

**Freire, André, ed. *O Sistema Político Português, Séculos XIX e XX: Continuidades e Rupturas*.  
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Luís Nuno Rodrigues<sup>1</sup>

This book, organized by André Freire, provides the reader with an insightful and comprehensive analysis of the political systems that existed in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Portugal. Condensing the Portuguese political history of the last two centuries, the book is written both by historians and political scientists and divided into four different sections, with a total of ten chapters. Each section of the book provides a refreshing overview of recent research in the fields of History and Political Science and brings in new data and new interpretations. The final result is a coherent piece of scholarship spanning two centuries and four different political regimes. Above all, this is not a mere collection of essays conceived separately. Although written by different authors, they share a common research grid as they try to find answers for the same set of questions in different periods and under different political regimes, combining concepts and methodology from History and from Political Science.

In the first part of the book, Paulo Jorge Fernandes provides an excellent and long overdue synthesis of the Portuguese political system during the constitutional monarchy. He emphasizes how clashes over different constitutional texts are central to understanding the political instability of the first thirty years of liberalism in Portugal. After these disputes were solved, the second half of the nineteenth century experienced some political stability, with a regime of “low parliamentary incidence” and “imperfect rotativism,” where the head of state continued to play an interventive role in the choice of government leaders and in other affairs.

Fernandes also stresses the “exiguity” of political recruitment as far the composition of the cabinet was concerned and the “personalization” of the channels affording access to power. These were two major reasons why elections played such an important role in the second half of the century, as is argued in the next chapter by Pedro Tavares de Almeida. This author points out that elections were the main arena for political struggle and negotiation, but they were also a source of political legitimation for

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<sup>1</sup> ISCTE- University Institute of Lisbon. *Email* - [luis.rodrigues@iscte.pt](mailto:luis.rodrigues@iscte.pt)

governments or “rituals of confirmation.” On the other hand, elections were also important in regulating the conflicts within the political elite, providing an opportunity for political recruitment and the selection of political leaders. In sum, as Almeida argues, elections were a tool of real “political engineering.”

The key moments covered by this chapter include: the 1852 constitutional revision, which stipulated the direct election of the lower house; the 1878 electoral reform, which opened up suffrage even further, giving voting rights to those who were able to read and write and also to the so-called heads of the families, almost doubling the electoral base; and the 1895 electoral reform, which was adopted in a context of political and financial crisis, with the emergence of the Republican Party, and therefore strongly limited the number of Portuguese citizens allowed to vote.

The second section of the book deals with the Portuguese First Republic (1910-1926). Farelo Lopes focuses on the eight legislative elections of the regime and explains how the Democratic Party, the heir to the political machine of the Republican Party, won five of the six elections in which it participated, obtaining four absolute majorities. There was, therefore, an absolute superiority of Democrats in the elections, in parliament and in government. Lopes acknowledges, however, that the hegemony of the Democratic Party also benefited from the parliamentary system established by the 1911 constitution, which concentrated a huge amount of power in the hands of parliament, including the power to dismiss the president, while the head of state could not dismiss congress or veto the approved laws.

The Republicans did not deliver the promise of universal male suffrage. The most progressive electoral law was approved in 1911, eliminating censitary suffrage. But it did not open up suffrage to any more citizens than in 1878. Republicans did not believe that illiterate people should have the right to vote. The exceptions were the periods of 1911-1912, and especially 1918, when Sidónio Pais radically changed this situation, adopting universal male suffrage and allowing illiterate men to vote. Farelo also acknowledges that, during the First Republic, elections were not competitive. The party in government controlled electoral mechanisms, voter registration and the whole bureaucracy of the process, clearly influencing the voting outcome. Just as in the last decades of the monarchy, votes were bought with money, food, wine, and electoral loyalties assured by promises of improvements in villages or towns, or simply exchanged for jobs in the state or public sector institutions.

Just like Paulo Fernandes, António Araújo highlights the role of the head of state during the First Republic, seeking to evaluate whether a “weak” presidency was responsible for the political instability of the period. Araújo recognizes that, during this period, instead of the weak parliamentary regime of the constitutional monarchy there was a “hypertrophy” of parliament, which, during the constitutional debates, even discussed the very existence of the president. But the weak presidential figure was not the main reason for political instability. Araújo prefers to stress the failure of the republic to accomplish many of the promises of its platform, such as the right to strike, universal suffrage, the eradication of illiteracy, the decentralization of the state, or the end of Catholicism.

In the third section of the book, Goffredo Adinolfi and António Costa Pinto provide two thought-provoking chapters on the *Estado Novo*, the Portuguese dictatorship that survived until 1974. Adinolfi explains the transition from the liberal First Republic to the military dictatorship as resulting from the errors committed by republican political elites, because, he argues, the forces that opposed the republican regime were weak and divided. Adinolfi also analyzes the consolidation of Salazar’s dictatorship and he does not avoid the much-debated topic of how the *Estado Novo* should be classified. Assuming that totalitarianism is a concept of “degree,” and not one of “nature,” Adinolfi does not hesitate in considering Salazar’s *Estado Novo* to have been a “weak” or “incomplete” totalitarian regime, different from Nazism and Stalinism, but bearing striking resemblances to Mussolini’s Italy. The Portuguese regime shared the same *zeitgeist* with Italian Fascism by rejecting democracy, parliamentarism and individualism. Adinolfi also expresses his preference for the concept of “generic fascism” as the most operative one when dealing with the several right-wing dictatorships that appeared in Europe after World War I.

António Costa Pinto examines the contest between three different branches of the Portuguese political right during the period of the military dictatorship, stressing the distinction between “conservative liberalism,” “authoritarian conservatism,” and the fascist radical right. Most importantly, Pinto also returns to the problem of the definition of Salazar’s regime and, contrary to Adinolfi, he considers that Salazar’s regime, in its cultural and ideological origins, had more in common with Franco’s Spain, Pétain’s France or Dollfuss’ Austria. However, Pinto argues, if we analyze the origins of the Portuguese regime from a comparative perspective, we will have to consider it to be situated within the “authoritarian cycle” of 1920s Europe. The Portuguese regime, therefore, is presented as part of a general movement that involved a rejection of liberalism and the creation of right-wing, anti-liberal alternatives in interwar Europe. All these alternatives had common

historical roots, shared a number of ideological aspects, and had similar political characteristics, allowing us to conclude that they had more in common between them, than they did with any liberal or democratic regime. Does this mean they were all fascist regimes? Apparently Adinolfi and Costa Pinto found different answers to this question.

The last section of the book has three different chapters, all of them authored by André Freire. The first one, written in collaboration with Manuel Meirinho, deals with the electoral system, political parties and government in the Portuguese democratic regime. Just as was done for the previous period, the authors pay close attention to the role of the head of state according to the 1976 constitution, again analyzing the situation from a comparative perspective with other European countries. They also analyze the Portuguese electoral system and the question of “governability,” measuring the average length of governments in European countries. Freire and Meirinho accept the concept of “semi-presidentialism” as a way of describing the political system that was born out of the 1976 Constitution. They also recognize that the powers of the President have decreased, especially since the 1982 constitutional revision. In their estimation, however, the Portuguese system does not present a serious problem of governability.

In the following text, Freire observes that political minorities have clearly been represented in the Portuguese democratic parliament over the years. The same is not true with regard to the government, especially in the case of political minorities to the left of the Socialist Party. They have never been in the government since the approval of the 1976 constitution, which makes Freire classify the Portuguese party and government systems as not very inclusive or innovative. Moreover, this situation is relatively exceptional in post-Cold War Europe and, according to Freire, there is a considerable gap between the left-wing political elites, who are incapable of reaching a compromise or understanding, and the will of their electorates, most of whom support such agreements.

The last text is a synthesis of all the previous chapters, but it also introduces some new data presented by Freire. The chapter is illustrated with tables and charts, analyzing continuities and changes throughout the four different regimes discussed in this book. Freire concludes that the major ruptures came with the *Estado Novo*, a regime that brought an end to more than one century of liberal experiments, and he stresses the continuities between the Monarchy and the Republic. Needless to say, however, the democratic regime after 1974 ushered in a completely new era, allowing Portugal to align itself with the majority of Western European countries, in terms of their political and social systems. Some completely new political characteristics emerged after 1974, such as universal

suffrage and the respect for human rights. Freire, however, ends the book with an ominous warning that should cause Portuguese citizens to engage in some serious reflection: to accept that the democratic regime brought enormous social, economic, cultural, and political gains when compared with previous regimes, does not imply a non-critical stance regarding the democratic status quo, especially at a time when Portuguese democracy is living through one of the most critical moments in its short history. For better or for worse, one might add, history teaches us that the present is never more than a brief and transitory arrangement.