

European
Elections monitor

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RESULT

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa is re-elected President of the Republic of Portugal in the first round

Incumbent President of the Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa was re-elected on 24 January for a second term as Portugal's head of State in the first round of voting. He took 60.7% of the vote, well ahead of Ana Gomes (Socialist Party), who was running without the backing of the Socialist Party and who won 12.97% of the vote. André Ventura, leader of the populist movement *Chega* (CH), came third with 11.9% of the vote. The other four candidates under 5% of the vote.

Turnout was the lowest ever recorded in a presidential election, at 39.49%; political observers expected an even higher level of abstention of over 70% due to the current explosion of coronavirus cases in Portugal and the lockdown of the population. Outgoing president, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, was also concerned about turnout. "*It only takes a 70% abstention for a second round to be almost inevitable,*" he said a few days ago. To counter low turnout and the reluctance of the Portuguese to go to the polls, early voting was organised on 17 January. Nearly 200,000 voters had then fulfilled

their civic duty. Volunteers even went out to collect ballots from 13,000 people who had been quarantined or confined to old people's homes.

Portugal, which has been in a state of health emergency since the beginning of November (two months of restrictions and curfews in the regions most affected by the pandemic), has witnessed an upsurge of 85,000 cases and 1,500 deaths in the last week. The country ranks first in the world in terms of the number of new cases and deaths compared to its population over this period and is second only to the British enclave of Gibraltar. A new record of daily deaths was set on 24 January, the day of the presidential election, bringing the total number of COVID related deaths to 10,500 since the beginning of the pandemic. Since 15 January, the Portuguese have been subject to a second general lockdown. Shops, restaurants and, additionally since 22 January and for a fortnight, schools, nurseries and universities have been closed.

Presidential elections in Portugal

24th January 2021

02

Results of the Presidential election of 24 January 2021 in Portugal

Turnout: 39.49%

Candidates	Number of votes won	% of votes won
Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (Social Democratic Party-Peoples Party, PSD-PP)	2 533 799	60.70
Ana Gomes (Socialist Party, PS)	541 345	12.97
André Ventura (Chega, CH)	496 653	11.90
Joao Ferreira (Communist Party, PCP)	180 473	4.32
Marisa Matias (Left Bloc, BE)	164 731	3.95
Tiago Mayan Gonçalves (Liberal Initiative, IL)	134 427	3.22
Vitorino Silva (aka Tino de Rans), (React, include, recycle, RIR)	122 743	2.94

Source : <https://www.presidenciais2021.mai.gov.pt/resultados/globais>

After the results were announced, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa thanked the Portuguese for their "*renewed confidence in conditions which are so much more difficult*" than 5 years ago, promising to make the fight against the pandemic his "priority". "*Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa is perceived as someone approachable and attentive, he has demonstrated great presence in the hard times, such as the fires of 2017 in particular. He was able to show the empathy that the population particularly needed at the end of years of serious economic crisis,*" said Patricia Lisa, a researcher at the Royal Elcano Institute for Strategic Studies. "*The other candidates are not really challenging him, they come to take advantage of the election campaign to get their messages across and to strengthen their image in preparation for the local elections next autumn,*" said Antonio Costa Pinto, professor of political science at the University of Lisbon.

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa has been criticised for his proximity to Prime Minister Antonio Costa (PS) alongside whom he happily coexists. This has

undoubtedly benefited André Ventura, who stands as an anti-establishment candidate. Although he did not take second place on the podium, his result reflects that the populist movement is progressing, a novelty in Portugal, which was an exception in Europe. Cécile Gonçalves, historian at the School of Higher Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS), sees this as a sign that "*the young Portuguese democracy is developing into one like any other*", adding "*until now there had been an aversion to extremes. The National Renovator Party made 0.2%-0.5%, it was a residual phenomenon, but since the economic crisis of 2008, however, an anti-immigration discourse is making its voice heard, similar to the Islamophobic one, although there are few Muslims in the country*".

The televised debate between Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and André Ventura was the most followed of the campaign. The election debates enjoyed a large audience due to the curfew that obliges the Portuguese to stay at home.

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa is 72 years old and holds a law degree from the University of Lisbon. He taught law before becoming a journalist. He founded and managed the weekly newspaper Expresso in 1973. After the Carnation Revolution of April 1974 and Portugal's return to democracy, he was one of the founders of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and was elected member of the Assembly of the Republic, the only house of Parliament, without relinquishing his academic career. In 1981, he became Secretary of State in the government of Francisco Pinto Balsemao (PSD). In 1982, he was appointed Minister of Parliamentary Affairs. In 1989, he failed to seize Lisbon, defeated by Jorge Sampaio (PS). In 1996, he was elected chair of the PSD, a post from which he resigned three years later after the failure of his coalition project with the People's Party (PP). For many years, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa contributed to a regular programme on the television channel TVI before abandoning it to embark on the 2016 presidential campaign. Elected head of State with 52% of the vote on 24 January 2016, he has been re-elected in incredibly special circumstances. The man, nicknamed Marcel by his compatriots, is very much appreciated and knows how to take time to discuss issues with his compatriots when he can.

been important figures within their political parties. Nor are the Portuguese afraid of political cohabitation. On several occasions (1987, 2006 or 2016, for example), they have elected a President of the Republic from the political side opposite the parliamentary majority they had brought to power a few months earlier.

Moreover, during the presidential election, the Portuguese are less interested in appointing a partisan head of State than a referee of the political game. This election is therefore often highly personalised even if, paradoxically, Portuguese heads of State have always

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