

Chapter Seven

Mapping the Political Landscape: A Vote Advice Application in Portugal

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On Sunday, 27 September 2009, Portugal held general elections for the *Assembleia da República*, the unicameral national parliament. The ruling Socialist Party (PS – *Partido Socialista*) lost half a million votes compared to 2005, polling 37 per cent of the vote and winning 97 of the 230 seats in Parliament. As a result of these elections, the PS lost its absolute majority – the first in the party’s history – and was forced into an uncomfortable minority government. The electoral results saw a considerable fragmentation of the vote (see Table 7.1). The elections were held at the end of a few difficult years in Portugal, both from an economic and a political perspective. Indeed, the Socialist mandate (2005–2009) was marked by economic crisis and political scandals affecting especially major political figures in the country, belonging to the major parties. In the run-up to the election there were considerable doubts that the socialists would be able to win another absolute majority, with polls showing that this was increasingly unlikely. Thus, party’s issue positions became quite important as they may signal coalition potential. Polls also showed that around twenty per cent of voters were unsure who they would vote for. This was not particularly surprising since in the 2005 (anticipated) elections, according to post-electoral surveys, more than one third of the electorate decided their vote during the campaign. This phenomenon reflects to a large extent the weak partisan loyalties of Portuguese voters. In fact, party identi-

fication is relatively low when compared to other European democracies and the trend has shown a steady decrease over last decades (Freire, 2006a).

Table 7.1 – Legislative Elections in Portugal: Results from 2005-2009

	2005			2009		
	Votes	%	Seats	Votes	%	Seats
BE	365,000	6.35	8	558,000	9.81	16
CDU	433,000	7.54	14	447,000	7.86	15
PS	2,590,000	45.03	121	2,078,000	36.56	97
PSD	1,654,000	28.77	75	1,655,000	29.11	81
CDS-PP	416,000	7.24	12	593,000	10.43	21
Others	122,000	2.13	0	176,000	3.1	0
Null Votes	170,000	2.96	-	177,000	3.11	-
Total	5,750,000	100	230	5,684,000	99.98	230

Source: <<http://www.legislativas2009.mj.pt>>

Thus, the political landscape of 2009 was particularly volatile. The evident majoritarian turn which Portugal underwent from 1987 onwards, with the progressive concentration of the vote was under threat since at least 2005 (Lobo, 2009). The 2009 elections confirmed the strengthening of the smaller parties, and the decline of the PS and the centre-right PSD (*Partido Social Democrata*), the two centrist parties which have alternated in government for almost two decades in Portugal. Thus, whereas these two parties polled respectively 78 and 74 per cent in 2002 and 2005, in 2009 they only managed to gain 66 per cent of the vote. This electoral change, pre-announced in the periodic surveys before the election, and subsequently confirmed in the election results signals meant that a Vote Advice Application (VAA) would be particularly important in the context

of the 2009 electoral choices presented to the Portuguese. Not only that, but the abstention trends, coupled with the growing dissatisfaction with politics which exists in the country (Freire and Magalhães, 2003) meant that such an Application might contribute to mobilise voters who are relatively unanchored. Moreover, it should be noted that the political landscape displayed an increasing complexity due to the formation of some new political parties which run for the first time in the 2009 European elections.

A Vote Advice Application was thus developed for Portugal by the authors of this chapter in cooperation with *Kieskompas BV*, the specialized VAA enterprise directed by political scientist André Krouwel of the Free University of Amsterdam. The Portuguese 'electoral compass' – *Bússola Eleitoral* – was launched online on 20 August 2009, five weeks before the general elections. It contained 28 questions that users could answer to and then compare their ideological position with the position of 12 political parties participating in the elections. By Election Day, more than 350 thousand visits to www.bussolaeleitoral.pt were registered. Of these, around 175 thousand consisted of active user sessions that lasted on average more than fifteen minutes. To our best knowledge, this is the largest sample ever gathered on political views in Portugal.

This chapter has three goals. First, we provide information about the development of the *Bússola Eleitoral*, particularly with regard to statement selection and calibration of parties. Second, we discuss the extent to which the *Bússola* presents a realistic picture of the Portuguese ideological landscape. Third, we present descriptive statistics about the users of the *Bússola* and conclude by discussing the extent to which these data help us understand electoral behaviour in Portugal. We start by briefly explaining the Portuguese political landscape.

7.1. Party system

During the democratic period, two centre and “catch-all” parties have dominated the Portuguese political system at both the electoral and governmental level: on the left, the Socialist party (PS); on the right, the Social Democratic Party (PSD). On the contrary, small parties have traditionally played a secondary role. While the Social Democratic Centre – Popular Party (*Centro Democrático Social – Partido Popular* – CDS) has shared several times government positions especially with the PSD, the Communist party (PCP – *Partido Comunista Português*) – one of Europe’s last remaining orthodox communist parties – has always lacked the legitimacy needed to form a coalition with the socialists, thus remaining excluded from the national government. The Renewal National Party (PRD), electorally successful after its creation in 1985 by Ramalho Eanes, former President of the Republic, failed to consolidate and virtually disappeared after the second electoral contest. Since 1999, however, a new radical left-wing and post-materialist party, the Left Block (BE – *Bloco de Esquerda*), achieved parliamentary representation, and has seen a constant and steady electoral growth.

Since 1987 the Portuguese party system has shifted from consensual dynamics to “majoritarianism” (Lobo, 2001; Magalhães, 2003; Jalali, 2007). This trend clearly emerges if we observe the decreasing effective number of electoral parties (ENEP) and the share of the vote gathered by small parties. In this respect, 2009 marks a clear shift towards a more “consensual” political system similar to the one that characterized the first decade of the Portuguese democracy, with a relatively low concentration of votes, high fragmentation and centrifugal tendencies. Thus, these elections contributed to change the trend toward a two-party system

displayed since 1987. Patterns of discontinuity with respect to previous elections emerge if we observe some basic indicators related to the fragmentation of party system. On the one hand, the ENEP in 2009 was 4.1 compared with 3.3 and 3.1 in 2005 and 2002, respectively (in terms of seats the fragmentation raised from 2.6 to 3.1); on the other the concentration of the vote in the PS and the PSD was only 67 per cent in the 2009 elections, while during the second decade of Portuguese democracy the average was 77 per cent of the vote (and 86 per cent in terms of seats). If the change in party system format seems quite remarkable, the formation of a new socialist minority government suggests a change also in the dynamics of inter-party relationship. From this perspective it is important to uncover the dimensionalities of the policy space in order to understand the position of parties, as well as patterns of party interactions and the recent dynamics of the Portuguese party system.

Perhaps the most used indicators of policy competition are party positions along the left-right continuum. This dimension does not tell us what the main characteristics of Portuguese policy space dimensionalities are. However, it may represent a useful clue for examining the evolution of party system dynamics over time, the formation of governments, and also for uncovering whether the ideological differences among Portuguese parties have been blurred, thus decreasing the complexity of the policy space or not.

According to voters' perceptions, the placement of the main parties on the left-right axis has remained substantially stable throughout the democratic period (Table 7.2). If we look at the degree of polarization, it is worth noting that there is little change in the distance between both extreme and the main parties. During the first decade it seems that the movement for extreme parties is toward an increasing radicalization, while the two moderate parties are perceived

to have shifted slightly to more rightist positions. However, since the 1990s the degree of polarization diminished or remained stable, displaying in 2005 a position similar to the one presented at the end of the 1970s. This finding is also confirmed by data from both the Comparative Manifesto Project and expert surveys (Laver and Hunt, 1992; Benoit and Laver, 2006; Freire, 2006a). Nevertheless, it should be noted that if we take into account the emergence of the Left Block, a slight increase in the distance between the more extreme parties took place in the more recent period.

Table 7.2 – Left-right positions of political parties in Portugal:
Voter perceptions, 1978-2005

Parties	1978	1985	1989	1993	1999	2002	2005
PCP	2.08	1.86	1.7	1.23	2.0	1.72	2.15
PS	4.21	4.5	4.8	4.27	4.7	4.6	4.7
PSD	6.27	6.18	7.2	7.08	6.9	7.31	6.96
CDS-PP	7.13	7.31	8.7	7.38	8.2	7.72	7.27
<i>Polarization</i>							
Extreme parties	0.56	0.61	0.78	0.68	0.69	0.67	0.57
Main parties	0.23	0.19	0.27	0.31	0.24	0.30	0.25

Party polarization is calculated based on Sani and Sartori's (1983) formula.

Source: Freire (2006b: 387); Lobo (2007: 91).

Overall, if we look at the relationship between the ideological dimension and party competition two aspects stand out. The first is that the distance between the two main parties is small when compared to other West European countries (Freire, 2006a). The second is that the emergence of the BE introduced greater complexity in party competition on the Left of the ideological spectrum. As we will see, the BE also was responsible for introducing post-

materialist issues in the political agenda and new topics related to citizenship and individuals as, for example, gender and sexual rights, racism and third world injustice.

A second and important source for understanding the relevant themes for political parties in Portugal is the Comparative Manifesto Project. The methodology employed in this project is based on the “salience theory”. The main idea behind it is that parties will tend to highlight in their party programs the issues which are most relevant to their interests and their constituents. Topics are identified *ex ante*, (see: Klingemann *et al.*, 2006) and the coder then attributes each phrase of the program to one of the topics. By adding up the number of times one topic is discussed it is possible to conclude which are the most salient issues for each party. Also, given that many of the topics identified are considered ideological, it is also possible to conclude on the left-right positioning of parties. Table 7.3 summarizes the topics which were most salient for Portuguese parties in the two legislative elections prior to 2009 (the elections in 2002 and 2005).

Both in 2002 and 2005 there are great similarities in the topics which parties choose to highlight. In 2002 and 2005, the most salient issues for the five parliamentary parties are: social justice, the expansion of social services and education, technology and infrastructure. Environmental protection, government efficiency, art/culture/sports/leisure, and regulation of capitalism are the next most salient topics. Together, these eight topics are the most prevalent for the two elections and the party manifestos of the five parties considered. Three of these eight topics are considered left-wing, namely education and social services expansion, and the regulation of capitalism, whereas none of them is considered right-wing.

Table 7.3 – Most salient topics for Portuguese parliamentary parties, 2002-2005: A summary

Topic	How often in Top-10 most salient topic?	How many parties cite topic?		
		2002	2005	TOTAL
Social Justice	2	5	5	10
Expansion of Education	2	4	5	9
Technology/Infrastructures	2	4	5	9
Expansion of social services	2	5	4	9
Government Efficiency	2	3	5	8
Environmental protection	2	3	5	8
Art, sports, culture, media	2	5	3	8
Regulation of Capitalism	2	3	4	7
Law and Order	2	3	1	4
Government effectiveness	2	3	1	4
Non-economic groups	1	3	-	3
Economic Objectives	1	3	-	3
Military: Positive	2	1	1	2
Trade Unions: Positive	1	-	2	2
Nationalizations	1	-	2	2
Incentives	1	-	2	2
Economic Orthodoxy	2	1	1	2
Agriculture	1	2	-	2
Democracy	1	2	-	2
Internationalism: positive	1	-	1	1
Decentralization	1	-	1	1
Productivity	1	-	1	1
Traditional mores: negative	1	-	1	1
Freedom & Human Rights	1	1	-	1

Source: Comparative Manifesto Project
(Klingemann et. al., 2001; Budge et.al., 2006)

It is also interesting to note that the salience attributed to these topics by parties is varied. In 2005, support for trade unions and nationalizations are salient topics only for the

extreme-left BE and the Communists. Both in 2002 and in 2005 the PSD is the only party which gives salience to economic orthodoxy and productivity. The conservative CDS introduces in both elections positive phrases on the military and on law and order.

These findings indicate that, in line with the data in Table 7.2, the differences between parties are not very large in Portugal (Freire, 2006a). The data on the manifestos show that parties choose very similar topics to elaborate their electoral programs. Moreover, some of these topics are positional, which suggest that there might be on certain issues very important similarities between political parties. Even so, it is clear that the salience attributed to the topics is not identical, a first sign of potential differences between parties. This is a first indicator that there might be differences between the parties, even though they may not be very large. Having characterized the Portuguese party system, as well as the political space in Portugal, we now turn to a discussion of the dimensions of political competition within that space.

7.2. The Dimensions of Political Competition in Portugal

As several authors have noticed, the left-right dimension can be considered as a “super-issue” which may include different specific socio-economic policies across time and space (Laver and Hunt, 1992; Benoit and Laver, 2007). Thus, it is necessary to specify the main policy dimensions of the Portuguese political system and their respective relevance over time.

Going beyond the overall left-right positioning of Portuguese parties on socio-economic issues, there is little consensus on the number of dimensions which characterize best the Portuguese policy space and which is their relative

salience. Laver and Hunt (1992) draws on an expert survey to conclude that the policy space for Portuguese parties can be captured by taking into account just one dimension, that is, the Left-Right divide (Laver and Hunt, 1992: 52). Yet, Huber and Inglehart (1995), using another expert survey, contend that the Portuguese policy space can be better characterized as two-dimensional, with the “traditional vs. new culture” divide as the main issue dimension. This dimension refers to traditions, religious values, Catholic state, ecological sensitivity, idealism, pacifism, secularism, participation, culture, environment, religion, moral order and social conservatism (Huber and Inglehart, 1995: 78). On the other hand, Lijphart (1999) and Freire (2006b) argued that in the Portuguese case policy competition is multidimensional and includes several components. Moreover, these authors also argue that there has been little variation in the main issue dimensions of policy competition, despite the fact that their relative salience has varied over the democratic period. Thus, although the party space has remained remarkably stable, there is disagreement on the main characteristics of issue domains.

What kind of dimensions then have been considered important beyond the left-right one? Regime support has been considered an important issue for party competition in the aftermath of the democratic transition. The conflict between the parties that advocated the adoption of a liberal-western type of democracy (PS, PSD and CDS-PP) and the extreme-left forces that defended a revolutionary regime based on popular democracy determined the marginalization of the PCP and its anti-system role in the Portuguese party system (Bosco, 2001). According to several authors (Gunther and Montero, 2001; Jalali 2007), this was the main cleavage of the Portuguese party system, contributing to the lack of differentiation between the two main

parties. Yet, from the late 1980s onwards the communists have begun to change their stances with regard to parliamentary democracy, making this cleavage less and less salient for party competition.

Considering both CMP data and expert surveys, it is relatively safe to claim that the main conflict between Portuguese parties concern socio-economic issues which have remained salient and stable throughout the democratic period (Laver and Hunt, 1992; Klingemann *et al.*, 2006; Benoit and Laver, 2006). While left-wing parties have usually defended more interventionist policies in terms of public investments and expenditures, right-wing parties have supported entrepreneurial freedom and the importance of private role in providing essential social services. A recent study based on the CMP data found that the economic and social dimensions account for more than 70% of the variance with respect to the left-right positioning (Benoit and Laver, 2007). The importance of these policies has been also confirmed by Benoit and Laver's study (2006) using expert surveys. In fact, both dimensions reveal a high salience which significantly contributed to explain left-right alignments. This means that, despite the centrist drive of the socialist party, the difference between left and right is still strong, and the economic and social dimensions significantly contribute to distinguish the Portuguese party space (see: Bosco and Morlino, 2007 for a comparison of the Portuguese case with other South European countries).

An important issue dimension that has proved to be significant, at least as far as voters' behaviour is concerned (Montero *et al.*, 2008), is religion. Among traditional social factors, this cleavage has usually been considered to have a stronger impact than the class conflict, especially during the first decade of Portuguese democracy when a deep polarization between liberal parties, on the one hand, and the

radical left, on the other, took place. Since then, the religious cleavage has lost some of its significance, at least with respect to party competition. Yet, moral issues still constitute an important dimension as the debates on the liberalization of abortion have shown. In 1998 and 2007 two referendums were held on this issue. The alignments of political parties opposed the two right-wing parties, advocating pro-Church and traditional values, to the left parties which defended the secularization of Portuguese society, with the PS that shifted from an ambiguous position to a clear defence of legalization of abortion between the two referendums (Freire and Baum, 2003; Manuel and Tollefsen, 2008).

Foreign policy achieved a high salience in the first decade of the Portuguese democracy, opposing liberal and moderate parties, on the one hand, to radical left-wing parties, on the other. While the former prompted the integration of Portugal within the Western bloc, the communists sympathized with the alternative bloc. Thus, this division substantially overlapped with the regime cleavage and its salience has gradually faded away.

The issue related to the European integration is somewhat distinct from the foreign policy one. First, contrary to the foreign policy dimension, some parties have shifted not only in regard to their emphasis but also with respect to their support toward the European integration. While the salience of this issue has increased after the accession to the EU, the politicization of this dimension has strengthened its importance for party competition. In fact, beyond the ideological opposition of the extreme Left, a strategic euro-scepticism has taken place, especially with regard to the CDS-PP (Lobo, 2007). Second, the BE has displayed a somewhat different position from the PCP. While the communists deeply criticize the integration process arguing

that it endangers the national interest and the national integrity through the implementation of a federal design at the European level, the BE has defended the deepening of European integration regarding social policies, favouring the adoption at the European level of more protective policies especially with regard to economic and financing regulation. Moreover, contrary to the PCP, the BE supported an internationalist project based on the differences among European cultures and societies, opposing the tendency towards homogenization and the centralization of decision-making procedures.

Another issue that may represent a new issue deals with post-materialism. This dimension has traditionally displayed a low salience in terms of voters' alignments. In fact, public opinion surveys reveal that only 10% of the population exhibits post-materialist values, less than the half of the average at the European level (Freire, 2003). Moreover, this level seems to remain stable over the 1990s. Notwithstanding the low support of the electorate towards post-materialist values, it should be noted that new issues and demands have reached a considerable salience for party competition (Freire, 2006b). As previously noticed, the BE has contributed to emphasize the importance of moral and non-economic issues.

Among the remaining dimensions considered by both Lipjhart's framework and the CMP data, the decentralization is generally considered an irrelevant aspect for party competition, while the role played by environment policy is somewhat more puzzling. According to Laver and Hunt's analysis (1992), the urban-rural cleavage may represent a second dimension of the Portuguese policy space, beyond economic and social issues. In fact, the PCP seems to be placed near the right parties, leaving the PS as the only left force to support a stronger centralization. As the same au-

thors have noticed, this finding may be misleading because it did not correspond to a clear ideological divide but it unveils strategic considerations with the main parties deeply divided on this issue, as the 1998 referendum showed (Freire and Baum, 2003).

The question whether environment policy may constitute a relevant issue dimension is more controversial and depends to a great extent to the different sources used. According to Benoit and Laver (2007), this dimension significantly contributes to explain the left-right placement of Portuguese parties, accounting for more than 20% of the variance. However, if we compare the coding from the expert survey and the CMP it is striking that, while the former reveals a strong correlation between environmental policies and parties' left-right positions, the CMP data shows no association between the two dimensions. This disagreement, which refers not only to the Portuguese case but also to other Western democracies, may be due to the salience assumed by this issue in the recent period – especially for left parties – or to a measurement error in the CMP estimates. This is a matter, however, that deserves more attention, especially when dealing with the 2009 Portuguese elections.

Overall, two points stand out when analysing the dimensionality of Portuguese policy space. The first is the limitation of policy dimensionalities. It is practically consensual that economic and social issues represent the main dividing lines among Portuguese parties. It is controversial, however, whether a second dimension can clearly constitute a second axis for party competition. When comparing to other advanced democracies, thus, the Portuguese case seems to present a low degree of complexity. Several factors may account for this pattern. First, the conflict over regime choice limited the strength of cleavage politics and represented a “super-issue”, enclosing several overlapping

divisions. Second, the lack of parties' strong roots within civil society, as well as the weak anchoring of electoral support in social cleavages. Third, non-material dimensions have displayed a low salience for both Portuguese voters and party competition. Still, it is important to note that recently non-material dimensions have become increasingly politicised. This is due to the fact that the majority Socialist government used its mandate to (1) hold a referendum in 2007 on the decriminalisation of abortion which effectively liberalised its access until 12 weeks of pregnancy; (2) liberalise divorce laws, making it easier for marriage to be dissolved; and (3) took a pledge on the legalisation of homosexual marriage including this topic in its 2009 electoral programme.

The second point that is worth stressing deals with the evolution of the policy space. There are strong evidences that some of the dimensions which have traditionally distinguished Portuguese political parties have gradually lost their salience, especially after the consolidation of the Portuguese democracy. These refer specifically to regime support and the religious cleavage. By the contrary, other dimensions have acquired more relevance, namely with respect to European integration and post-materialist issues. The rise of a new actor, the BE, has contributed to attribute more salience to previously marginalized issues, while introducing at the same time new issues in the political agenda. Overall, a look at the issue salience over time through the CMP data shows that as far as the stabilization of the regime is assured, economy and regime support are relatively less relevant for policy competition, while social and environmental concerns began receiving more emphasis since 1987 onwards.

7.3. *Constructing the Bússola: Questions and Measurement*

How do we then evolve from the dimensions of political competition in Portugal to a voting advice application including 28 questions on the issues which dominate political competition?

The *Bússola* team started by using the analysis above in Portugal to determine the number of axes – essentially corresponding to dimensions of political space which we would need to show the political landscape. From the discussion above there is clearly one main dimension of competition, which aggregates socio-economic issues, and which is extremely central to political competition. The other dimension, admittedly much less salient, incorporates issues which conceptually do not fit in the traditional left-right axis, purporting instead to values on morals, on foreign policy and on the environment. A second axis was thus conceived to aggregate the topics which Marks *et. al.* (2006) have denominated as Green-Alternative-Libertarian (GAL) vs. Traditional-Authority-Nationalist (TAN). This GAL-TAN dimension includes the environment, attitudes towards European integration, and all moral value issues which have been politicized recently by the Socialist party.

Once those two axes were defined, the next step consisted of selecting the group of themes which were most relevant for each of these axis/dimensions, based on the previous discussion and analysis of what are the components of party competition. In each theme there are at least two questions. The first axis incorporates the following themes: Welfare State and Public Administration; Taxes and Finance; and Economy. The second axis incorporates the following themes: Life Styles and Ethics; Environment and Society; and European Integration.

Having defined the relevant themes within the main dimensions, it was then necessary to design the questions. This involved a careful study of way in which themes had been politicised, namely through collaboration with journalists and opinion makers, as well as analysis of media statements and parliamentary debates in order to ascertain which formulation would best capture both the differences between the parties, as well as the importance for the public. In order to avoid bias, exactly half of the statements are left-wing and half are right-wing, and this ideological balance was also kept within each theme, and within each axis. We also took special care to include questions which relate to issues “owned” by different parties, especially the smaller ones. The choice of questions also had to reflect the politics and policies of the previous four year parliamentary mandate, given that voting relies on retrospective evaluations. This was indeed a long process of deliberation that was necessary in order to ensure the greatest degree of neutrality in the questions that were ultimately included in the *Bússola Eleitoral*.

Table 7.4 provides a full list of all questions that were included in the application. On the left-right axis, several questions refer to the role which the State should play in several areas, namely education, health, social security, regulation of prices. Important campaign issues such as the importance of balancing public accounts, the need to lower of taxes and to raise public investment in major public works were also included. On the GAL-TAN axis there were five questions relating to ethics, covering such topics as abortion, divorce, homosexual marriage and the decriminalization of drugs. On the theme of “society and environment”, four questions deal with topics ranging from the protection of the environment, immigration and issues of law and order. Finally, there were several questions tap-

ping attitudes towards the European Union, ranging from the generalist to the particular, namely asking the respondent whether s/he was in favour of the Lisbon Treaty.

Table 7.4 – Twenty-eight question from the *Bússola Eleitoral*:
Issues and Dimensions

English	Dimension
<i>Welfare State and Public Administration</i>	
The role of the private sector in the educational system should be very limited	Left
Social security should be exclusively based on public funding	Left
The sustainability of social security will require the increase in retirement age for civil servants	Right
Private initiative should have a very limited role in health care	Left
The modernization of the public administration depends on the reduction of the number of civil servants	Right
<i>Finances and Taxes</i>	
Taxes should be reduced to increase economic growth	Right
Public accounts can only be balanced by sacrificing important economic and social objectives	Left
The nationalization of banks should be a solution of last resort	Right
The battle against inequality requires a bigger contribution from wealthy persons and companies	Left
In Portuguese society private initiative is not sufficiently compensated	Right
<i>Economy</i>	
Public-Private partnerships are a good way of funding public investments	Right
In the current situation constructing great public works, such as the TGV, is a good thing	Left

Markets should be deregulated as much as possible	Right
Economic growth depends on more flexible labour laws	Right
The government should directly regulate the price of basic goods	Left

Life styles and Ethics

Decriminalization of abortion is a good thing	GAL
Marriage should remain a union between people of the opposite sex	TAN
Decriminalization of soft drugs is a good thing	GAL
Divorce should be facilitated as much as possible	GAL
Single women should not have access to publicly financed medically assisted procreation	TAN

Society and Environment

We should protect the environment, even at the cost of economic growth	GAL
Criminals should be punished more severely	TAN
Quotas for women in politics are essential to increase the quality of democracy	GAL
In the current economic situation reducing quotas for immigrants is a good thing	TAN

European Integration

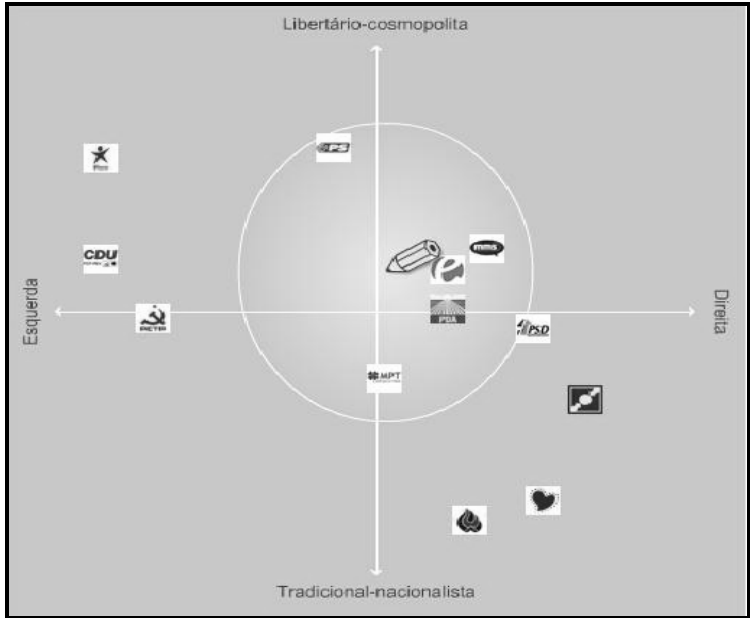
The European Union should have a greater say in more policy areas	GAL
Portugal would be better off outside the European Union	TAN
European integration is a good thing	GAL
The ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, in its current form, is essential for the future of the European Union	GAL

Once the questions were designed, it was then necessary to position the political parties on each of them using a

five-point scale ranging from “completely agree” to “completely disagree”. The first step was the choice of parties. In principle, all parties running in the election should be present in the application, so that it could reflect accurately the Portuguese political landscape. Questions of timing were however also crucial. There were two parties which were created shortly before the election, and these could not be included.

For each party, information was collected from a number of data sources, in a clear hierarchy. The most important document was the election manifesto for 2009, followed by transcripts from parliamentary debates during the previous legislative mandate (2005-2009). Party platforms elaborated for the latest party meeting were also considered. Moreover, the 2005 election manifesto was coded whenever it was available. Finally, all other type of documents, namely from party-websites, as well as media statements by leaders were coded and placed last in the hierarchy of data sources. Using all the information gathered, it was then possible to position each party on each question. Next, all parties were contacted and were asked to confirm that the calibration was indeed the most appropriate. In the instances where there was disagreement on the positioning of parties, the *Bússola* team had discretion as to whether any changes were made or not. New parties, running for the first time in a legislative election were asked to provide statements which would corroborate their positioning on issues.

Figure 7.1 – An ‘Electoral Compass’ of Portuguese Politics



Source: <<http://www.bussolaeleitoral.pt>>

This leads to the codification of twelve parties, across two dimensions of political competition, six themes, and twenty-eight questions which distinguish between political parties in Portugal. Figure 7.1 presents a visualization of the placement of these twelve parties on the two ideological dimension and, when looking at the five parties represented in parliament, clearly shows the three blocks of parties, with the CDU and BE on the extreme left, in the upper left quadrant; the PS left of the centre, also in the upper left quadrant; and the PSD and CDS-PP on the centre-right, in the lower-right quadrant. Apart from the marginal, but longstanding communist party PCTP-MRPP, all the other smaller parties are ideologically placed in the centre-right

(MMS, MEP, PDA and MPT), or the extreme right (PNR and PND).

7.4. *The Bússola in use*

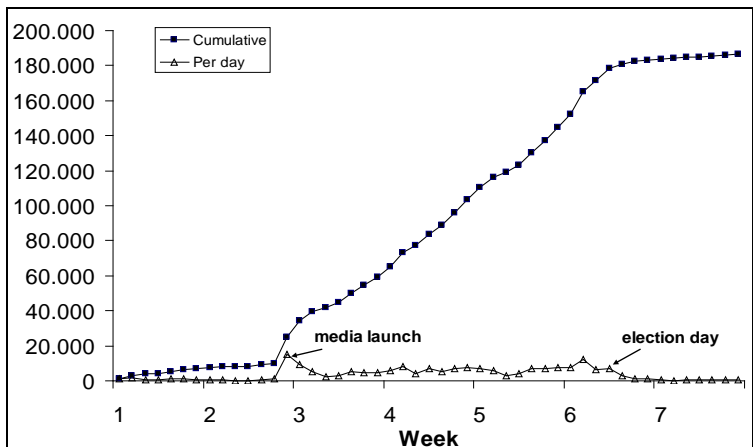
The website of the *Bússola Eleitoral* was activated and opened to the public via www.bussolaeleitoral.pt on Thursday 20 August. Our launching strategy was based on a two-step approach. First we announced the website in the blogosphere, via email, personal blogs, twitter and a dedicated 'cause' page on Facebook in order to receive feedback from more activist users of the internet with more specific interest in online politics. This led to a use of around a thousand users per day. We used blogs and twitter to clarify a number of misconceptions around the vote advice application, for example with regard to coding and calibration.

In a second phase we sent out short media statements and launched a campaign with our media partner SIC Notícias ('SIC News'), a commercial news channel with a much-visited and well-maintained website. They broadcasted a short item on the *Bússola* throughout the day, which was timed specifically in the first week after the end of August holiday period and around three weeks ahead of the elections. A short item was also announced on the main page of the website of SIC Notícias (<<http://sic.sapo.pt/online/noticias>>) as one of the five most important news items of the day. This had a significant effect on the use of the *Bússola*, with around fifteen thousand users alone on Wednesday 2 September. From the media launch until election day, the website was visited on average around six thousand times per day, with another peak of around twelve thousand users on the Friday before the elections, which took place on a Sunday (our statistics show much higher activity on workdays vis-à-vis weekend

days). By Election Day around 175 thousand visits had been registered. Visits to the website quickly dived below a thousand per day to stabilize around five hundred per day, signalling that vote advice applications do serve a purpose as well even after have casted (or not) a vote. Figure 7.2 shows the development of the visits to the website from the launch in August until a week after the elections.

So how does that *Bússola* work? When they visit the website, users of the *Bússola* are asked to respond to the twenty-eight questions used to differentiate between the ideological positions of political parties and to reply on a five-point Likert scale. The answers from each user are subsequently matched with the ‘answers’ of the parties (according to our coding) and as a result the user is presented with information about his or her placement in the ideological landscape. It is possible to answer ‘no opinion’ for a specific question, and if a user does so this question is left aside in the calculation of his or her ideological position.

Figure 7.2 – *Bússola Eleitoral*: user statistics (20 August-7 October 2009)



Source: <<http://www.bussolaeleitoral.pt>>

Beyond issue statements, the user had the possibility to answer two optional questions. The first was related to the “feeling thermometer” which asked users to rate their hostility/favourability toward party leaders on a 11-point scale. The second optional question dealt with vote propensity, by adopting the standard formulation (“how probable it is that you will vote for the following parties?”). It should be noted that this question was set before the final results and had no influence on the calculation of party-user proximity or agreement scores.

The *Bússola Eleitoral* generates information about ideological position in relation to the twelve political parties in two slightly different ways. First, after having answered the set of twenty-eight question, each user is provided with a visualization of her or his ideological position, as in Figure 7.1. The position of the user is indicated by the pencil in the middle of the circle (the circle indicates the range of parties that lie within one standard deviation of the user’s position). The user can thus see which parties are closer and which parties are further away from her or his ideological position.

Furthermore it should be noted that the ideological landscape is presented in an interactive format and that users can click on specific parties to see how these parties have answered (or rather, how we have coded them) on specific issues. All the information that we used to code each position of each party on each question is also provided, for the user’s information, and also by way of transparency of our coding process.

The positioning of the elector – as well as that of parties – on the interactive map is calculated in the following way: it is the *average* positioning on the Likert scale (ranging from -2 to +2) for each of the questions included in a particular axis. The pencil in Figure 7.1 illustrates the position of the

average user (N=162.693). This position is virtually in the centre, on the horizontal left-right axis (0,034 on a scale from -2 to +2), and moderately 'progressive' (GAL) on the vertical axis (0,37 on a scale from -2 to +2).

Table 7.5 – Proximity to party positions

	Nearest party		Furthest party	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
PS	45,108	27.4	101	0.1
PSD	5,576	3.4	0	0.0
CDS-PP	1,578	1.0	813	0.5
CDU	910	0.6	1,480	0.9
BE	1,657	1.0	65,959	40.0
MEP	40,007	24.3	23	0.0
MMS	14,192	8.6	8	0.0
MPT	24,459	14.8	2	0.0
PCTP-MRPP	6,628	4.0	28	0.0
PDA	21,988	13.3	64	0.0
PND	646	0.4	71,658	43.5
PNR	864	0.5	23,477	14.2
Total	164,421	99.8	164,421	99.8
Missing	1,186	0.7	1,186	0.7
Total	164,799	100.0	164,799	100.0

Source: <<http://www.bussolaeditorial.pt>>

When looking at the proximity of users to each of the twelve parties, a descriptive analysis shows that the most frequent 'advices' (or rather, the indication of proximity) were towards the PS (27%) and the MEP (24%), a small centrist party. On the other hand, the most frequently noted 'furthest' parties were the PND (44%), on the right,

and the BE (40%), on the left (see Table 7.5). It should be noted, though, that these proximity scores were only calculated for the very nearest and the very furthest party, for each user. We also designed the website in such a way that these proximity scores were noted, but disappeared after a few seconds in order for users to explore more substantially their ideological relation to the different parties, on the different issues.

A second form of information about ideological position is provided by the so-called ‘agreement’ scores. This measure is more useful, in terms of obtaining information not only about the two nearest and furthest parties, but rather obtaining a ranking of scores expressing the percentage of agreement with each of the parties. These scores, in a way, provide a more accurate picture of the ideological relation to the twelve parties, as they are not based on average ideological position on each of the two axes (as is the case for the proximity scores), but rather on the average agreement based on all of the twenty-eight questions. These scores are more accurate because, hypothetically, it could well be the case that a user occupies the same position on both of the axes, as one of the parties, but that this proximity is based on agreement and disagreement with different statements from the questionnaire.

When we look at the available user data, we see – interestingly – that the four parties to which users ideologically relate most closely, in terms of agreement on important political issues, are four small parties that did not gain enough votes to be represented in parliament (see Table 7.6). Of these four, the MEP gained most votes (25.475), which in the Portuguese moderately disproportional system is not enough to win one of the 230 seats in Parliament, unless every single vote is concentrated in the same electoral district. Secondly, when looking at the five main par-

ties, the PSD, PS and CDS-PP are all relatively close to each other, in terms of agreement score, whereas for BE and CDU the average agreement scores are significantly lower, and not surprisingly relatively similar. These results, in combination with the results of the election (see Table 7.1), underscore the relative antagonistic character of the current Portuguese political climate, with a strong polarization between the left of the BE and CDU and the right of the PSD and CDS-PP, with the PS in an awkward position in between these two blocks.

Table 7.6 – Agreement scores (average for twenty-eight questions)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Agreement with MMS	70.50	6.49
Agreement with MEP	66.37	7.15
Agreement with MPT	65.71	7.07
Agreement with PDA	64.59	7.58
Agreement with PSD	64.31	8.56
Agreement with PS	63.43	8.21
Agreement with CDS-PP	62.41	9.31
Agreement with PNR	58.33	8.23
Agreement with BE	57.12	9.61
Agreement with CDU	54.12	9.39
Agreement with PND	52.20	8.84
Agreement with PCTP-MRPP	51.96	8.01
Valid N (listwise)	163,453	

Source: <<http://www.bussola eleitoral.pt>>

7.5. Discussion

Vote advice applications are devised to inform voters about ideological differences between parties and about

their own position in the ideological landscape. Voters are not supposed to follow, certainly not mechanistically, the ‘advice’ of these tools and we would expect them to have a healthy distrust of any tool which tells them how to vote. Having said this, vote advice applications such as the Portuguese *Bússola Eleitoral* can be useful to provide clear programmatic information about party positions as a basis for a well-informed vote.

In the Portuguese case, this is particularly important for several reasons: firstly, because parties tend to be relatively centrist, even comparatively (Morlino and Bosco, 2007), and media opinion tends to give the impression that parties do not differ in their stances towards policies. The *Bússola Eleitoral* shows very convincingly a substantial range of issues where parties differ. Secondly, in times where vote abstention is on the rise (Lobo, 2009), and a large part of non-voters are youngsters, we believe that the *Bússola Eleitoral* would be particularly relevant to contribute to political discussion among the electorate’s younger cohorts which are more prone to make use of the internet. Thirdly, the proportion of individuals who claim not to have a party identification is quite large, and thus it is plausible to think that in such a context issue voting might be more important.

As previously seen, there is substantial disagreement with regard to the dimensionality of Portuguese political space and, more specifically, in terms of relevant policy issues. The *Bússola Eleitoral* sheds more light on the main issues of competition and it allows users to easily get information about differences between parties for each topic. Whereas, for example, the ideological differences among the main parties are limited in the areas of environment and European integration, huge differences exist with respect to public investments and gender rights. Moreover, one of the

main contributions of this tool was to offer an alternative methodology for coding party positions which is sensitive not only to the evolution of one's country but also to the specificities of issue campaigns.

With a vote advice application it is possible to give a complex view of party positioning in Portugal on the basis of a large database of relevant statements from electoral manifestoes, parliamentary debates and other sources. This is a useful tool in order to understand the evolution of party positioning over time. On the interpretation of user data, it is advisable to be extra cautious given that its representativeness is not assured. Nevertheless, having said this, a brief analysis of the user data shows that users were mostly centrist, and moderately progressive, which is in line with the results of the election where the two centrist parties won 66 per cent of the vote, with the centre-left PS staying the largest party (though losing its absolute majority).

The answers from the users of the *Bússola*, on vote probability and sympathy scores for leaders, also indicate that users were very much centred on the five largest parties - those already represented in parliament, and were not tempted away from these dominant parties despite strategic ideological positioning from some micro-parties in the core ideological heartland between the PS and PSD. Future analysis of the data is fundamental in order to explore better the links between electors and parties, and the degree to which the latter represent the former's political preferences.

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