



Representation in times of crisis: deputy–voter congruence on views of representation in Portugal

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Abstract

This article compares how Portuguese voters and deputies evaluated the role of legislators and the representation process before and after the economic crisis (2008 and 2012, respectively). It makes use of a set of six issues characterising two views of representation: one institutional–independent and another participatory–mandatory. It also includes an analysis of two core policy issues. The research draws upon surveys of Portuguese voters and deputies carried out in 2008 and 2012. Findings reveal significant changes in the patterns of representation, a tendency for greater deputy–voter correspondence on the issues of representation, and lesser correspondence among government parties on core policy issues. Finally, voters' views of representation seem equally significant when explaining levels of congruence both before and after the crisis.

Keywords

Economic crisis, representation patterns, congruence, system support, Portugal

Introduction

To what extent have the economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures forced upon Portugal since 2010 affected the way voters and deputies think about the representation process? And to what extent has the crisis affected the connection between the positions adopted by the electorate

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and its representatives? With the help of data linked to the emergence of the economic crisis, this article addresses an important question that has seldom been considered: the relevance of economic conditions for the views and performance of representation.

Portugal represents a fitting case study with which to explore this question. Following the financial collapse in the US (2007–2008), and soon after the outbreak of the Greek sovereign debt crisis (early 2010), Portugal was identified as a high-risk investment. In March 2011, following the aggravation of an economic crisis, it requested the intervention of international lenders, the so-called Troika (the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)). The intervention programme requiring the government to implement a series of severe austerity measures created a downward spiral of recession involving rising unemployment, declining state revenue, persistent budget deficits, new austerity measures and deeper recession. One result has been a sharp decline in the standard of living in Portugal.

The economic downturn is presumed to have had a substantial impact on the functioning of the political system. It has already been shown that it changed the discourse of political leaders, as well as the channels of voter political participation (Blyth, 2013; Monastiriotis et al., 2013; Ponticelli and Voth, 2011; Rüdiger and Karyotis, 2013). It has also been documented that voters are concerned particularly about policy issues such as employment and economic growth, which are issues driven by fiscal policy (Rudder, 2013: 356), and that dissatisfaction regarding these policy outcomes, if intense and prolonged, can lead to policy and institutional changes (Cooper, 2013).

Political parties are generally considered to be the institutional link between citizens and the political sphere, and are thus at the core of these potential institutional changes in times of profound economic crisis. In Portugal, the increased dissatisfaction with, and distrust of, the political system, and of political parties in particular, began before the crisis (Magalhães, 2004). New data confirms that these attitudes have been exacerbated by the crisis (Teixeira et al., 2013). The literature suggests that economic conditions are closely linked to the functioning of democracy and political representation (Lefkofridi et al., 2012; Schmidt, 2009). It is thus reasonable to expect that the severe economic crisis affecting Portugal since 2010 has also affected the performance of representation and the way in which voters and deputies assess this process.

Much of the existing research on congruence has been descriptive, comparing elites with voters (e.g. Converse and Pierce, 1986; Esaiasson and Holmberg, 1996; Miller et al., 1999; Powell, 2000; Schmitt and Thomassen, 1999; Valen and Narud, 2007). There is also substantial literature on dynamic representation (e.g. Bonafont and Palau, 2011; Erikson et al., 2002; Kang and Powell, 2010; Soroka and Wlezien, 2005; Stimson, 1995). However, only a few studies have focused on party–electorate policy congruence (Belchior and Freire, 2013; Bonafont and Palau, 2011; McAllister, 1991; Soroka and Wlezien, 2005; Thomassen, 1994; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999) and, as far as we are aware, none has explored the impact of the economic crisis on views of representation or on changes in the relationship between deputies and voters.

This article has three major goals, all focused on comparisons before and after the emergence of the economic crisis in Portugal (2008 and 2012, respectively):

- first, to explore how much the economic crisis is associated with a change in representation patterns, among both voters and deputies;
- second, to assess levels of deputy–voter congruence using measures of congruence related to two views of representation and policy issues;
- finally, to assess the impact of the electorate’s views of representation on the extent of congruence.

The fact that Portugal is one of the countries that experienced the brunt of the economic crisis makes it an appropriate case study of its potential political consequences. The Portuguese electoral system is generally regarded as one that generates few incentives for the creation of strong ties between deputies and voters. Indeed, Portugal is regarded as one of the European countries in which such ties are at their weakest. Parties control the electoral process (Portugal has a proportional system with closed lists) and parliamentary activity (which is highly disciplined). Consequently, the incentive to establish direct ties between voters and elected representatives at the constituency level is very weak (Belchior and Freire, 2013; Leston-Bandeira, 2012). The question explored here is whether the crisis led to a change in representation preferences, especially among voters.

The limitations of a single case study are partially offset by the uniqueness of a profound economic crisis combined with the opportunity to use appropriate data: here we rely on exceptional data facilitating the comparison of Portuguese deputies and voters in 2008 and 2012.

Another limitation of this research stems from studying only two points in time: 2008 and 2012. It is therefore impossible to be sure any detected changes can be attributed to the economic crisis. We suggest that, while significant differences in findings between these two points should probably be regarded as being due to the crisis, one should not ignore the possibility of other potential causes.

We begin by presenting a review of the literature on representation and the economic crisis before going on to provide an overview of the research methodology and a discussion of the theoretical expectations and then presenting and interpreting the empirical findings.

On representation and the economic crisis

Democracy can be defined as a system of governance in which all members of society have an equal right to participate in the decision-making process (Beetham, 1993: 55, 61–66). However, the concept of democracy is neither that simple nor consensual; indeed, there are several models of democracy (Held, 1996). We can identify two ideal models of representative democracy: one linked to elitist theories, the other based on theories of participatory democracy. While both models aim at promoting the common good of the community, they differ in terms of the priorities at stake and on the role of political power in pursuing the common good. Modern interpretations of the former model rely strongly on the Schumpeterian procedural perspective of democracy: that political expertise lies with elites, thus legitimating their power, and that the public should abstain from taking part in the political process between elections (Schumpeter, 1996 [1942]). Conversely, theories of participatory democracy are based on the principle of the equality of all individuals and on scepticism regarding the elite's ability to serve the common good. These tenets suggest that the best way to achieve the common good is through public political participation (e.g. Barber, 1984).

Inspired by Burke, and closely related to these two types of democracy, Eulau et al. (1959) proposed a typology of representative foci and styles of representation. The former involves the conflict between options of representatives for local or national representation, the latter between mandatory and independent representation. The mandatory style of representation stipulates that the views of voters and their interests should determine the political behaviour of their representatives, while the independent style claims that the actions of representatives should be independent from those of their constituents. Although different combinations are possible, an arrangement that matches local foci and the mandatory style of representation gives more decision-making power to citizens, while an arrangement combining national foci and the independent style tends to concentrate power at the elite level and reduce the influence of voters on policy making.

However, the typology outlined by Eulau et al. ignored the role of political parties, which are fundamental players in parliamentary systems (Andeweg, 1997). That is why we conceive two ideal visions of representation combining both previous models of democracy and Eulau et al.'s typology regarding the style of representation. The institutional-independent vision gives priority to institutions over citizens, conceptualising representation as an outcome of political parties and party leaders acting in accordance with an independent style of representation. Parties and party leaders are supposed to have the expertise and skills required to identify the common good of the community, while voters are expected to engage in limited intervention in politics due to their limited political competence. In contrast to this model, the participatory-mandatory vision is more concerned with taking voters' views into account in the decision-making process. In this case, voters' participation is welcome and their ability to identify the common good is acknowledged. Therefore, party leaders should decide and act by taking voter preferences into account.

In many studies, representation has been measured by the extent of congruence between the positions of voters and their representatives, since a reasonable level of congruence indicates a well-functioning liberal democracy (e.g. Pitkin, 1967; Wessels, 1999: 137). The main conclusion from research on deputy-voter congruence is that it is extremely difficult to identify a clear trend or pattern. Some scholars argue that congruence tends to be low (Miller et al., 1999; Pierce, 1999; Thomassen, 1994), while others provide evidence that policymakers more often than not follow public preferences (Erikson et al., 2002: Chapter 8; Kang and Powell, 2010; Manza and Lomax Cook, 2002). Above all, congruence apparently varies greatly and largely depends on the issue at stake (Manza and Lomax Cook, 2002; Thomassen, 1994: 255, 1999: 45–52; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999: 199), and tends to be greater for ideological or highly-politicised issues (Holmberg, 2000: 163–165; Mattila and Raunio, 2006: 437–439; Pierce, 1999: 30; Thomassen, 1994: 254–256, 1999: 53). Although it is a rough measure, deputy-voter congruence can be considered a valid estimate by which to assess representation as it is conceptualised here.

There is some extensive previous research on the topic of economic difficulties and their consequences for representation. The impact of budget deficits and economic crises on the positions adopted by political parties and on the relationship between voters and Congress has been studied in depth by scholars of American politics (e.g. Blyth, 2013: Chapter 2; Cooper, 2013; Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2013; Rudder, 2013; Thurber, 2013) and to a lesser extent by scholars of British politics (e.g. Brandenburg and Johns, 2013). The economic crisis in Southern Europe has also generated a burgeoning literature over the last few years, and has generally identified the following political consequences: the risk of ungovernability and instability of cabinet formation (and the emergence of technocratic cabinets); acute austerity policy agendas; the decline of conventional participation and the rise of protests and even violent demonstrations; an increase in electoral volatility; growing distrust and dissatisfaction with the political elite and the democratic system; realignment, fragmentation and polarisation in party systems; and the emergence of new patterns of party representation (e.g. Gorjão, 2012; Rüdiger and Karyotis, 2013; Teixeira et al., 2013; Verney and Bosco, 2013). Among these consequences, those involving the relationship between voters and deputies are the most important, both because they are related to many of the consequences outlined above and because representation is at the core of democracy. Notwithstanding the importance of this literature, the impact of the crisis on representation remains an understudied topic, which provides the rationale for this article.

Data, measurement and theoretical expectations

This analysis focuses on the five political parties currently represented in the Portuguese parliament. The centre-left Socialist Party (PS – Partido Socialista) and the centre-right Social

Democratic Party (PSD – Partido Social Democrata) became the country's largest parties immediately following the Revolution of 25 April 1974. They are commonly considered catch-all parties (Lopes, 2004: 122) and have been alternating in government (either alone or in coalition) since 1976.

To the right of the PSD is the Democratic Social Centre/Popular Party (CDS/PP – Partido do Centro Democrático e Social/Partido Popular). Closest to the cadre party type (Lopes, 2004: 33, 36–38), it represents mainly Christian-democratic values and conservative voters. Despite its small size in electoral terms (usually below 10%), it has managed to present itself as a party with the potential to participate in government coalitions and it has been included in several governments, including the one that took office in 2011: a majoritarian PSD and CDS/PP coalition.

The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP – Partido Comunista Português) is a Marxist-Leninist party and the only mass-based party (Lopes, 2004: 79). Since 1987, the PCP has stood for election in coalition (CDU – Coligação Democrática Unitária) with the Greens (PEV – Partido Ecologista 'Os Verdes'). It experienced a relative electoral decline, to slightly below 8%, in the most recent legislative elections (2011), although it experienced limited recovery in the 2014 European elections, when it obtained almost 13% of the votes.

Finally, the Left Bloc (BE – Bloco de Esquerda), the most recent party to emerge in the Portuguese parliament, is a left-libertarian party. Its electoral performance was initially very low, with percentages of around 2%, but its score has improved, albeit never attaining 10%. In the 2011 and 2014 elections, it fell back to around 5%.

This study of the views of deputies and voters on representation before and after the economic crisis is based on surveys of deputies and voters conducted in 2008 and 2012–2013. The 2008 survey of deputies (April and October) returned 143 interviews out of 230 (61.7%), while the 2012–2013 survey (June 2012–May 2013) obtained 123 valid interviews (53.5%). In both cases, a good representation of the parties represented in the Portuguese parliament was achieved.¹ Regarding voters, this study relies on two surveys (2008 $n = 1350$; 2012 $n = 1209$) conducted in early 2008 (March–July) and late 2012 (September–October). Both surveys were based on a multi-stage representative sample of the adult population living on the mainland. The four surveys were coordinated by a research team at ISCTE-IUL (further information on these surveys can be found online at: <http://er.cies.iscte-iul.pt/node/42>).

In order to contextualise the Portuguese case study, the analysis makes use of complementary surveys: Members of the European Parliament survey (1996) (at: <https://dbk.gesis.org/dbksearch/sdesc2.asp?no=3078&db=e&doi=10.4232/1.3078>); the PIREDEU Candidate Survey (2009) in which candidates to the European Parliament were interviewed (at: www.piredeu.eu/public/Candidates.asp); and two surveys on representation in Spain administered to citizens (Estudio CIS N° 2588, Representación y Participación Política en España (2005), and Estudio CIS N° 2.930 Congruencia Ideológica entre Electores y Representantes Políticos (2012), both available at: www.cis.es/cis/opencms/ES/8_cis/).

After assessing the consequences of the economic crisis for the views of representation among both voters and deputies, the level of deputy–voter congruence within political parties is calculated using percentages, means and Achen's centrism (1978). Centrism is the strongest measure for assessing how closely the opinions of party elites mirror those of their average (or median) supporters (Golder and Stramski, 2010 : 94).

It is measured by the following formulas:

$$\check{S}_j = \sum (a_{ij} - r_j)^2 / n_j$$

where a_{ij} is the position of voter a_i in party j , r_j the mean position of the representatives of that party, and n_j the size of the sample,

$$\check{Y}_j^2 = \sum (a_{ij} - \bar{a}_j)^2 / (n_j - 1)$$

which measures the variance for the electorate, where \bar{a}_j is the median position of voters; and

$$\check{C}_j = \check{S}_j - \check{Y}_j^2$$

which measures centrism in party j . High centrism values indicate a mismatch between the voters and the elite, while low values indicate the opposite.

It is reasonable to assume that the greater the degree of congruence between the preferences of the electorate and their representatives, the greater the probability the electorate will feel well represented and that legislators (and the government) will act in accordance with the electorate's preferences. This maxim applies equally well (if not better) when examining congruence in specific policy orientations and evaluations and preferences concerning aspects of the functioning of the political system and its institutions.

In the case of the US, over the centuries support for majoritarianism has grown alongside a disdain for partisanship and plebiscitary politics and a preference for the trustee legislative model. As a result of greater expectations of political performance and extreme dissatisfaction with the performance of government and Congress, the question about whether the traditional doctrine is outmoded has been asked (Cooper, 2013: 415–416, 427–428). In Portugal, the electoral system strengthens the role of parties as a link between voters and their representatives to the extent that a trustee style of representation has apparently been gaining ground (Leston-Bandeira, 2012). This suggests that an institutional-independent vision of representation may now characterise the Portuguese case. However, a conclusion that may be derived from Figure 1 is that a different model of representation may be developing as the crisis has increased the distance between Portuguese voters and their representatives, and has fed a growing mistrust of the performance of the political system.

Figure 1 suggests that a strong negative trend emerged in the wake of the crisis. Although changes in the values of significant items between 2008 and 2012 are modest, most are statistically significant.² The crisis apparently reduced the level of voter satisfaction with democracy in Portugal from a level that was already low before the crisis, and in voters' view has diminished the value of political parties for democracy and the importance of parliament. In brief, these findings suggest a loss of popular confidence in core democratic institutions. In terms of overall change, the electorate appears to be moving away from traditional and conventional types of representation – no matter how modest – towards a 'participatory' type of democracy.

Therefore, during a period of growing dissatisfaction with the political system, our main theoretical expectation is that the economic crisis has been pushing voters (but not deputies) towards a more participatory–mandatory type of representation at the expense of an institutional–independent type. We also expect to find that the crisis has moved voters away from their representatives both in terms of their conception of representation and their political positions.

To test these hypotheses, we analyse six variables and two policy issues. The first four variables are measured using an agreement scale that runs from one (completely disagree) to five (completely

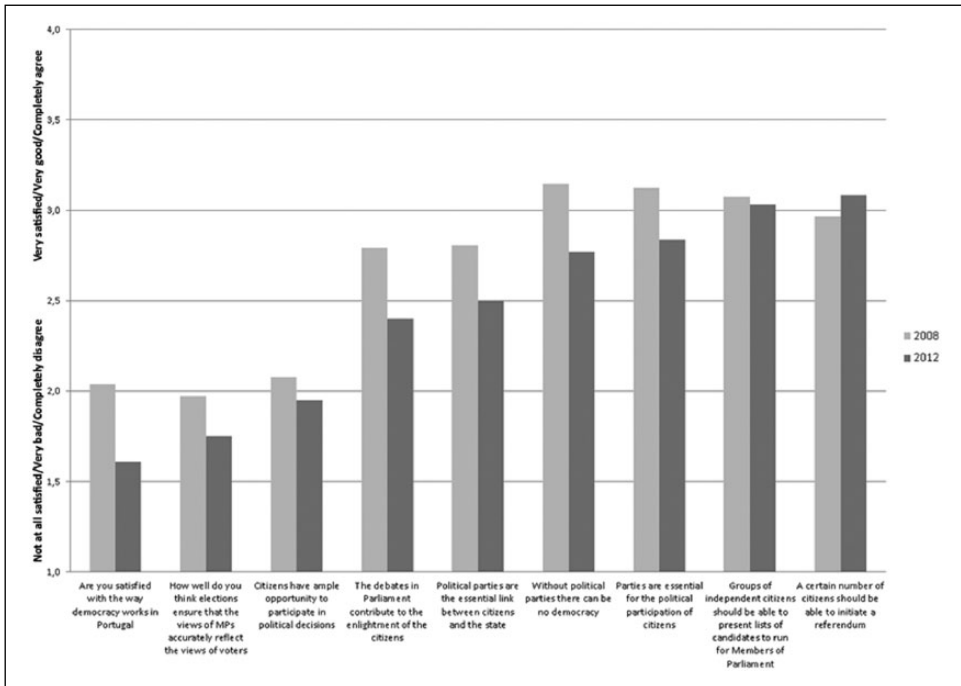


Figure 1. Portuguese citizens’ evaluations of the political system before and after the crisis (mean values). Source: Portuguese MP’s Surveys (2008 and 2012).

agree); the remaining two variables are measured by a scale that runs from one (completely disagree) to four (completely agree):

- ‘A deputy represents their party above all’;
- ‘A deputy represents their constituents above all’;
- ‘A deputy represents their district/region above all’;
- ‘A deputy represents the entire population above all’;
- ‘Debates in parliament contribute to the enlightenment of voters’;
- ‘Groups of independent citizens should be able to submit lists of candidates to run for parliament’.

The policy issues are:

- ‘Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people’;
- ‘Current levels of social protection must be maintained even if doing so requires raising taxes’.

The six variables seek to measure the two views on representation being examined: one, institutional-independent (‘deputies should represent their own party above all’, and the importance of debates in parliament), the other, participatory–mandatory (‘deputies should represent their constituencies, district/region, the entire population’, and the possibility of groups of independent citizens running

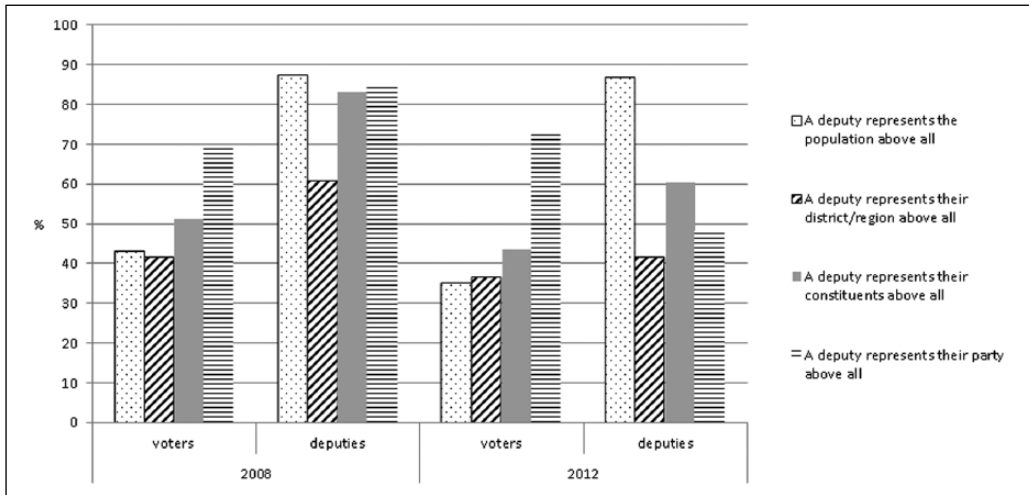


Figure 2. Portuguese voter and deputy agreement with the statements: 'A deputy represents above all...' ('completely agree' and 'agree').

Source: Portuguese MP's Surveys (2008 and 2012).

electoral slates for parliament). For the performance of parties, we hypothesise that a high level of deputy–voter congruence in respect of representation or policy issues reflects the prevalence of the participatory–mandatory view.

Findings

We begin our empirical analysis by presenting some comparative data. Table 1 (available at: <http://ips.sagepub.com/>) presents the positions of members of the European Parliament (MEPs) on the role of legislators between 1996 and 2009. Although our focus is not on MEPs, but on national deputies, this data (which is the only data available for this purpose) allows us to compare the Portuguese case across countries and time. The table shows that in most countries legislators attribute less importance to representing people in their countries and constituencies as well as to their party supporters. This trend can be interpreted as a shift away from the participatory–mandatory view of representation. At the same time, MEPs tend to give more importance to representing people in Europe and, albeit in a smaller number of countries, to representing their party. This notwithstanding, legislators give more importance to representing party supporters in an increasing number of countries, which suggests the participatory–mandatory vision remains dominant after all.

Portugal is not part of this trend. It demonstrates increasing importance in almost all roles in 2009, and in both 1996 and 2009 the most important role remained representing people in the country. By contrast, Greek and Spanish legislators – in common with those in most other countries – thought representing party supporters was the most important role in 2009. However, it should be noted that by 2009 the crisis had already begun.

Next, we consider the questions used to analyse the congruence between Portuguese deputies and voters.³ We first explore straightforward measures of congruence. Looking at Figures 2 and 3, by 2012, as a result of the large decline in the proportion stating that the main role of the deputies is to represent their parties, Portuguese deputies appear to have moved significantly away from the institutional–independent view of representation. The positions of voters on these questions appear comparatively stable in comparison to those of deputies.

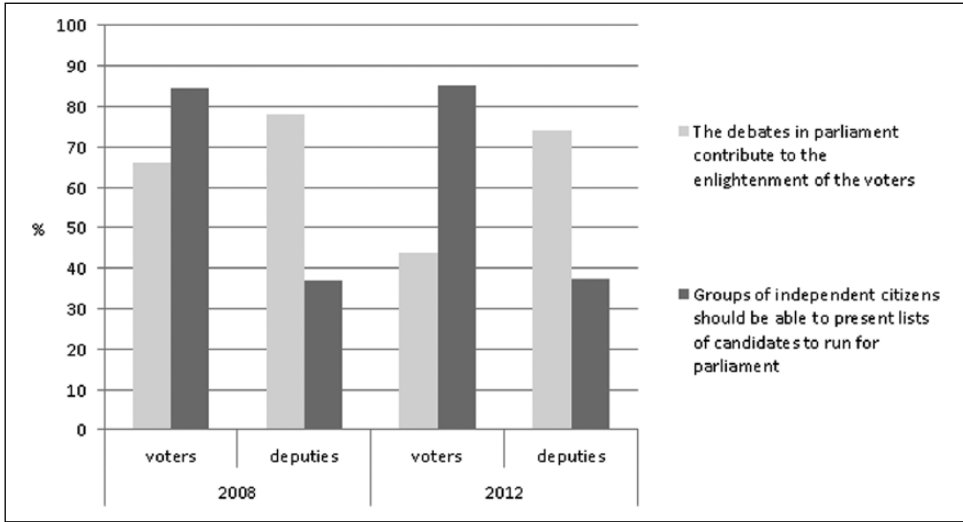


Figure 3. Portuguese voter and deputy agreement with the following measures ('completely agree' and 'agree').
 Source: Portuguese MP's Surveys (2008 and 2012).

However, this picture is reversed when it comes to the educational/socialising effects of parliamentary debates. In this case, there is a relative stability of opinion among deputies, a large majority of whom appear convinced of the value of debates. However, while a majority of voters in the 2008 sample supported this idea, the reverse was true four years later.

On the question of the value of a low institutional threshold for voters running for parliament, we observe no significant change: in both years there is an incongruence between voters and deputies on this question. Both before and after the crisis, an overwhelming majority of voters apparently value the ability to submit lists to run for parliament, while on both occasions a clear majority of deputies reject this position.

Figures 4 and 5 suggest that Spanish voters believe political parties in particular take party structures into account and, to a much lesser extent, party voters and districts in making decisions. This is similar to what Figure 2 shows for Portuguese voters. An increased proportion of voters estimate that the institutional-independent form of representation is dominant.

Turning now to intra-party congruence regarding the six representation issues and two policy issues,⁴ we recall that the idea 'a deputy represents their party above all' reflects the institutional-independent view of representation. Table 2 (available at <http://ips.sagepub.com/>) reveals the existence of strong support for this view across all parties, with a tendency towards decline in 2012 among government and main opposition party deputies (PSD and CDS/PP, with a fall of 54.9% and 37.4%, respectively, and PS, with a decline of 39.3%). It should be noted that these three parties signed the memorandum with the Troika and have been in office since 2008 (the PS until June 2011, then the PSD and CDS/PP in coalition). The growing disagreement with the idea that deputies should represent their parties can be partially explained by the fact that a political programme that was not part of the manifesto of any government party was imposed from the outside. This imposed programme was not the result of any discussion or negotiation with national leaders, but was rather imposed as a condition that had to be accepted in full before Portugal could receive a bailout.

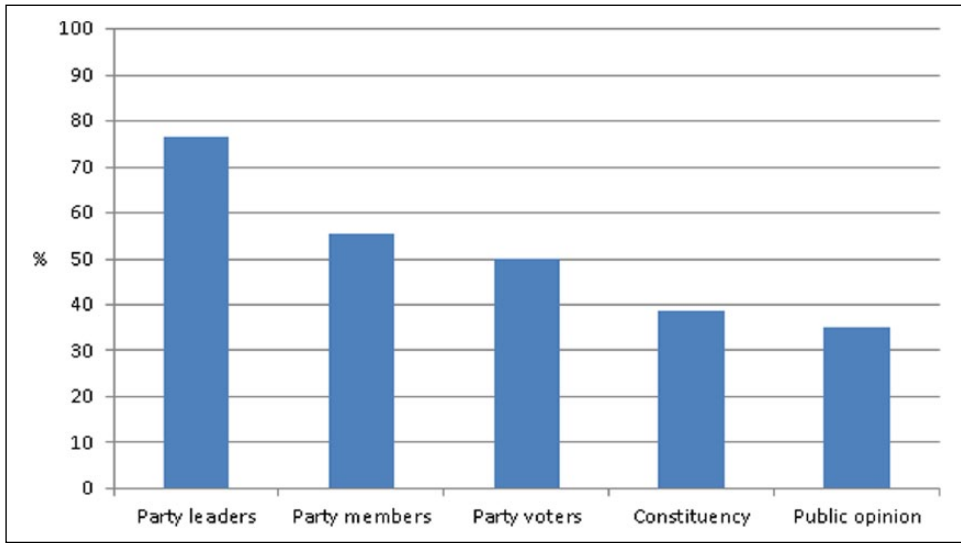


Figure 4. Spanish citizens' estimate of how much deputies take different groups into account when deciding policy, 2005 ('very much' and 'much').
 Source: Representación y Participación Política en España (2005).

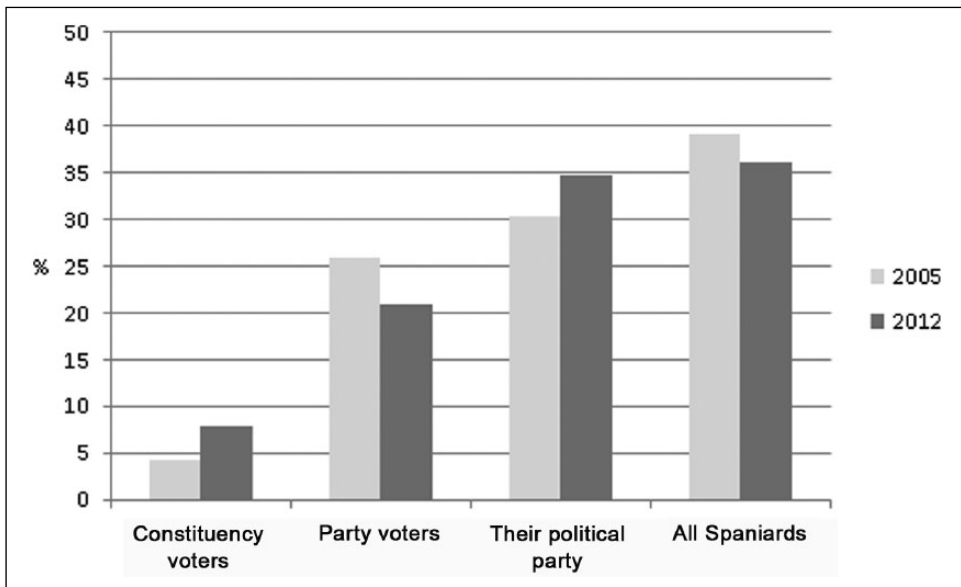


Figure 5. Spanish voter perceptions of whom deputies represent above all else (2005–2012).
 Source: Representación y Participación Política en España (2005).

Legislators for the parties of the left became less supportive of the idea that deputies should represent their parties above all (although the decline is small). However, there is no significant change among voters in respect of their agreement with this statement, except for CDS/PP voters,

who express greater agreement with the idea. This exception might be explained by the fact that, because it was the junior partner in the coalition in office in 2012, its representatives were more able to oppose the position taken by its senior coalition partner. This behaviour might have been interpreted by the party's voters as putting the party ahead of both the senior coalition partner and the Troika's political programme.

With the exception of the CDU, there is a decline in deputy and voter agreement with the idea that 'a deputy represents their constituents above all': that is, a participatory–mandatory view. The decline is more evident among deputies representing the largest parties, and is most striking among supporters of the BE. In 2008 voters were already less likely to agree that deputies represent their constituents, and in 2012 deputies moved closer to the position of the voters. In 2012, only 50% or less of voters supported the idea that deputies represent their constituents, and although the percentage remained higher among deputies, it decreased significantly in 2012.

There was generally less support for the ideas that 'a deputy represents the population above all' and that 'a deputy represents their district/region above all' than previously. In certain cases there was a significant decline in 2012.

The statement that debates in parliament contribute to the enlightenment of voters had less support in 2012, although there was a slight increase among BE, PSD and CDS/PP deputies. Voters for all parties strongly support the idea that groups of independent citizens should be able to submit lists of candidates to run for parliament (80% or more in both years), a position that is strongly opposed by the majority of deputies (except BE deputies). However, in 2012 deputies supporting the coalition government expressed greater support for this possibility.

Regarding the two policy issues, the pattern of left parties (BE, CDU and PS) is similar: deputies express greater support than voters for both issues (income and wealth redistribution, and maintaining existing levels of social protection). However, since voters were more supportive of these policies in 2012, the result is an increased convergence of voters and deputies in these parties.

In summary, although there is a clear tendency, especially among the 'Memorandum' parties in 2012, towards disagreement with the idea that deputies represent their parties or their constituents above all, the data shows no evidence of a growing dissonance between deputies and voters on issues of representation. Indeed, deputies seem to follow the same tendency as voters, although compared to deputies, voters of all parties tend to believe that deputies are more likely to represent their own parties and less likely to represent their constituencies. The pattern is different in respect of the two policy issues: in 2012 voters were more supportive of redistributive and social protection policies, probably due to the austerity measures that followed in the wake of the crisis. This shift has promoted convergence with the deputies of left-wing parties, and divergence with those of right-wing parties—especially those of the PSD, the senior partner in the governing coalition. Representation and policy issues therefore exhibit apparently different trends following the outbreak of the crisis; furthermore, there is greater policy congruence between left-wing parties and their voters.

Since lower figures for centrism represent a higher correspondence between parties and their voters, the most useful way of looking at Table 3 (available at <http://ips.sagepub.com/>) is by identifying the negative signs of the differences between 2008 and 2012: that is, an increasing correspondence between deputies and voters. In respect of deputies representing their party above all, the CDU exhibits the highest negative difference, meaning an increase in deputy–voter correspondence. CDS/PP also demonstrates a negative difference, while the differences in the remaining parties are close to zero or are positive, as is the case of the PSD. This means that the decline in support for deputies supporting this role (seen in Table 2) does not translate into a better correspondence with voters for the PSD in 2012.

A general increase in congruence takes place in 2012 on the question of whether a deputy represents their constituency above all. This increase is due to the disproportionate decline in

agreement with this idea among deputies, which brings them closer to their voters. Largely due to the decline in support for this idea among deputies, there is little difference between deputies and voters on the claim that deputies represent the population or their district/region above all.

The two remaining policy indicators – parliamentary debates and the possibility of groups of citizens running for parliament – show either negative differences or low values for centrism. This means that either deputies or voters were already close to the party in 2008, or that they moved closer in 2012.

The centrism totals by party and year restate previous findings: an unexpected general trend towards increasing correspondence on representation issues. This is consistent with other research that has identified a modest tendency towards a higher level of congruence in catch-all parties compared with the most ideological parties (Belchior, 2013). The PS and PSD display lower levels of centrism than the CDU or CDS/PP, which are among the most incongruent parties. In general, changes in congruence occurred in a different direction than expected, and deputy–voter correspondence indeed increased by 2012.

Centrism confirms previous findings about differences between representation and policy issues. In respect of the latter: congruence has increased for left-wing parties that are typically more likely to defend redistribution and social protection policies (which voters supported more widely in 2012), and declined for the parties in government that were responsible for implementing the austerity measures. One point that deserves to be highlighted is that by using centrism, a more precise measure of congruence, the increase in incongruence for CDS is clarified: the party was most in tune with its voters on these policies in 2008, and least in tune in 2012.

It is not possible to isolate the impact of the economic crisis on the change in the levels of congruence on representation issues. However, it is highly likely that the crisis and its political and social effects have contributed significantly to this change, especially because the increase in levels of deputy–voter correspondence is not primarily due to a change in the opinions of the voters but rather to deputies becoming more receptive to more participatory forms of representation. The crisis also seems to have played a role in policy issues: only left-wing parties (that have not participated in government) experienced increased congruence with their voters in 2012.

To assess the impact of voter views on representation on the extent of congruence both before and after the crisis we ran a regression model on the pooled dataset of the 2008 and 2012 studies (Table 4, available at <http://ips.sagepub.com/>). The dependent variable is the squared difference between voter positions and the mean position of party deputies (corresponding to Achen's (1978) proximity), for each of the six representation issues involved, with lower values for the dependent variables representing an increase in congruence. Apart from the participatory–mandatory versus the institutional–independent view of representation, the independent variables are assessment of the economy, media exposure and party identification.⁵ To measure the significance of voter positions on the participatory–mandatory view compared to the institutional–independent view, an additive index was constructed using two variables to measure voter positions on the following statements: 'parties are the main link between voters and the state' and 'voters have ample opportunity to participate in political decisions' (1=completely disagree; 5=completely agree).⁶

Since the goal is to explore how much the economic crisis is associated with a change on matters of representation (as the literature suggests: Lefkofridi et al., 2012; Schmidt, 2009), voters' assessments of the state of the economy were used as an individual proxy to assess the importance of the crisis. Media exposure is used as a measure of political information, since more informed voters are more likely to agree with their parties' views of representation (for a literature review see Belchior, 2013: 355–356, 358). A year dummy was also included, as well as interaction terms between that dummy and the main independent variables to detect possible changes in the impact of the

independent variables while the crisis was at its peak. Party dummies were also included as independent variables, since the type of party has proved important in other research (Belchior, 2013).

There appears to be a strong inverse relationship between a participatory–mandatory view of representation and congruence, which best explains the distance between deputies and voters within parties (note that the negative signs of the coefficients indicate an increase in MP deputy–voter correspondence). There is no significant change over time in this relationship. One possible explanation is that voters who tend to adopt the institutional–independent view of representation are more likely to mirror their deputies’ own assessment of the representation process. Voter perceptions of the state of the economy in Portugal do not, therefore, have a significant impact on congruence.

Final considerations

Using surveys of Portuguese deputies and voters at two points in time (2008 and 2012), this article has examined how Portuguese deputies and voters view and assess the role of legislators and the representation process before and after the economic crisis. While one can only indirectly infer the impact of the crisis from the research design, the results provide insights about the possible effects of the economic crisis on views on representation and performance, and can serve as a benchmark for future research.

Our findings suggest that a change in representation patterns occurred between 2008 and 2012 among both voters and deputies. One of the major and unexpected findings is that there is a tendency towards increased deputy–voter congruence on issues involving representation in the wake of the crisis. This is partially due to the apparent movement of Portuguese deputies away from the institutional–independent model and toward a more participatory–mandatory view of representation (albeit to a lesser extent than that of voters, and with a significant distance remaining between the two groups). The electorate has moved away from traditional and conventional understandings of representation toward the participatory view of democracy, reinforcing a tendency already evident in 2008. Voters support the possibility of groups of independent citizens running for parliament and agree that the decision-making process is unresponsive to constituencies. Although the trend is towards greater correspondence, voters are more likely than deputies to believe that deputies represent their own parties rather than their constituencies. The analysis of two policy issues – income and wealth redistribution and maintenance of social protection levels – highlights the split between voters and government party deputies following the outbreak of the crisis: congruence between deputies and voters has declined or increased only slightly among those parties.

Finally, voter views of representation patterns seem to influence the level of deputy–voter congruence. The gap between voters and deputies narrowed between 2008 and 2012 as a result of deputies moving towards more participatory views of representation. Further, the fact that voters adopted views closer to the institutional pole of the continuum also explains deputy–voter congruence.

Perhaps responding to increased criticism and dissatisfaction on the part of the electorate, the 2008 economic crisis seems to have alerted legislators to the fact that a closer connection with voters was desirable in order to better overcome the social consequences of the crisis. However, our findings suggest little in terms of a movement of parties toward the policy positions of their supporters – apart, that is, from the two policy issues, where we discovered that deputies from the parties in government are moving away from their supporters, while deputies from the main opposition party are moving closer to the party’s voters. Future research should test whether the stated preferences of the legislators match their legislative output.

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Notes

1. The sample of deputies per party in 2008 was (the number of parliamentary deputies in parenthesis): BE 4 (8); CDS-PP 8 (12); CDU 8 (14); PSD 45 (75), and PS 76 (121). In 2012–2013 the sample of MPs per party was: BE 4 (8); CDS-PP 13 (24); CDU 9 (16); PSD 58 (108), and PS 39 (74).
2. The test of means report to the following hypotheses: the mean of the variables is equal in both years: $H_0: \mu_{2008} \geq \mu_{2012}$, or the mean of the variables is different when comparing 2008 and 2012: $H_a: \mu_{2008} < \mu_{2012}$. t test results are as follows, in the order of Figure 1: $t(2496.852)=14.676$; $t(2387.550)=8.363$; $t(2456.932)=5.232$; $t(2270.056)=9.193$; $t(2321.725)=-8.282$; $t(2341.43)=-10.667$; $t(2286.694)=12.734$; $t(2329.657)=11.994$; and $t(2099.277)=1.621$. Only this last one is not significant.
3. The t test results of mean differences are as follows, in the order of the Figures: For voters: $t(2338.436)=0.707$; $t(2376.602)=4.684$; $t(2303.924)=3.173$; $t(2337.315)=5.088$; $t(2329.657)=11.994$; and $t(2099.277)=1.621$. All tests are statistically significant, except the penultimate. For MPs: $t(191.068)=7.224$; $t(258.739)=-0.576$; $t(254.350)=2.858$; $t(223.915)=4.541$; $t(242.661)=-0.0292$; and $t(236.284)=0.950$. The first and fourth indicators are not significant.
4. The link to a party is via the party list for deputies and party identification for voters.
5. The questions for voters in 2008 and 2012 were: ‘What do you think of the state of the economy in Portugal? Would you say the state of the economy is:’ (five point scale: from ‘very good’ to ‘very bad’); and a composite index of ‘How often do you follow politics in media? How often do you follow politics in the news, on television, radio, daily papers or on the internet?’ (‘every day’, ‘several times a week’, ‘once or twice a week’, ‘less often’, ‘never’).
6. These items were selected because they clearly reflect the two opposite ends of the continuum with respect to views on representation. Deputies were not asked these questions, but since here we are only interested in voters, we were able to select these items for the construction of our index.

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