b). On this subject, the political culture of the party's founders presents sharply different nuances that are equidistant from the extremes of pure ethnic identity on the one hand and multiculturalism completely open to migration absorbed by naturalisation or *jus soli* on the other (Marchi 2020).

At both the national and European level, Chega advocates an assimilationist nationalism that is critical of the communitarian resistance of ethnic minorities. The main targets are Gypsy and Islamic Portuguese communities resulting from immigration. The former is targeted because of their cultural habits (school dropouts and arranged marriages, among others) that are contrary to the national legalistic culture. The latter are targeted for representing the introduction, in Europe, of growing enclaves governed by *Shari'a* law that is incompatible with the Judeo-Christian identity of Europe and with the secular nature of the state. For these reasons, Chega rejects affirmative action policies, which it claims only serve to further fragment the national community into identity ghettos, with possible repercussions for the country's internal security. Conversely, based on cultural equivalence with the West and according to the country's economic needs, Chega advocates restricted and selective immigration and nationality policies. So, while identity issues are always present in Chega's discourse, the party prioritizes the populist agenda of anti-system protest, which is more effective at capturing disenfranchised people from across the political spectrum.

Chega's strategy of presenting itself as a protest force rather than an identity party is based on its awareness of the marginal nature of the migration issue within Portuguese public opinion and which focuses more on the themes of corruption, economic stagnation and the dysfunctional nature of

democracy in the governance and justice arenas. Chega members share a political culture found throughout the Portuguese population on these subjects. They do not represent a lunatic fringe that is disconnected from public opinion, although their concerns about the impact of migration (particularly Islamic migration) on national security and culture are at odds with the rest of the population. Alignment with mainstream political culture gives the militant base a perception of their being neither extreme nor radical but simply on the right, sharing the concerns discussed daily within the family, professional and leisure environments. This is possibly a common trend of public opinion that cannot be discarded, given the electoral growth of the party in just three years (from 68,000 votes to 400,000 votes) compared with the failure of previous radical right projects and despite the cordon sanitaire established around Chega by the intellectual, political and media elite.

This political identity is quite homogeneous among Chega members, with there being no significant differences according to age or gender. In this sense, the most significant variable is the greater or lesser degree of secularism or confessionalism among party members, with Christians tending to be more sensitive to conservative values. Chega members do not recognize themselves as radical and populist militants: their concerns are not directed against democracy as a political system but rather against the unsatisfactory way in which democracy functions. In this sense, its illiberal values are not synonymous with an attack on liberal institutions. If, on the one hand, there is a clear appreciation of democracy as a government of the majority rather than of its liberal aspect of guaranteeing minorities vis-à-vis the majority, on the other, there is no tendency to restrict political pluralism. The fear is that organized minorities – namely the post-materialist and globalist left – may impose cultural models on the disorganized majority and that the consolidation of the partocracy may remove democracy from the control of the people once and for all. Nonetheless, criticism remains within the boundaries of the democratic liberal paradigm, with no appetite among the party base for plebiscitary or direct democracy.

References

- Afonso, A. (2021). 'Correlates of Aggregate Support for the Radical Right in Portugal', *Research and Politics* 8 (3): 1–9.
- Cancela, J. and Magalhães, P. (2022). *Bases Sociais do Voto nas Legislativas de 2022*. Available at: bit.ly/3wFII2C (accessed 29 August 2022).
- Carvalho, J. (2022). 'Understanding the Emergence of Extreme Right Parties in Portugal in the Late 2010s', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 76(4): 879–899, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsac001>
- Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social (ERC) (2022). 'Eleições legislativas 2022–30 Janeiro 2022: Boca de urna'. Available at: bit.ly/3KsXcY4 (accessed 29 August 2022).
- Fernandes J. M. and Magalhães P. C. (2020). 'The 2019 Portuguese General Elections', *West European Politics* 43 (4): 1038–1050.

- Georgiadou, V., Rorib, L. and Roumanias, C. (2018). 'Mapping the European Far Right in the 21st Century: A Meso-Level Analysis', *Electoral Studies* 54: 103–115.
- Heyne, L. and Manucci, L. (2021). 'A New Iberian Exceptionalism? Comparing the Populist Radical Right Electorate in Portugal and Spain', *Political Research Exchange* 3 (1): 1–28.
- Ignazi, P. (1992). 'The Silent Counter-Revolution: Hypotheses on the Emergence of Extreme Right-Wing Parties in Europe', *European Journal of Political Research* 22 (1): 3–34.
- Lima J. G. de (2022). 'Do próprio veneno: A ultradireita de Portugal e os bolsonaristas que vivem por lá', *Piqui: 189*. Available at: bit.ly/3ATuso1 (accessed 29 August 2022).
- López-Rodríguez, A., González-Gómez, A. and González-Quinzán, S. (2021). 'Populismo punitivo y extrema derecha en el espacio ibérico', *Universitas-XXI, Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas* 35: 103–126.
- Magalhães, P. (2020a). 'Quem quer votar no Chega?', *Expresso*, 15 February. Available at: bit.ly/3TBeE0T (accessed 29 August 2022).
- Magalhães, P. (2020b). *O Que Pensam os Que Votaram no Chega?* Available at: bit.ly/3wzQOZu (accessed 29 August 2022).
- Marchi, R. (2019). *The Portuguese Far Right: Between Late Authoritarianism and Democracy (1945–2015)*, London: Routledge.
- Marchi, R. (2020). *A Nova Direita Anti-Sistema: O Caso do Chega*, Lisbon: Edições 70.
- Mendes, M. S. (2022). 'Enough of What? An Analysis of Chega's Populist Radical Right Agenda', *South European Society and Politics* 26 (3): 329–353.
- Mendes, M. S. and Dennison, J. (2020). 'Explaining the Emergence of the Radical Right in Spain and Portugal: Salience, Stigma and Supply', *West European Politics* 44 (4): 752–775.
- Mudde, C. (2000). *The Ideology of the Extreme Right*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Taguieff, P.-A. (2007). *L'Illusion Populiste: Essai sur les Démagogies de l'Âge Démocratique*, Paris: Champs/Flammarion.
- Zúquete, J. P. (2007). 'Portugal: A New Look at the Extreme-Right', *Representation* 43 (3): 179–198.