

# The right is set to form the next government in Portugal but the radical right has made a major breakthrough

The Democratic Alliance, comprising the Social Democratic Party (PSD) led by Luis Montenegro, the Social Democratic Centre/People's Party (CDS/PP), a Christian Democrat led by Nuno Melo, and the Monarchist People's Party (PPM), came out ahead in the 10 March general election in Portugal with 29.49% of the vote, representing 79 of the 230 seats in the Assembly of the Republic, the single chamber of parliament (+7 compared to the previous general election on 30 January 2022). The alliance beat the Socialist Party (PS), led by Pedro Nuno Santos, which won 28.66% of the vote and 77 seats (-43).

Chega (Enough) (CH), André Ventura's radical right-wing party, came third with 18.06% of the vote (48 MPs, +36). It achieved the major breakthrough predicted by pre-election opinion polls and trebled its number of seats. *"Until 2019, Portugal was described as a kind of safe haven, free of populism, but it was clearly only a matter of time before it came to pass,"* said José Santana Pereira, professor of political science at the Lisbon University Institute (ISCTE), adding: *"The ground was prepared, all that was missing was someone capable of presenting a convincing political project, and that person was André Ventura"*.

Liberal Initiative (IL), the party led by Rui Rocha, won 5.08% of the vote and 8 seats (=). It was followed by the Left Bloc (BE), a radical left-wing party whose spokeswoman is Mariana Motagua, with 4.46% and 5

seats (=); the Unitary Democratic Coalition (CDU), an alliance of the Communist Party (PCP), the Ecologist Party-Greens (PEV) and Democratic Intervention (ID) led by Paulo Ramundo, with 3.3% and 4 seats (-2); LIVRE (Free) (L), a left-wing ecologist party whose spokespersons are Rui Tavares and Teresa Mota, with 3.26% and 4 seats (+3); and People-Animals-Nature (PAN), whose spokesperson is Ines Sousa Real, with 1.93% and 1 seat (=).

The election on 10 March was anticipated by 2 years and followed the resignation of outgoing Prime Minister Antonio Costa (PS) on 7 November 2023 after 8 years in power. His resignation followed the indictment and provisional detention of his chief of staff, Vitor Escaria. The head of government, suspected of having helped to unblock procedures in the award of contracts for four industrial projects linked to a data storage centre near the port of Sines, lithium mines and the production of green hydrogen, was himself the subject of an investigation.

Voter turnout was very high for a country that is usually very abstentionist, with two-thirds of voters fulfilling their civic duty: 66.23%, + 14.77 points compared with the previous general elections held on 30 January 2022. It seems that Chega succeeded in convincing a large number of abstainers to return to the polls.

## General elections in Portugal

10th March 2024

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### Results of the general election in Portugal on 10 March 2024

Turnout: 66.23%

Political Parties	N° of votes won	% of votes cast	Number of seats
<b>Democratic Alliance (Social Democratic Party (PPD/ PSD) Social Democratic Centre/People's Party (CDS/ PP) Monarchist People's Party (PPM))</b>	1 812 929	29.49	80
<b>Socialist Party (PS)</b>	1 757 879	28.63	76
<b>Chega (CH)</b>	1 108 764	18.06	48
<b>Liberal Initiative (IL)</b>	312 033	5.08	8
<b>Left Bloc (BE)</b>	274 011	4.46	5
<b>Unitary Democratic Coalition (CDU)</b>	202 565	3.30	4
<b>Livre (L)</b>	199 890	3.26	4
<b>People-Animals-Nature (PAN)</b>	118 574	1.93	1
<b>Others</b>	353 644	5.76	0

Source : <https://www.legislativas2024.mai.gov.pt/resultados/globais>

"Portugal needs a clean sweep", "We are the extremists in the fight against corruption", these Chega slogans clearly struck a chord with voters. Chega's breakthrough is the key event of this election, and its result puts an end to the Portuguese exception, as the country was one of the very few (along with Ireland and Malta) not to have a consistent right-wing populist party. "In fact, as soon as democracy was consolidated, after the Carnation Revolution of 1974, we knew that between 18% and 20% of Portuguese society expressed authoritarian conservative views. However, the two parties on the right - the Social Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Centre/People's Party - which came from the moderate opposition to Salazarism, contained them", says Antonio Pinto, Professor of Political Science at the Institute of Social Sciences at the University of Lisbon.

André Ventura denounces the corruption - financial and moral - of the elites, and asserts that Portugal's two "major" parties, which have governed the country in alternation since the advent of democracy in 1974, are merely "two sides of the same coin". He wants to regulate immigration by regaining control of the borders, put an end to the Islamisation of Europe, ban abortion and reinstate the death penalty. An economic liberal, he advocates lower taxes, higher wages, privatisation in health and education, and an end to welfare for the unemployed. Recently,

however, he has toned down his liberal rhetoric in favour of more social measures.

"André Ventura never ceases to highlight the "good Portuguese" of whom he is the embodiment, i.e. people who work and do not depend on state subsidies or aid. It's a discourse that has reached some of the abstentionists and disaffected voters", indicates Victor Pereira, professor of history at the University of Lisbon.

The radical right-wing party has undoubtedly benefited from the series of corruption scandals that have affected forces on the right and left in recent years. A few months before the affair that led outgoing Prime Minister Antonio Costa to resign, Portugal had already been rocked by the scandal linked to the privatisation of the national airline TAP Air Portugal. A conflict of interest led to a government crisis and the resignation of the Minister for Infrastructure and Housing, Pedro Nuno Santos (PS), and the Secretary of State for the Treasury, Alexandra Reis. This did not prevent Pedro Nuno Santos from taking over as leader of the PS in December 2023 and leading the party into the 10 March elections.

André Ventura welcomed "an absolutely historic result" and declared himself "available to give Portugal a stable government within a strong right-wing majority". "The

*Portuguese people have been clear. The Democratic Alternative wanted an absolute majority, but it is far from that. The Socialist Party wanted a relative majority; it is far from that. Chega wanted to become the centrepiece of the political system, and has succeeded", he added, adding: "We cannot allow the Socialist Party to govern if there is a right-wing majority. The elections have clearly shown that the Portuguese people want a government from the Democratic Alternative and Chega".*

The Democratic Alliance, led by Luis Montenegro, came first in the election but does not have an absolute majority, even if it joins forces with the Liberal Initiative. Throughout the election campaign, Luis Montenegro repeated that he would not collaborate with Chega. "*Não é não (No means no)*", he said. His refusal to consider any rapprochement with the radical right was the cause of his break with former prime minister (2011-2015) and leader of the Social Democratic Party (2010-2018) Pedro Passos Coelho. "*We are ready to begin governing and to change policy (...) It is with a high sense of responsibility that I will convey to the President of the Republic our willingness to govern,*" said Luis Montenegro. "*Our policy will have to be implemented through dialogue*", he added, calling on "*all parties to assume their responsibilities*".

Socialist leader Pedro Nuno Santos has indicated that he would not stand in the way of the formation of a right-wing minority government. Until 2015, Portugal had a system whereby the party that came first in the general elections governed the country, while the party that came second left it to govern. This rule ceased to apply in the general elections of 4 October 2015, when the PS,

which came second in the poll, formed an alliance with the Left Bloc and the United Democratic Coalition to form a government. "*Despite the minimal difference between us and the Democratic Alternative, we did not win the elections and we will be in opposition (...) The Socialist Party will not provoke a constitutional deadlock*", said João Torres, PS campaign director, who added: "*The Socialist Party is not a natural partner for the Democratic Alliance. No one expects us to facilitate its budgets*".

The Social Democratic Party therefore finds itself in a fragile situation, subject to the goodwill of the Socialist Party. Nevertheless, the Socialist Party, which has no interest in going back to the electorate, should, at least for the time being, give priority to the stability of the country. The 10 March general election was the result of the resignation of outgoing Prime Minister Antonio Costa (PS). The President of the Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, chose to dissolve the Assembly of the Republic and call an early election. He could have made a different choice, as his predecessors did in 2004 and 1981. The outgoing head of government had in fact put forward the name of Mario Centeno, current governor of the Bank of Portugal and former finance minister, to replace him. On 9 November, the Council of State issued a reserved opinion on a return to the ballot box.

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa undoubtedly saw the organisation of new general elections as an opportunity to help his original party, the PSD, which has been out of power for 8 years. The Chega result has thrown the situation into turmoil, just over a month before the 50th anniversary of the Carnation Revolution, which in 1974 put an end to the dictatorship instituted by Antonio Salazar in 1933.

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