

The Socialist Party wins the absolute majority in the general elections in Portugal

The Socialist Party (PS), led by outgoing Prime Minister Antonio Costa, won the early legislative elections in Portugal on 30 January. While the latest opinion polls indicated that it was running neck and neck with the Social Democratic Party (PSD), it finally secured an absolute majority in the Assembly of the Republic, the single chamber of Parliament. The Socialists received 41.68% of the vote and won 117 seats, 9 more than in the previous parliamentary elections on 6 October 2019.

The Social Democratic Party (PSD), a centre-right party led by Rui Rio, did not succeed in its bid and was left behind the Socialists: it obtained 27.80% of the votes and 71 elected members (-8). *"Bipartisanship still holds up well in Portugal because the entire anti-party, anti-corruption fringe does not vote. The Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Party are still expected to control about two thirds of the seats in parliament"*, anticipated Antonio Costa Pinto, professor at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon.

Chega (Enough) (CH), the right-wing populist party of Andre Ventura, became the third political force in the country with 7.15% of the vote and 12 elected members (+11). The breakthrough of the populists is real and important in Portugal where this political tendency was previously absent, making the country a kind of exception in Europe. The Liberal Initiative (IL), led by Joao Cotrim de Figueiredo, came fourth with 4.98% of the vote. It won 8 seats (+7).

The radical left, which was at the origin of the snap parliamentary elections, collapsed. The Left Bloc

(BE), whose spokesperson is Catarina Martins, won 4.46% of the vote and took 5 seats (-14) and the Unitary Democratic Coalition (CDU), led by Jeronimo de Sousa, got 4.39% of the vote and halved its number of elected members: 6 (-6).

On 27 October 2021, the Unitary Democratic Coalition and the Left Bloc, allies of the Socialist Party in parliament, joined the four right-wing parties in the parliament in their opposition to the 2022 Finance Bill. The bill failed to pass and the President of the Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, announced his decision to dissolve the Assembly of the Republic, which led to the organisation of early legislative elections. The last legislative poll on 6 October 2019 had already strengthened the Socialist Party at the cost of its radical left-wing allies, the legislative elections on 30 January 2022 have confirmed this state of affairs. *"This ideological decision (the rejection of the budget) will have an electoral cost for both the Left Bloc and the Unitary Democratic Coalition, which will be penalised for not having supported a budget that was modest but not an austerity budget,"* warned Marina Costa Lobo, a political scientist at the University of Lisbon.

The Social Democratic Centre/People's Party (CDS/PP), a Christian Democrat party led by Francisco Rodrigues dos Santos, long allied with the Social Democratic Party with which it has often governed and now plagued by strong divisions, collapsed, taking 1.61% of the vote and losing its 5 deputies.

People-Animals-Nature (PAN), the party that defends the rights of animals and nature, of which Ines Sousa Real is the spokesperson, lost one

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member. With 1.53% of the vote, it won 3 seats. LIVRE (Libre) (L), a left-wing environmentalist party, kept its deputy with 1.28% of the vote.

Turnout was higher than expected. It stood at 57.96%, 6.53 points more than in the previous parliamentary elections on 6 October 2019.

To combat abstention, the government had allowed confined or quarantined voters (there are currently over

500,000 people in quarantine in Portugal) to break their isolation to vote. They were allowed to go to some of the designated polling stations one hour before closing time. Thousands of voters in quarantine or confined to old people's homes were also able to fulfil their civic duty, thanks to volunteers who came to collect their votes at home. Finally, in an effort to reduce the population mixing, some 315 000 people had already started to vote ahead of time on 23 January.

Results of the legislative elections of 30 January 2022 in Portugal

Turnout: 57,96%

Political Parties	Number of votes won	% of votes cast	Number of seats
Socialist Party (PS)	2 246 983	41,68	117
Social Democratic Party (PSD)	1 498 605	27,80	71
Chega (CH)	385 543	7,15	12
Liberal Initiative (IL)	268 414	4,98	8
Left Bloc(BE)	240 257	4,46	5
Democratic Unitarian Coalition (CDU)	236 630	4,39	6
Social Democratic Centre démocrate social/People's Party (CDS/PP)	86 578	1,61	0
People-Animals-Nature (PAN)	82 250	1,53	3
LIVRE (Free) (L)	68 971	1,28	1
Madeira First	50 634	0,94	3
Democratic Alliance (AD)	28 520	0,53	3
Others	85 521	3,65	0

Source : <https://www.legislativas2022.mai.gov.pt/resultados/globais>

"An absolute majority is not absolute power, it does not mean governing alone, it means responsibility, it means governing with and for all the Portuguese people (...) It is the victory of humility, confidence and stability", declared the outgoing Prime Minister António Costa when the results were announced.

He had asked the Portuguese people to give the Socialist Party the strength to govern in a stable and sustainable way. He had campaigned on the SP obtaining an absolute majority before modulating his

speech after the Social Democrats' rise in the opinion polls. His compatriots finally listened to Antonio Costa. "Despite a certain disenchantment with the Socialist Party, the majority of voters consider that Antonio Costa has more skills and experience to govern than Rui Rio", analysed Marina Costa Lobo. "The victory of Antonio Costa is a gamble for stability and continuity. The Portuguese people have punished those who were deemed responsible for the political crisis," said Patricia Lisa, political analyst at the Elcano Institute.

The legislative elections have exposed the fragmentation of the Portuguese right. The internal divisions that affect each of the two main parties - the Social Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Centre/People's Party - have allowed, on the one hand, a "smaller" party such as the Liberal Initiative to progress and, on the other, the right-wing populist formation Chega to strengthen.

The Socialist Party has promised to increase the minimum wage from €705 to €900 per month by 2026. 800,000 people receive this wage in Portugal. It also wants to launch a national debate on the reduction of working time (4-day week). Finally, it has promised to lower income tax and reduce VAT from 21% to 17% by the end of the legislature.

Portugal will receive €16.6 billion in European funds allocated to it in the context of the health crisis. The main issue of the 2022 finance bill, this substantial sum should help boost the country's economy but also improve the purchasing power of the Portuguese.

Antonio Costa, 60 years old and born in Lisbon, is the son of the writer Orlando da Costa, originally from Goa. He graduated in law and political science from

the University of Lisbon and practised as a lawyer. He joined the Socialist Party and was elected Member of Parliament in 1991 and became Secretary of State for Parliamentary Affairs in 1995, rising to the rank of Minister two years later. He was then Minister of Justice (1999) before being elected MEP in 2004. The following year, he returned to government and was appointed Minister of the Interior. In 2007, Antonio Costa won the mayor's office in Lisbon and was re-elected in 2013. The following year, he was elected secretary general of the Socialist Party.

In 2015, he became Prime Minister of Portugal after the PS was defeated by the PSA in the legislative elections. Antonio Costa allied himself with the Unitarian Democratic Coalition and the Left Bloc, a union known as *geringonça*, a term referring to a makeshift arrangement. This heterogeneous alliance lasted four years, to everyone's surprise. In 2019, the outgoing Prime Minister once again led his party to victory, but he chose to stop governing with the parties on the radical left.

The 2022 legislative elections were the third consecutive victory for the PS led by Antonio Costa.

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