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Iberian Citizens' Views on their Parliaments

Support, Attitudes on Representation, Candidate Selection and Electoral System

José Santana-Pereira and Irene Martín

Abstract

In this chapter, we aim at providing a general overview of Iberian citizens' attitudes towards their parliamentary institutions. The goal is to understand the degree of diffuse and specific support for the representative institution *par excellence*, as well as how they assess the parliamentary focus and style of representation, candidate selection procedures and the electoral system. Portuguese and Spanish citizens consider that their parliaments are important but tend not to trust them, not to be pleased with their performance, and do not feel represented by them. They are not interested in what the parliament does, consider the debates boring or uninformative and tend to be suspicious of the motivations underlying their MPs' will to run for a parliamentary seat. In general, they tend to favour changes leading to more participatory, egalitarian and personalized modalities of parliamentary representation.

Introduction

In representative democracies, parliaments are the political system's building block, invested with formal and – arguably – popular political legitimacy. Members of parliament (MPs) are in charge of preparing, discussing and passing or rejecting legislation, giving or removing support to governments and carrying out an array of other activities in the name of the population they represent. This very notion of representation confers a great deal of importance to the study of public opinion towards parliaments and their members.

In representative democracy, – both in the “mandate” and “accountability” versions (Mansbridge, 2003; Przeworski, Stokes and Cheibub, 1999) - it is crucial that citizens trust their representatives and that these have a good reputation. In the “mandate” view citizens need to believe that MPs will fulfil their promises and will take care of their interests, even if they do not monitor them all the time or don't have information on all the decisions they take. In the “accountability” view citizens will reward or punish parties according to whether they think that MPs have acted on behalf of citizens' interests, even if they were not attentive. When citizens are informed about what their representatives do, about their deliberations, and of the circumstances that surround the policies they adopt, they will use this information during the elections. But, in a context in which most citizens are not informed, uncertainty about the results of policies increases, and the reputation of politicians decreases, trust becomes all the more important (Bianco, 1994). The level of trust will affect how they vote, and whether they have to offer ex post explanations (idem). Similar considerations could be extended to other attitudes of citizens towards the Parliament.

Taking Easton's work as inspiration, attitudes of can be classified into diffuse and specific (1965, 1975). Diffuse attitudes are more generic, more stable, and less responsive to short-term contextual factors. Amongst these, we will analyse citizens' opinions about how relevant they consider Parliament to be. In turn, specific support is more dependent

on its specific results and activity. That is why we will focus on how much they trust this institution under different contexts, and the degree of satisfaction with the performance this institution.

Another aspect that is interesting to be studied through the lens of public opinion is what makes representative democracy more legitimate in the eyes of citizens than other political decision-making methods. In the words of Eulau et al, the fundamental question for the theories of representation is not just the fact that decision-makers are elected, but that “*what* representatives decide and *the way* they reach decisions is more nearly in accord with expectations and demands of the represented” than another system (1959: 743). One of the aspects that affects this perception of legitimacy is the idea of “role” (idem). Referring to Burke’s distinction between focus and style of representation, Eulau and his colleagues reminded us that there are different “foci” of representation or, in other words, different ways to delimit the interests that legislators should represent (i.e. local vs. national). According to Burke, the foci would be associated with a certain “style” of representation (i.e. legislators should trust their own criteria when deliberating and legislating, or those of certain groups). Even though this association between “foci” and “style” has been questioned (Eulau et al, 1959: 746), it is still relevant to find out what citizens think about the foci and the styles that the MPs should respect. In other words, who legislators represent, and which are the criteria they apply when taking decisions, are important for whether citizens perceive representative democracy and its most characteristic institution as legitimate. Two other aspects contribute to this as well: the opinions about who should select the candidates to represent them (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988), and citizens views about the mechanism by which seats are assigned to the elected candidates, that is, the electoral system.

In this chapter, we aim at providing a general overview of Iberian citizens’ attitudes towards their parliamentary institutions, taking both a comparative and longitudinal perspective. The goal is to understand to what extent citizens support the representative

institution *par excellence*, consider it to be a trustworthy institution and are satisfied with its performance, as well as how they understand and assess the parliamentary focus and style of representation, the candidate selection procedures and the electoral system used to elect MPs.

These have been, to a considerable extent, neglected topics in the field of legislative studies and a secondary concern of public opinion scholars in Portugal and Spain, which means that both the literature and the raw data are scarce. Some studies have paid attention to trust in parliament¹, either as a feature of broader political trust (e.g. Magalhães 2002, 2003, Teixeira and Freire 2010, Torcal 2014, Jaime-Castillo et al. 2016, Muro and Vidal 2017), or on its own (Montero 1989, Martínez and Crespo 1998, Méndez-Lago and Martínez 2002, Méndez-Lago 2006, Oñate 2003, Freire and Meirinho 2012, Mota 2016, López-Nieto 2017).

We argue that there are several reasons to pay special attention to the public opinion regarding the parliament in Portugal and Spain. First, these are fairly recent third-wave democracies where there may be traces of antiparliamentarism in the population, due to the historical developments of the early and mid-20th century as seen in the bad reputation of MPs and parties (Montero 1989, Magalhães 2002; Torcal, Gunther, Montero, 2002). Recent developments, namely the political consequences of the great recession (Bosco and Verney 2012, 2017), exponentiates the usefulness of understanding the longitudinal dynamics in terms of how citizens look at the institution that formally represents the different viewpoints in their societies, and whose sovereignty has been questioned in the context of the crisis by the imposition of measures by the EU. Also, the frequency of minority governments with the parliamentary support of other parties in both countries also make

¹ A rather common way to ask citizens how much they trust their national parliament is by including the following question in a survey that is asked to a representative sample of the population: "I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain media and institutions. For each of the following media and institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it". *The (NATIONALITY) Parliament*. Answers: Tend to trust / Tend not to trust / DK - Don't know. See graph based on the Eurobarometer surveys below.

the study of these two countries especially interesting. The importance of the parliamentary arena has increased in the current context, where the number of seats of the ruling party in both countries is smaller than ever. In methodological terms, the focus on these two polities allows us to introduce a most similar systems framework to the analysis, in terms of political culture. This does not obviate the institutional arrangements put into practice after the transition into democracy, that mirror the diversity of Spain and homogeneity of Portugal, as explained in another chapter of this book.

This chapter is organized in five sections. After this introduction, we discuss the available public opinion data and previous research on diffuse and specific attitudes towards the legislative institutions in the Iberian Peninsula: importance, trust and satisfaction with the way it works. The second section deals with the perceptions and preferences in terms of focus and style of representation offered by the Portuguese and Spanish parliaments. Lastly, we explore views and preferences regarding candidate selection and electoral system. The chapter concludes with a summary and discussion of the main findings.

Diffuse support: The importance of parliamentary institutions

The perception of parliaments as relevant political institutions seems to be particularly widespread in the two Iberian democracies (at least until 2008, the most recent year for which there is available data). Between the early 1980s and the year 2000, 4 in every 5 Spanish citizens agreed that the parliament was important for the functioning of democracy and a necessary institution, while almost two-thirds believed that parliamentary activities have a great or considerable impact on their lives (Oñate 2003). In the last decade, these attitudes were slightly more modest but still very high: approximately 75 per cent² of Spaniards considering the parliament and 57 per cent believed that the Congress had a great

² In this chapter, all percentages were calculated including the cases in which respondents opted for not responding or claimed they did not know the answer.

or substantial impact in their lives important (CIS 2003, 2008). Also, the lower chamber is placed in the last position in terms of impact amongst the main political institutions, after the city council (73 per cent), the regional (66 per cent) and the national government (66 per cent) (CIS 2005). This pattern of modest decrease in the perceived relevance of the Spanish parliament can be linked to the relative loss of centrality it has suffered due to the European integration and the political decentralization of the State, both resulting in a loss of powers to supranational or subnational entities (Méndez-Lago and Martínez 2002).

The figures for Portugal are similar, with 63 per cent of the citizens considering the parliament essential to the Portuguese political system in 2002 (Freire et al. 2003). The data collected by Bacalhau (1994) in 1984 and 1993 already showed the existence of majorities of citizens convinced of the parliament's relevance (64 and 80 per cent, respectively). Also, in the mid-2000s, the *Assembleia da República* was seen by almost one third of the population as the political institution that actually ruled the country, second to the prime-minister (51 per cent) and before the Council of Ministers (25 per cent) and the President of the Republic (14 per cent) (Freire et al. 2006).

Interest in, and knowledge of, Parliament

As previous literature has shown, support of Parliament, and knowledge about it, are not necessarily related (Flickinger, Bennett, and Bennett, 1995). On the contrary, knowledge and interest in it are (idem). This is confirmed by the Spanish data (no data are available for Portugal). In 2005, only one third claimed to be interested in parliamentary activities, while the interest in the activities of local and regional authorities and the national government was considerably higher, with percentages ranging from 45 to 54 per cent (CIS 2005). Lack of interest in parliamentary debates has been predominant in the Spanish society between 1982 and 2000 (Montero 1989, Oñate 2003).

Also, Iberian citizens do not seem to possess high levels of information about the parliament. In Spain, just around one third of the citizens recalls the name of the president

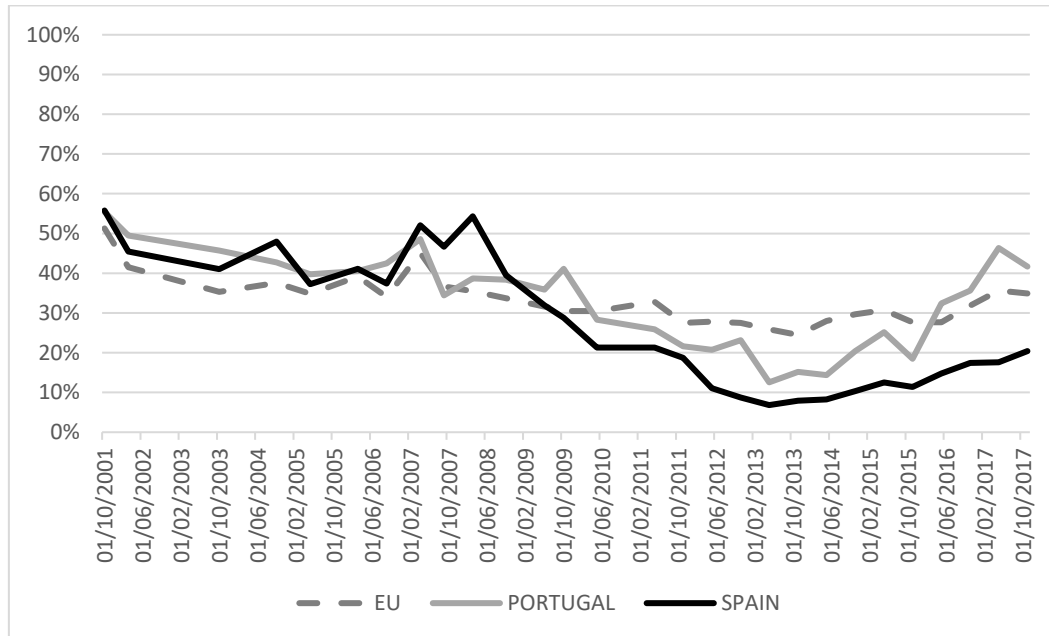
of the Congress of Deputies and less than 10 percent that of the Senate (Onãte 2003). In Portugal, in 2008, 11 per cent of the citizens claimed that they never heard of Jaime Gama, then president of the *Assembleia da República* (Freire and Viegas 2009).

Trust in Parliament

The academic literature of political trust has flourished over the last decade, when the erosion on the way Iberian citizens looked at their political institutions became a matter of concern amongst political scientists and other observers. Indeed, as Figure 1 shows, trust in the national Parliament has declined in both countries coinciding with the beginning of the sovereign debt crisis. In the onset of the 21st century about half of the Iberian citizens tended to trust their national parliament, in line with the EU average. Moreover, these figures were slightly higher than those observed in Portugal and Spain in the 1980s and 1990s – all ranging from 35 to 40 per cent (Teixeira and Freire 2010). Some authors stress that the decrease in political trust predates the financial crisis (Muro and Vidal 2017), but it is undeniable that the political and economic events that took place as of 2008 functioned as a death blow to trust in parliament, as well as in other political institutions, such as political parties, the national government and the European Union. To be sure, in 2013 only 12.5 per cent of the Portuguese and 6.8 per cent of the Spaniards expressed such positive attitude. The two Iberian countries were indeed among the countries with the largest decrease in institutional trust in Europe between 2008 and 2012 (Torcal 2014).

From 2015 onwards, there are signs of recovery, although much clearer in Portugal, as a possible reaction to the political and economic events in the country (cf. De Giorgi and Santana Pereira 2016). By the end of 2017, trust in the *Assembleia da República* was again above the levels in the EU at large. In Spain the recovery is still quite timid, and it is still clearly lagging behind the EU at large. These oscillations confirm that, besides being related to diffuse support, political trust is related to specific support depending on the evaluation of performance (Hetherington, 1998).

Figure 1: Trust in the national parliament in Portugal, Spain and the EU, 2001-2017



Note: Values are the percentage of interviewees who tend to trust in the national parliament.

Source: Eurobarometer

(<http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/index>)

What are the grounds of the trust citizens allocate to parliamentary institutions? In the literature on this subject, several perspectives co-exist. Some emphasize cultural factors and stresses the relevance of **social capital and values (social trust)** as explaining factors; others point at a relationship with support for the incumbent a (Holmberg, Lindberg, and Svensson, 2017); and a third group focuses on political and economic performance (Mishler and Rose 2001).

In the late 1990s, the main factors of trust in parliament in Portugal and Spain were related to support for the incumbent party and, in Spain, beyond age and education, ideological radicalism (with more extreme citizens depositing less trust on their legislative chambers) (Magalhães 2002, 2003). Looking at data from the late 2000s, Teixeira and Freire (2010) showed that trust in the parliament seemed to be more rooted in cultural and

political factors in Spain than in Portugal, where both political and economic factors (employment status, assessment of the country's economic situation) mattered.

To what extent has the financial crisis and its political consequences stress the relevance of economic factors? Torcal (2014) explored the role of citizens' assessments of the economy and political responsiveness during the peak of the financial crisis (2008-2012). He concluded that political responsiveness is the most important and robust predictor of trust in parliament, together with perceptions of corruption are also shown to hinder this attitude. But the study also reports a significant effect of economic perceptions. His findings could be used to argue that the financial crisis harmonized the factors underlying trust in parliament in the two countries and enhanced the role of political responsiveness/external political efficacy, especially in Spain.

Studies of trust in parliament using aggregate data tend to back up this general panorama. Muro and Vidal (2017) tested the effects of political and economic indicators on aggregate levels of trust in political institutions in Italy, Portugal, Greece and Spain. Their regression analysis stresses the relevance of economic factors, such as public debt, even when controlling for political variables. They also confirm the impact of perceptions of corruption and of assessments of the government's record. Another macro-level study of trust in national political institutions in five Southern European democracies between 2000 and 2015 has also noted that higher levels of trust in Parliament were correlated with lower rates of unemployment and poverty risk, lower levels of corruption at the executive level and lower centralization of the candidate selection process (Fernandes et al., *forthcoming*). In sum, studies tend to support the idea that both economic and political factors matter. Interestingly enough, both Portuguese and Spanish citizens themselves select corruption as the main factor of mistrust (Belchior et al. 2014, CIS 2012, Jaime-Castillo et al. 2016).

Specific support: Satisfaction with the way parliaments work and other attitudes

One of the first systematic studies of attitudes towards the parliament in Portugal analysed aggregate data on the perceptions citizens had of the parliament's performance in the 1980s and 1990s (Magalhães 2002). Most expressed a moderate assessment of the parliament's performance, as indicated by 52 to 74 per cent of the respondents choosing the response "so-so". One of the trends that was identified were popularity peaks immediately after the legislative elections, indicating a sort of honeymoon effect at the time of its renewal. These mild assessments were often considered a result of the perception of parliament as a distant political institution, and that it was seen as too dependent on single-party majoritarian governments, concentration of powers on the executive and strict party discipline (Magalhães 2002). A third relevant finding is that attitudes towards the *Assembleia da República's* performance displayed less variation than that of the government (Veiga, 1998; Magalhães 2002).

In Spain, the available data on satisfaction with the way the parliament works covering the 90s and 2006 (CIS) show variation, but usually less than half of the Spanish citizens declared themselves pleased with the performance of their national parliament (28 to 46 per cent). This pattern is probably related to the fact that most citizens see MPs as devoting too much attention to irrelevant issues, a position held by 61 per cent of the Spaniards (CIS 2010). Based on the data reported by Oñate (2003) these perceptions have worsened.

Also, there has been a degradation in the way citizens assess the informational role of parliamentary debates. In Portugal, if in 2006-2008 around 6 in every 10 respondents agreed completely or partially that parliamentary debates contributed to inform citizens (Viegas 2006, Freire and Viegas 2009), in 2012 and 2014 this figure was about 20 percent points lower (Freire et al. 2012, Belchior et al. 2014). In Spain, there has been a steady growth in the support to the idea that the parliamentary annual debate is boring, (28 per cent in 2010 and 41 per cent in 2014), with a decreasing trend in terms of how many citizens find it useful (from 23 per cent in 2010 to 14 per cent in 2015). Citizens considering this

debate useful started to be outnumbered by those bored by it in the mid-2000's (CIS 1992-2015).

Also the general reputation of MPs is indeed an issue in the Iberian Peninsula. In 2014, only 16 per cent of the Portuguese believed that MPs tried to fulfil the promises made during the election campaign once elected (Belchior et al., 2014). Given this general panorama, it is not surprising that in 2008, 58 per cent of the Portuguese believed that the number of mandates in the parliament should be limited by law (Freire and Viegas 2009), and a few years later 87 per cent were completely or partially in favour of reducing the current number of parliamentary seats to the minimum allowed by the Constitution (Freire et al. 2012). In 2005, 57 per cent of the Spaniards believed that the main reason for someone to run for a parliamentary seat was the power and influence stemming from the position, and only 26 per cent believed that the desire to participate in the resolution of the country's problems or fight for her own and her party ideals were the main motivations (CIS 2005).

Focus and Style of Representation

According to Eulau et al. (1959), there are two important aspects in the analysis of political representation, which strike us as quite useful in the study of parliaments: the focus and the style of representation. The former has to do with who MPs represent (the population as a whole, their voters, their party, their electoral district?), while the latter addresses the question of the criteria they use in the decision-making processes (do and should they act following the mandate of their voters, follow party guidelines or vote according to their own judgement?) (see also Méndez-Lago and Martínez 2002). We explore these two dimensions of representation below.

Focus of Representation

The most recent data show that Portuguese citizens tend to have a rather party-centric vision of representation: MPs represent first and foremost their parties and, in the second place, their voters (Table 1). The Portuguese Constitution's article 152, states that the MPs represent the country as a whole and not the district they were elected in. Only 30 to 40 per cent of the Portuguese consider that this is the case, and similar proportions believe that the MPs indeed represent the electoral districts in which they ran. No matter what Portuguese citizens think things are like, and even though they think it is essential for MPs to represent the Portuguese population as a whole (Freire et al. 2017), for 64 per cent of the Portuguese, it is only natural that MPs try to benefit their electoral districts (Freire et al. 2012).

Table 1: Who do MPs represent?

	Portugal		Spain	
	2008	2012	2005	2012
His/her electoral district	40	31	4.0	6.9
His/her voters	50	39	23.8	18.3
The population in general	41	31	35.8	31.6
His/her party	67	68	27.8	30.3
Specific social groups	36	<i>Not asked</i>	1.7	0.5

Note: Questions and modes of reply are slightly different. In Portugal, several questions were posed, and the figures are the percentage of citizens who agree completely or agree with each possible focus of representation. In the case of Spain, respondents had to select only one option.

Source: Freire and Viegas 2009, Freire et al. 2012, CIS 2005, 2012.

Arguably, the biggest group of Spanish citizens believe that MPs representation is more in line with the formal design of the Congress of Deputies, intended to be a chamber to represent the population, whereas territorial representation is guaranteed by the Senate. The most relevant group defends that MPs indeed represent the population as a whole, a similar percentage consider they represent their party, and a very small group sees them as representing the electoral districts they were elected in (Table 1). This universalistic conception of representation was even stronger in the nineties (Méndez-Lago and Martínez,

2002). Interestingly, there is a considerable degree of coherence between how Spanish citizens and MPs regard the focus of parliamentary representation (Méndez-Lago and Martínez 2002). However, Spanish citizens long for a greater connexion between MPs and their electoral districts, with 87 per cent of the citizens believing that they should visit them more often in order to be in touch with the problems and claims of their constituents. 66 per cent consider that they should live in the district in which they were elected (CIS 2005). The closed-party lists that are controlled, in most cases, by the central organs of the parties, the prominence of the main leader, and the party-focused campaigns, do not create any incentives for MPs to create more personal links with their constituencies (Carey and Shugart 1995).

The idea of MPs as efficient representatives of the citizenry is not predominant at all. In 2002, 43 per cent of the Portuguese believed that members of the *Assembleia da República* had little or no idea of what citizens think, while only 30 per cent said that MPs had a fair or good grasp on public opinion concerns (Freire et al. 2003). In Spain, this latter opinion was expressed by a similar proportion of citizens (Freire and Meirinho 2012). These figures placed the two Iberian countries slightly above average in a sample of democracies (Freire and Meirinho 2012). Moreover, in the dawn of the 21st century, only about 30 per cent believed that the opinions of the MPs reflected perfectly or fairly well those of their voters – a figure that placed Portugal well below the average of 33 democratic regimes, and well below Spain, where two thirds of the citizens felt their opinions fairly or well represented by MPs (Freire et al. 2003, 2006, Freire and Meirinho 2012). In the last ten years, the proportion of Portuguese citizens holding this positive attitude plummeted and reached a worrisome 9 per cent in 2014 (Freire and Viegas 2009; Belchior et al. 2014; Freire et al. 2017).

Also, in 2008, only 1 in every 5 Portuguese citizens believed that the laws reflected the interests of the majority of the population, and 60 per cent agreed to some extent that private interests had too much weight on the law-making process (Freire and Viegas 2009).

This latter figure has risen to 75 per cent in 2012 and 81 per cent in 2016-2017 (Freire et al., 2012, 2017). Onãte (2003) reports data showing that, before 2000, 60 per cent of the Spaniards considered that MPs did not defend their interests at all, or hardly. In 1998 the majority of Spaniards considered that they were very or considerably concerned with their own interests and those of their party and hardly or not worried at all with the needs of their voters.

Style of Representation

In this case, the representative can act as trustee, delegate, or politico (Eulau et al., 1959:749-750). In the first case, he/she will act freely and will take decisions according to his/her own assessment of the situation. If the representative acts as delegate, he/she will subordinate its independence to the will or mandate of a superior authority. Finally, representatives act as politicos when they follow both orientations. The more complex the decisions, the closer the role of representatives to that of the trustee (idem: 751).

Surveys carried out in the last ten years show that in the case of conflict between the position of the party to which the representative belongs, and the voters, a majority of the Portuguese think that the MPs behaviour should be driven by the opinions of voters. This figure has risen from 70 per cent in 2008 to 88 per cent in 2016-2017. About 3 out of each 4 Spanish and Portuguese citizens contend that MPs should decide according to the opinions of voters in their electoral district even if they hold a different opinion on the matter (Freire and Viegas 2009, CIS 2012, Freire et al. 2012, 2017). In other words, when the party and the voters are confronted, the citizens want the MP to be their Delegate. The Portuguese seem to be more divided when faced with a conflict between the opinion of an individual MP and the party she belongs. While in 2008 almost half of the voters (49 per cent)³ thought that in situations like this the vote should be in line with the party position (Freire and Viegas 2009), in 2012 and 2016-2017 the most expressive opinion (44 and 65 per cent,

³ 20 per cent were unwilling or unable to respond.

respectively), was that the MP should vote according to his own opinion (Freire et al. 2012, 2017). A similar question was posed to Spanish citizens in 2007 and 2009. In both years the most relevant group (around one third) supported the idea of MPs behaving in accordance with their own judgement (CIS 2007, 2009). Previous data on this, regarding the 1984-1997 period, shows a completely divided Spanish society regarding this matter (Méndez-Lago and Martínez 2002). In sum, when the conflict affects the party and the MP, both Portuguese and Spaniards prefer that representatives play the role of trustee, and does not subordinate his/her actions to those of the party.

However, this view coexists with a clear contradiction, as the predominant view amongst both Spanish (around 70 per cent in CIS 1994-2011; Méndez and Martínez, 2002) and Portuguese citizens (57 per cent in 2008 according to Freire and Viegas 2009) think that if an MP abandons the party they must give up their seat and be replaced by another MP of the same party. In other words, the majority thinks that MPs must be subordinated to the party, in accordance with the electoral system rules (proportional, based on closed and blocked lists defined by the party organization).

Candidate Selection and Electoral System

Candidate selection and gender quotas

Both in Portugal and in Spain, recent years have been marked by a debate on who should be in party lists and how they should be selected. In this section, we focus on the Iberian citizen's attitudes regarding less party-centric modalities of candidate selection and the implementation of quotas fostering the presence of women in parliament and therefore tackling known and overwhelming asymmetries in terms of descriptive representation.

In the last decade, an overwhelming majority of Portuguese citizens – up to 80 per cent - believed it would be important that party members were able to select MP candidates by means of primaries (Freire and Viegas 2009; Viegas 2009). The Spanish public opinion, on its side, seems to be divided between those in favour of opening up the election of the

candidates of political parties to all of society (35-40 per cent) and those who would leave it in the hands of the party members, or of party members and sympathizers (around 35 per cent altogether). Few (around 12-13 per cent), however, would leave it in the hands of the internal party organs (CIS 2007, 2009). In sum, in both countries there seems to be support for more inclusive, democratic and transparent modalities of candidate selection in a context of closed and blocked list electoral systems.

What about gender quotas? In 2006, almost half of the Portuguese (48 per cent) was neither in favour nor against gender quotas in candidate lists (Viegas, 2009). In spite of this, the measure would be implemented that same year (Baum and Espírito-Santo 2012). At that time, only 23 per cent clearly supported this measure. However, only two years later, the support for this measure almost doubled (Freire and Viegas 2009). In 2012, 66 per cent of the population were in favour of gender quotas (Freire et al. 2012). This trend is certainly not unrelated with an evolution in terms of how citizens perceive the gender misrepresentation in Parliament. In 2008, when asked if the fact that 4 out of 5 MPs are male posed a serious problem for the Portuguese democracy, the citizens were divided, and 45 per cent disagreed with that statement (Freire and Viegas 2009). Four years later, only 28 per cent discard this fact as a threat to the quality of democracy in Portugal (Freire et al. 2012). In Spain, citizens are divided in this respect, as two similar groups (43%) back and reject, respectively, the idea that the parties should guarantee some positions for specific groups such as women or youngsters in their lists (CIS 2012).

The electoral system

Reforming the electoral system used in legislative elections is a recurring topic in the Portuguese public sphere, with parties, journalists and experts discussing the need to implement reforms and dissecting the details of concrete proposals, but the panorama has been of considerable stability – in fact, the main change was the reduction in the number of parliamentary seats – from 250 to 230 in the turn to the 1990s (Freire and Meirinho 2012;

see also Sampaio 2009). To what extent is this stability linked to the fact that public opinion is satisfied with the system currently in practice?

The average citizen's notion of the electoral system is often quite generic and crude (Curtice 2004, Freire and Meirinho 2012), which makes the specificities of electoral systems a difficult issue to explore in terms of mass opinions and attitudes; nevertheless, in the last decades survey data on how citizens regard the electoral system's main features has been collected both in Portugal and Spain. We now proceed to analyse the most relevant data available.

In 2008, 41 per cent of the Portuguese supported the ideal of proportional representation in the parliament, with a close resemblance between the vote shares and seat shares each party gets, but an expressive minority of 32 per cent would favour a certain degree of disproportionality leading to the most voted party getting the majority of the parliamentary seats (Freire and Viegas 2009). Interestingly enough, an overwhelming majority of MPs interviewed on the same occasion were supportive of the ideal of proportionality (around 80 per cent), a finding that the authors explain as being due to the fact that the Portuguese electoral system is disproportional enough to permit single-party majorities, and that proportionality is a constitutional requirement (Freire and Meirinho 2012). Four years later, the support for the proportional representation ideal had grown considerably, being favoured by 52 per cent of the citizens, and the preference for a disproportional result shrunk to 18 per cent (Freire et al. 2012).

But citizens are not pleased with all the aspects of the current electoral system. For instance, over the last ten years, an overwhelming majority of Portuguese citizens has been in favour of ending the monopoly political parties have in terms of presenting lists in legislative elections, being therefore favourable to having groups of citizens running as well. The support to this change to the electoral system is growing from about two thirds of the respondents in 2006-2008 to 72 per cent in 2012 and 81 per cent in 2014 (Viegas 2009; Freire et al. 2012, Belchior et al. 2014).

The goal of creating more favourable conditions for a closer relationship between MPs and their constituents lies at the heart of most proposals for electoral reform in Portugal presented in the last two decades, since the distance between those who represent and who are represented is believed to be the main handicap in the current system (Freire and Meirinho 2012, Lobo and Santana-Pereira 2015). Citizens tend to see this goal as desirable, and there is a longitudinal trend of increase in terms of support to this idea: in 2008, 58 per cent of the citizens in Portugal agreed that it should be possible to vote more for candidates and less for parties; more recently, this opinion is held by roughly 3 in every 4 interviewees (Freire and Viegas, 2009, Freire et al. 2012, 2017).

In Spain, the pattern is similar, with two-thirds of the citizens in favour of such an electoral reform, and one third even consider closed lists to be antidemocratic (CIS 2005, 2007). The biggest group of Spaniards (30-40%), however, does not have an opinion about the electoral system, at least in 2007.

As it stands, the current electoral system does not foster links between voters and candidates. Ballot structures include only party labels and, as a consequence voters do not know candidate names. The percentage of Spanish citizens who remember the name of the candidate heading the list of the political party they voted for in the most recent legislative elections tends to be very low (Oñate 2003). Data collected in 2000 estimated it to be of around 35 per cent (CIS 2000). In turn, data from the Portuguese Election Study of 2002 shows that less than 30 per cent of the Portuguese citizens believed they were able to recall the name of any candidates running in their own electoral district, only a few months after the election had taken place, and only 19 per cent mentioned a correct name (Freire et al. 2003). This lack of knowledge about the specific candidates is unsurprising if one considers the fact that in both countries legislative elections use closed and blocked party lists. Citizens formally vote for parties, not for candidates nor for candidate lists.

Conclusions

This chapter sought to provide a panoramic understanding of the Portuguese and Spanish citizens' attitudes towards their parliaments, by analysing the available survey data and previous studies on this matter.

The results allow us to conclude in favour of the existence of general diffuse support, but often negative attitudes towards the parliament in both countries. A majority of Spanish and Portuguese citizens consider the Parliament a relevant institution. Nevertheless, most citizens are uninterested in the parliament's activities and unable to recall the name of its president. Distrust is considerable, but there is a great deal of volatility in this attitude, with the great recession taking a toll on the trustworthiness of parliaments in the eyes of Portuguese and Spanish citizens. The literature on these two cases identifies as main explaining factors political attitudes not directly related with the parliamentary itself (corruption, political responsiveness, support for the incumbent party and assessment of the government's record), but the economy also matters. Specific support for the parliament is as feeble as trust. Citizens are not too enthusiastic when asked to assess this institutions' performance.

In what regards attitudes in terms of the focus and style of representation, the Portuguese display a rather party-centric perception of representation, while the Spaniards display a more universalistic conception of the representation offered in parliament. Also, both the Spaniards and the Portuguese believe that MPs have no idea of what the average citizen thinks, and especially the latter do not feel that the MPs positions reflect the opinions of voters. In both countries the idea that personal motivations and interests outweigh the desire to represent the people's interests is predominant.

Regarding the style of representation, most citizens think that MPs should represent their voters' opinions when these are in disagreement with the party's position or the MPs themselves. When MPs disagree with their parties, citizens are split, but there is a trend of increasing consensus surrounding the idea that MPs should vote according to their own positions. In spite of this, and of very critical attitudes towards parties citizens think that if

an MP abandons their party, they should also abandon the seat, in consonance with the logic of party democracy (Méndez 2006; Méndez and Martínez 2002).

Lastly, citizens support a more participatory modality of candidate selection, and quotas that ensure a better balance in the presence of men and women in parliament. In both countries, the time is ripe for changes fostering a more personalized vote instead of closed lists.

Against this negative backdrop, and despite the scarcity of recent data, it seems there are nowadays good news for Iberian MPs, as trustworthiness in the Parliament is on the rise. However, the positive trend observed in the last few years may only be partly due to the performance of parliamentary institutions *strictu sensu* and more directly connected with the general political and economic landscape.

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