Universidades Lusíada

Pavia, José Francisco Lynce Zagallo, 1967-

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http://hdl.handle.net/11067/951
https://doi.org/10.34628/eae0-ch40

Metadados

Data de Publicação 2014-07-10

Resumo A crise económica e financeira, o crescente nível de desemprego, o avolumar das desigualdades, o aumento do endividamento das famílias e os crescentes níveis de corrupção juntamente com a falta de alternativas nos partidos tradicionais, pode levar a um colapso do sistema democrático. O país que começou - de acordo com Samuel Huntington - a terceira vaga de democratizações, pode ser aquele onde haverá uma ruptura do sistema democrático? Tentaremos responder, neste artigo, a esta pergunta provocad...

Palavras Chave Crises financeiras - Portugal, Democracia - Portugal, Portugal - Política e governo - Século 21

Tipo article

Revisão de Pares Não

Coleções [ILID-CEJEA] Polis, n. 18-21 (2012)

Esta página foi gerada automaticamente em 2024-10-12T04:31:54Z com informação proveniente do Repositório

http://repositorio.ulusiada.pt

IS IT POSSIBLE THAT THE GENERAL MALAISE ALONG WITH THE ECONOMIC CRISIS LEAD TO SITUATIONS OF POLITICAL COLLAPSE? THE CASE OF A EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY: PORTUGAL

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ABSTRACT

The economic and financial crisis, rising unemployment, the growth of inequality, the growing indebtedness of households and increased corruption along with the lack of alternatives in the traditional parties, may lead to a state of collapse (deadlock) in the democratic system. May the country that has begun - according to Samuel Huntington - the third wave of global democratisation be the one where there will be a disruption of the democratic system? We try to answer this provocative question in this paper, and whose conclusions might be used in other similar situations, in particular in other countries in southern Europe and in Latin America.

Key-words
Portugal – Crisis – Disruption – Democracy.

RESUMO

A crise económica e financeira, o crescente nível de desemprego, o avolumar das desigualdades, o aumento do endividamento das famílias e os crescentes níveis de corrupção juntamente com a falta de alternativas nos partidos tradicionais, pode levar a um colapso do sistema democrático. O país que começou - de acordo com Samuel Huntington - a terceira vaga de democratizações, pode ser aquele onde haverá uma ruptura do sistema democrático? Tentaremos responder, neste artigo, a esta pergunta provocadora, cujas conclusões poderão ser usadas em situações similares, em particular noutros países da Europa do Sul e da América Latina.

Palavras-chave
Portugal – Crise – Ruptura – Democracia.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The economic and financial crisis, rising unemployment, the growth of inequality, the growing indebtedness of households and increased corruption

along with the lack of alternatives in the traditional parties, may lead to a state of collapse (deadlock) in the democratic system. May the country that has begun - according to Samuel Huntington - the third wave of global democratisation be the one where there will be a disruption of the democratic system? We try to answer this provocative question in this paper, and whose conclusions might be used in other similar situations, in particular in other countries in southern Europe and in Latin America.

1.2 THE THIRD WAVE OF DEMOCRATISATIONS

The processes of democratic transitions have been the growing interest of many scholars of international political issues. According to some authors, we find ourselves facing a "third wave" of democratisations that started in Portugal on 25 April 1974.[1] There are relevant studies on this new democratic cycle covering Southern Europe, Latin America, Eastern Europe and, to a lesser extent, Asia. This trend was also reflected in Africa especially in the 1990s.

Samuel Huntington (1991), in his comparative study, identified three waves of democratisation and two of reflux:[2] the first wave of democratisation took place between 1828 and 1926; the second wave took place between 1943 and 1962, and the third – the target of our more specific interest - started in 1974 and is still ongoing. At the end of the first wave of democratisation (1828-1926) there were 29 democratic states, but after the first wave of reflux (1922-1942) the number of democracies plummeted to 12. The second wave of democratisation (1943-1962) raised the number of democratic states to 36, but the wave of reflux that followed (1958-1975) dropped six of them. In turn, the third wave of democratisation, which began in 1974 (more precisely on 25 April in Portugal) - and is still ongoing - has led to the highest number of democratic states of all time: 89, which represents 46% of the world countries, amounting to 2.78 billion people, or 46% of the world population.[3]

Huntington points to the American and French revolutions as those which triggered the start of the first wave, although the democratic institutions were developed mainly during the nineteenth century, and it was then that two simultaneous events made Huntington single out the U.S. and the date of 1828 as the beginning of the first wave: 50% of adult men acquired the right to vote and the government had to be supported by a parliamentary majority in elections held regularly. This ended in the mid-twenties – this was in the twentieth century

[1] Cf., Huntington, Samuel (1991) The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century, UOP, Oklahoma.

[2] Idem. Pp.13-26.

[3] Cfr. http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=70&release=756. Acessed 10/05/2009.

- starting then the first wave of reflux, in 1922, with Mussolini march on Rome and the end of the fragile Italian democracy. In response, many countries in Europe (Portugal, Spain, Germany, Austria), Latin America (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay) and Asia (Japan), also fell in dictatorial regimes. These changes of regime reflect the rise of communism, of fascism and military philosophies, in that period.

The end of the Second World War was marked by the second wave of military occupations that promoted democratic institutions in countries, in particular the West Germany, Italy, Japan, Austria and South Korea. Moreover, in Latin America, nations such as Uruguay, Brazil, Costa Rica, Argentina, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela, also democratised. Some Asian States, emerged from decolonisation, such as India, Sri Lanka, Philippines and Israel, followed the same path. The second wave of reflux was very significant in Latin America, particularly in the sixties and first half of the seventies, where many countries are no longer democratic. This wave also reached Asia: Pakistan, South Korea, Indonesia, Taiwan and the Philippines suffered its effects. The third wave of democratisations, as stressed, started in Portugal with April 25, 1974. This wave has, for the first time, a truly global character as far as we are concerned. The movement began in southern Europe, then spread to Latin America, had an extraordinary momentum in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and then hit Asia and Africa. Huntington (1991) identifies five changes responsible for this wave, which occurred alone or in combination, namely:

1. The crisis of legitimacy of authoritarian regimes;
2. Unprecedented economic growth;
3. The new role of the Catholic Church after Vatican II;
4. The impact of the European Community on the authoritarian regimes of Southern Europe, the role of policies in promoting the protection of human rights, and the transformation of the communist regimes started by Gorbatchov;
5. The effect of contagion (or domino effect) of the processes of democratisation.[4]

1.3 THE PROCESS OF DEMOCRATISATION IN PORTUGAL AND THE WEIGHT OF THE "STATE": A BRIEF OVERVIEW TILL NOWADAYS

On 25 April 1974 a military coup d'état put an end to the Estado Novo regime and led to the democratisation process in Portugal. At the time some slogans were proclaimed, such as the three "D": Democracy, Decolonisation and Development. But reality shows us that the most utopian slogans are easier shouted than put into practice. The Decolonisation was up by some, called "exemplar". However,

[4] Pasquino, Gianfranco (2002) Curso de Ciência Política, Principia, Cascais. P.326.

the civil wars that broke out immediately in the former territories with its trail of death, destruction, famines and diseases have also shown that it might have been further advised that the process should have been more gradual allowing, for example, that the peoples of these territories had been consulted in free elections or a referendum in which they could express their will. The Democratisation, despite some initial tribulations, took place following the elections of 25 April 1975, elected the Assembly that drafted the new constitution, and the events of 25 November 1975, which led to the Constitution of 1976 that after revised and purged of its non-democratic provisions in 1982, could eventually be considered a truly modern and democratic constitution, in line with their counterparts in Western Europe. However, the third "D", Development, is yet to materialize, since Portugal still shows the characteristics of a dual society; about 18% of the population live below the poverty line, there are high rates of illiteracy, a large deficit of civic and political culture, high levels of corruption and a failure of successive governments to overcome this situation. In spite of this, and almost 36 years after the 25 April, Portugal has, no doubt, fulfilled all the conditions to be considered a Consolidated Democracy - even the Huntington's double turnover test, for example; the problem is that we have come to a point where we don't see a solution - in the actual institutional framework and political party system - to the serious problems that Portugal is facing nowadays. The perception of the common citizen is that the political establishment is taking care of themselves, forgetting the good governance and the Common Good.

It seems that the political leaders - especially the ones who have government positions - live in a different world of the ordinary citizen; and if some of those citizens dare to call the attention[5] to the economic problems or others, they are instantaneously considered as "extreme pessimists" or even "prophets of disgrace", as it was the case of, for example, Henrique Medina Carreira, a former finance minister.[6] In sum, the pressures of the civil society, could be the solution to these problems, since the political establishment is unable to do so; the problem is that Portugal doesn't have a strong and independent civil society, as it is the case of other Western European countries, since the "middle classes" are all to dependent on the "State" i.e., public sector. The "State" in Portugal has an overwhelming presence in all the sectors of the society,[7] from the economy to the education systems, through culture, sport, etc., leaving no space for the emergence and development of independent institutions. One possible solution

[5] These alerts are not a recent trend. Cf. Pinto, Ricardo Leite (2002) Pessimismo Democrático, Editora Livros Horizonte, Lisboa

[6] Cf. For example: Medina Carreira, Henrique e Costa, Ricardo (2005) O Dever da Verdade, Publicações Dom Quixote, Lisboa.

[7] This is an historical fact since the foundation of the portuguese nationality, for example the main actor in the process of the "Reconquista" or the overseas expansion was the "Crown" i.e. the State, in a clear contrast with Great Britain or the Netherlands.

for this problem would be a strong privatization scheme, liberating the economy from the "State" - I know that is a very political incorrect recipe nowadays -, downsizing the public sector and eliminating the bureaucracy of all government services; with these measures the "weight" of the "State" could be considerably reduced, thus giving space to strengthen the private sector and independent institutions and associations.

1.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACIES

Stepan (1988) defines civil society as:[8]

> "The arena where social movements (such as neighbourhood associations, feminist movements, religious groups and intellectual currents) and civic organizations of all classes (such as lawyers, journalists, trade unions or employers) in an attempt to be coherent, so that can express and defend their interests."

On the other hand, John Keane (2001) describes civil society as:[9]

> "(...) A set of complex and dynamic non-governmental institutions that legally protected tend to be non-violent, self-organized, self-reflexive and in permanent tension with each other and with state institutions that "fall", strain and facilitate their activities. "

A strong civil society can be a valuable contribution to democracy for several reasons. Perhaps, the most important is the fact that it represents a reservation of resources - political, economic, cultural and moral - that checks and balances the power of the politicians. A number of strong independent associations and a free press and dynamic are an important basis for the limitation of state power. If the state controls the press, there will be no way to expose their abuses and corruption. However, the concept of civil society is at the heart of the processes that led to the formation of Western modernity. Contemporaneously, this notion has increasingly been used to pinpoint the locus of what we call the fundamental democratic expansion. We can consider two main theoretical currents in the history of the concept of civil society. The first tributary of the anti-absolutist view of John Locke, was followed by Adam Smith, in fact a social philosopher (The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 1759), and Adam Ferguson (Essay on Civil Society,

[8] Stepan, Alfred (1988) Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone, Princeton University Press, Princeton. Pp. 3-4.

[9] Keane, John (2001) A Sociedade Civil, Temas e Debates, Lisboa. P. 15.

1767), who emphasized the economic and civil character of society, arguing that individuals can self-regulate in the market without government intervention. The second followed the tradition of Montesquieu, Rousseau and Tocqueville, emphasizing the social relations established by independent players.

The concept of civil society reappeared in the theoretical and political scenario in the 1980s, mainly due to the influence of authors, such as John Keane (2001), James Wolfe (1997) and Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato (1992). This revival was primarily caused by three factors: a) the exhaustion of the forms of political organization based on Marxist tradition, with the reassessment of the proposed merger between the Marxist civil society, state and market, b) the appearance of called "new social movements" that focus their strategy is not the requirement of State action, but the proposition that the State respects the autonomy of certain social sectors, c) and, finally, the processes of democratisation in Latin America and the Eastern Europe where the social and political actors identified the action as part of the reaction of civil society to the State (Leonardo Avritzer, 1997, 1999).

Charles Taylor (1995), in turn, identifies three different types of civil society: In a superficial sense, there is a civil society, when there are free associations outside the authority of the State power; in its strongest sense, when the society as a whole can organize and coordinate their actions through associations free from the State's custody; and, as an alternative to the second sense, there is society when all the associations determine or influence significantly the course of public policy. The "political" role of civil society is not directly related to the conquest and control of power; it is related to the generation of cultural influence in the public sphere. The mediating role of political society between the State and civil society is essential, and so are the roots of political society in civil society. The concept of civil society requires the recognition of intermediary institutions between the individual, the market and the State. These institutions fulfil the mediating role of institutionalising ethical principles that cannot be produced by the strategic action of the market and by the power of the State. Accordingly, the reconstruction of social solidarity in modernity was associated with the idea of social autonomy. In liberal democracies, civil society is not, by definition, as opposed to the economy and the State. The conceptions of society and economic policy above are related to the areas of mediation through which civil society can influence the political-administrative and economic processes. An antagonistic relationship of civil society, or their players, with the economy or the State, is only when these mediations fail, or when the institutions of economic and political society serve to insulate decision making from the influence of social organizations and initiatives, participation and various forms of public discussion; and this is the case - as we try to demonstrate in this paper - of the portuguese society nowadays.

1.5 THE VARIABLES TO ASSESS WHY DEMOCRACIES COULD COLLAPSE: THE CASE OF PORTUGAL

To assess the possibility of collapse of the Portuguese Democracy we will use the four groups of relevant independent variables described in the article of Abraham Diskin, Hanna Diskin and Reuven Y. Hazan.[10] In the first group - institutional variables - the first hypothesis is that "federal states are more prone to democratic collapse than unitary ones"; the case here is favourable to Portugal since the Portuguese constitution of 1976 establishes a unitary state with two autonomous regions, and there are no regional tensions. The second hypothesis is that "presidential or semi-presidential regimes are more prone to democratic collapse than parliamentary ones"; the case here is not favourable to the Portuguese Democracy since the Portuguese constitution predicts a semi-presidential form of government.[11] The third hypothesis is that "proportional electoral systems are more prone to democratic collapse than those with less proportionality"; again this is not favourable, since the article 149, nº1 and nº2, of the Portuguese fundamental law establishes the proportional system for the parliamentary elections. The fourth and last hypothesis of this first group, "political systems with low constitutional stability are more prone to democratic collapse than those with high constitutional stability" is again not favourable, because in its 33 years of mandate the portuguese constitution was amended seven times, and in some occasions - for example in 1982 and 1989 - in a profound manner.

The second group of independent variables - the societal variables - is divided into three variables; the first hypothesis is that "countries with deep or parallel social cleavages, or both, are more prone to democratic collapse than those with low or cross-cutting cleavages, or both"; in this case Portugal doesn't have religious, ethnic or even regional cleavages, but one can argue that there are increasing economic, and in some cases, social cleavages that can result in political disorder. The second hypothesis that "countries with weak or unstable economies are more prone to democratic collapse than those with stable economies" is very much adequate to the performance of the Portuguese economy; that performance in the last ten years was very bad and the present situation is a case of great concern.[12] The last hypothesis of this group "countries with undemocratic or

[10] Diskin, Abraham and Diskin, Hanna and Hazan, Reuven Y. (2005) "Why Democracies Collapse: The Reasons for Democratic Failure and Success", in: International Political Science Review, Vol.26, Nº 3, pp. 291-309.

[11] However, in a recent study, (Cf. Salgado de Matos, Luís (2008) Como Evitar Golpes Militares, ICS, Lisboa, Pp. 329-330), a portuguese political scientist demonstrates that the presidencial or semi-presidencial regimes are more prone to avoid military coups, thus implying that those regimes are more secure for democracies.

[12] "The recent spread performance of the Portuguese Bonds was negative", thus the interest rates that the Portuguese Republic and the portuguese banks will pay for their

mixed historical backgrounds are more prone to democratic collapse than those with democratic historical, cultural, and civil society backgrounds" is not favourable to the Portuguese Democracy since the recent history of Portugal has shown a mix of a long dictatorship (the Estado Novo) with great political instability and a very low "civic culture" along with the persistence, in some areas, of the Portuguese society, of a "nostalgia" of "the old times" and great figures of those times, like António de Oliveira Salazar.[13]

The third group of independent variables - the mediating variables - is also divided into three variables; the first one is fragmentation, and establishes that "party systems with a high level of fragmentation are more prone to democratic collapse than systems with low fragmentation"; in this case we can say that the Portuguese political system is highly fragmented; for instance, in the recent European elections, there were thirteen parties in competition, and there are five parties represented in the parliament; there is, of course, a correlation between the electoral system (proportional) and the fragmentation of the party system, that causes instability. The second variable in this group is polarization, and hypothesize that "highly polarized party systems are more prone to democratic collapse than systems with low polarization"; in the Portuguese party system we can say that we have, at least, two anti-system parties: the Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc) and the Partido Comunista Português (Portuguese Communist Party); these two parties combined can reach about 20% of the Portuguese electorate, according to some recent pools, and thus exacerbate the polarization. The last variable is governmental instability, and hypothesize that "unstable governments or governing coalitions, are more prone to democratic collapse than stable governments"; here too, the performance of the Portuguese democracy is characterised by strong instability: thirty-five years after the 25 April, there were 6 provisional governments and 19 constitutional ones.[14]

Finally, the last group was characterized by the authors mentioned above[15], as an extraneous variable, and that variable is foreign involvement; the hypothesis is that "countries experiencing serious levels of involvement by foreign forces are more prone to democratic collapse than those with low involvement". In this case, we can argue that foreign involvement can work in two ways, the domino factor is considered as a positive factor in the democratization processes: that was

debts will be higher, this will have a strong negative impact in the portuguese economy. Cf. Jornal Económico de 15/01/2010. The interest rates had reached almost 15%; this was the main factor that lead to the "baylout".

[13] In a recent poll on the great historic personalities of Portugal, António de Oliveira Salazar, was the winner, ahead of such figures as "Vasco da Gama" or "Henry The Navigator".

[14] We can say that this performance, in spite of the instability, was nevertheless better than the period of the First Republic, 1911-1926; during those fifteen years there were 44 governments and 7 presidents of the Republic.

[15] Diskin, Abraham and Diskin, Hanna and Hazan, Reuven Y. (2005) Op. Cit.

the case in Southern Europe and Latin America after the Portuguese coup; but it can also be a negative factor if the trend tends to move towards the authoritarian direction. In the Portuguese case, the European Union factor is, in our point of view, a decisive one in securing the consolidation of democracy in Portugal.

However the recent (June 2011) "rescue agreement" with the so called *Troika* (IMF, European Comission and ECB) with the "austerity package" that come along, could also be a negative factor since it is perceived by the public opinion as a "foreign envolvement" with the complicity of the portuguese government.

1.6 CONCLUSIONS

To summarize the conclusions, the prospects for the Portuguese democracy are not brilliant;[16] the eleven variables that were analysed in the previous section were conclusive: nine of them gave results that were more prone to democratic collapse and only two can be, in some aspects, considered positive. As far as we are concerned, as it was stated before, the European Union leverage is the most important factor in securing the Portuguese democracy; the reform of the Portuguese political, economic and social systems should be imperative in order to attract the new generations to the virtuosities of the democratic system. A recent article in one of the Portuguese leading newspapers,[17] called our attention, to what is now known, as "the lost generation" i.e., the generation between 16-25 years old. The facts and statistics are overwhelming; the unemployment rates in this sector of the portuguese population are very high, and above all, the expectations for the future are very low; and we know the possible consequences for the stability of the society of an entire youth generation in despair. However, there are strong resistances from the ones who are the beneficiaries of the status-quo; those, i.e., the older generations[18] with stable jobs and secure generous pension reforms and also the public administration personnel, organized in powerful corporations, trade unions and in constitutional dispositions, are resilient to changes, but they must understand that a reform, even profound, is preferable to a revolution.

[16] Diskin, Abraham and Diskin, Hanna and Hazan, Reuven Y. came to the conclusion that "the most crucial variables are: cleavages, a malfunctioning economy, unfavourable history, government instability and foreign involvement" and they predict that "if four of these negative factors appear simultaneously, the democratic regime is almost doomed to collapse". This is the case of the Portuguese democracy as we have shown in the analysis of the eleven factors.

[17] Jornal Público nº 7220, 10/01/2010.

[18] The portuguese population is the eighth ageing population in the world. Japan is in first place. Cf. Jornal Económico de 15/01/2010.

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