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THE PANDEMIC OF 2020-21 IN PORTUGAL:

Did the Politics of Geringonça help with the
National Response?



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Abstract

Portuguese democracy faced a significant national crisis in 2020–2021. The COVID-19 pandemic placed new and unforeseen stresses on the political system, as the national leadership attempted to balance the rights and freedoms of their citizens with the required and sometimes draconian public health measures required to stop the spread of the coronavirus, including the first declaration of a national emergency in 45 years. This paper briefly examines the political background of the national response to the pandemic of 2020–2021 and asks if the political lessons of the *geringonça* experience from 2015 to 2019 helped to facilitate policy consensus and cooperation among opposing ideological views during the crisis.

The Pandemic of 2020-21 in Portugal: Did the Politics of *Geringonça* Help with the National Response?

Portuguese democracy faced a significant national crisis in 2020–2021. The COVID-19 pandemic placed new and unforeseen stresses on the political system, as the national leadership attempted to balance the rights and freedoms of their citizens with the required and sometimes draconian public health measures required to stop the spread of the coronavirus, including the first declaration of a national emergency in 45 years. This paper briefly examines the political background of the national response to the pandemic of 2020–2021 and asks if the political lessons of the *geringonça* experience from 2015 to 2019 helped to facilitate policy consensus and cooperation among opposing ideological views during the crisis.¹

National Emergency in Portugal, 1975 and 2020–2021

In response to the initial outbreak of the coronavirus in Portugal, President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa declared a state of emergency on March 20, 2020. We have to go back to 1975 to find the last such declaration in Portugal, during the heated political environment following the April 25, 1974, coup d'état against the 48-year-old Salazar/Caetano regime. At that time, a variety of opposing sides, including those favoring Maoist, Cuban, Soviet, and West European political and economic models, battled over the future of Portugal. The ideological battles of the two-year period, from 1974 to 1976, eventually brought the country to the brink of a civil war. The trigger for the 1975 declaration of the national emergency was the November 25 left-wing coup attempt against Prime Minister Pinheiro de Azevedo's moderate Sixth Provisional Government, which had been inaugurated on September 19, 1975. Shortly after the start of the coup, President Costa Gomes denounced the military action and declared a state of emergency in the Lisbon military region—the declaration effectively suspended civil rights, imposed a curfew from midnight to 6 a.m., and

¹ See Chris Ansell, Arjen Boin, and Paul Hart, “Political Leadership in Times of Crisis: Comparing Leader Responses to Financial Turbulence,” in Ludger Helms, ed., *Comparative Political Leadership. Palgrave Studies in Political Leadership* series (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137264916_6.

prohibited all demonstrations and public meetings.² In addition, with the permission of President Costa Gomes, Colonel Ramalho Eanes took personal control of the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), the Operational Command of the Continent (COPCON), and all the Commando units.³ Following the defeat of the revolutionary leftist forces on November 25, COPCON was disbanded; its commander, Major Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, who was also the hero of April 25, was dismissed from that role; and some 200 extreme left-wing military were arrested. Once all of the revolutionary leftist forces were removed from the political equation, and after the parliamentary and presidential elections of 1976, newly inaugurated President Ramalho Eanes and the new Socialist Prime Minister Mario Soares, with the support of moderate parliamentary leaders, helped Portugal emerge from the state of emergency and steered the country to a successful transition to democracy.⁴

The declaration of the 1975 national emergency offers some important lessons to the current period. The national emergency declaration was both necessary and vital to the democratic transition: it gave the democratic forces the *time and space* required to stabilize the political situation, avoid civil war, and prepare the country for the scheduled 1976 legislative and

² Marvine Howe, "Portuguese Units Stage Rebellion; Regime Hits Back," *New York Times*, November 26, 1975, <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/11/26/archives/portuguese-units-stage-rebellion-regime-hits-back.html>.

³ COPCON, or the Operational Command of the Continent (Comando Operacional do Continente), was a left-wing military unit commanded by Otelo. It was dissolved after the failed coup of November 25, 1975.

⁴ Portugal functions under a French-style dual-executive system, with a unicameral Assembly of the Republic (Assembleia da República), composed of 230 seats. The president is elected by majority popular vote in a two-round vote to serve a five-year term and may run for reelection one time. The prime minister is appointed by the president to serve a four-year term and may be reappointed. The prime minister is typically the leader of the political party with the most seats won in the legislative elections. In the Assembleia da República, 226 members are elected in multi-seat constituencies by proportional representation vote, and four members representing Portuguese living abroad are elected by proportional representation. If no candidate receives an absolute majority of valid votes cast a second round is held 21 days later between the top two candidates. See Marina Costa Lobo, *Governar em Democracia* [Governing in Democracy] (Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2005); Marina Costa Lobo, *The Emergence of a Prime Ministerial Model: Coordination in the Portuguese Government, 1976-1995*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford University, 2001.

presidential elections. Likewise, Portugal faced a grave national emergency in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. As in 1975, the Lisbon government needed to declare a national emergency to give the public health authorities the *time and space* they needed to stabilize the situation and to prepare the country for a national vaccination program as the sole means to come out of the pandemic. In addition, in both 1975 and in 2020, Portugal needed the strong and steady leadership of the president and the prime minister to overcome the national crisis.

The Geringonça Experience, 2015–2019

Leading up to the 2020 national emergency declaration, from 2015 to 2019, Portugal had experienced something new, unusual, and unmatched in its political history, called *geringonça*. Originally a pejorative term, *geringonça*—which is a Portuguese word meaning a device or a contrivance—was the name given by critics to Prime Minister Costa’s plan to form a unified leftist governing coalition.

The politics of *geringonça* sought to break the center right/center left (PSD/PS) post-1976 asymmetry in Portuguese politics. Costa’s strategy was, in his words, “essential for the quality of our democracy. To improve governance, in order to be more inclusive and ensure greater diversity of solutions.”⁵ This unexpected political experiment may have also unintentionally prepared the National Assembly to be able to quickly gain consensus during the pandemic of 2020–2021. Let us explore that point.

At first, everything was following the normal political pattern in the aftermath of the October 4, 2015, legislative elections. President Cavaco Silva asked Pedro Passos Coelho, then prime minister and leader of the center-right electoral coalition called “Portugal Ahead”⁶ to form

⁵ Costa, António, “Forward,” André Freire, ed., *Para lá da “Geringonça* [Beyond Geringonça] (Lisbon: Contraponto Editores, 2017); Márcia Galvão and Rita Tavares *Como Costa Montou a Geringonça em 54 Dias* [How Costa Assembled Geringonça in 54 Days], (Lisbon: Lua de Papel, 2016).

⁶ The main political parties in Portugal are PS, Socialist Party [Partido Socialista]; PPD/PSD, Social Democratic Party [Partido Social Democrata]; BE, Left Bloc [Bloco de Esquerda] Democratic socialism; PCP, Portuguese Communist Party [Partido Comunista Português]; CDS–PP, People’s Party Center Social Democrat [Partido Popular]; PAN, People-Animals-Nature [Pessoas-Animais-Natureza]; PEV, Ecologist Party “The Greens” [Partido Ecologista “Os Verdes”]; Chega, Enough [Chega]; IL, Liberal Initiative [Iniciativa Liberal]. The center-right coalition included the main parties of the right, the PPD/PSD and the CDS–PP.

a new government because his coalition had won the most seats with 107. There were, however, two main problems: first, and as indicated in Table 1, although the incumbent right-wing coalition had won the most seats of any party, the total seats won by the parties of the left were greater than those won by the center-right coalition; the left was therefore in a position to form a government, if they decided to work together; and second, the Socialists refused to participate in the center-right government. As such, the center-right government lasted about one month, from October 30, 2015, to November 26, 2015, and collapsed when its program failed in the National Assembly, by a vote of 123 to 107.

Table 1: Main Results of the National Assembly Election, October 4, 2015

Political Parties	Number of votes won	Percent of votes won	Number of seats
Social Democratic Party-People's Party (PSD-PP-CDS) "Portugal Ahead"	2,060,192	38.44	107
Socialist Party (PS)	1,740,300	32.38	86
Left Block (BE)	549,153	10.22	19
United Democratic Coalition (CDU) Communist/Greens electoral alliance	444,319	8.27	17
People–Animals–Nature (PAN) [Pessoas-Animais-Natureza]	74,656	1.39	1

Sources: Electoral Commission, <http://www.legislativas2015.pt/resultados/>; Turnout: 55.84%.

Corinne Deloy, "The Outgoing Right-Wing Coalition Comes out Ahead in the General Elections in Portugal but Fails to Win the Absolute Majority," *Fondation Robert Schuman*, October 4, 2015, <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/oeo/oeo-1610-en.pdf>.

At that point, the president turned to the second-place finisher in the 2015 legislative elections, Socialist Party leader António Costa, and asked him to form a government. This was not an easy task for Costa because there had never been a unified PS-PCP leftist government. António Costa, however, is a unique Portuguese politician. A lawyer by training, he is more importantly a

natural campaigner and leader, known for both his charm and his toughness.⁷ Political scientist André Azevedo Alves observed, “If there is one thing all commentators agree on, it’s António Costa’s political savvy . . . there’s near unanimity on his political skills.”⁸ Those skills were on full display in 2015, when Costa negotiated the historic four-party left-wing government between the Socialist Party (PS), the Greens (PEV), the Left Bloc (BE), and, surprisingly, the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP). This was the first time that the Socialists and the Communists ever agreed to share power in Portugal.

Given the deep historical animosities between the PS and the PCP, and the somewhat strained relations between the PS and the other far-left parties, including the Greens and the Left Bloc, political opponents quickly ridiculed this governing alliance as completely unworkable, an unstable political coalition that would quickly unravel faced with a significant challenge. They called it a *geringonça* (contrivance); or, according to the *Oxford Learning Dictionary*, “a clever or complicated device or tool made for a particular purpose.”⁹ Since critics considered the new leftist governing coalition to be a clever and complicated device, they anticipated that a quick return to a center-right coalition government was in the offing.

Yet, under Costa’s masterful leadership, the leftist governing coalition did not collapse. *Geringonça* not only survived but it thrived for four years. Costa sought to change the direction of Portuguese politics from the traditional center right/center-left (PSD-PS) post-1976 governing pattern. Not to be confused with the middle-of-the-road ‘problem-solvers’ caucus in the American

⁷ Costa was born in 1960 in Lisbon, and his father, Orlando da Costa, has origins in Goa, India. Maria Antónia Palla, his mother, a Portuguese journalist met Orlando da Costa in Mozambique, where he was born. Prime Minister Costa is a law and political science graduate from the University of Lisbon. He was first elected to office on October 6, 1991; in 1997, then-Socialist Prime Minister Antonio Guterres appointed him to be the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, followed by an appointment as Minister of Justice. “António Costa, The Successful Leftist,” *Politico*, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/list/politico-28-2018-ranking/antonio-costa/>. Also see “Portugal: Prime Minister António Costa Visits Ancestral Home in Goa – India,” *The Portuguese American*, January 6, 2017, <https://portuguese-american-journal.com/portugal-prime-minister-antonio-costa-visits-ancestral-home-in-go-india/>.

⁸ “António Costa, The Successful Leftist,” 2018.

⁹ *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary*, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/contrivance?q=CONTRIVANCE>.

Congress, Costa assembled a results-oriented leftist government committed to applying progressive solutions to pressing social and economic problems. To that end, Costa prevailed upon both the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and Left Bloc (BE) to set aside some of their policy disagreements, such as leaving NATO, and instead work together to change the austerity measures implemented by the previous center-right government. To that point, Reinhard Naumann notes that “this Portuguese new model with a minority Socialist government and radical left support is only possible because the radical left made a very big step . . . The Socialists almost didn’t have to move. The agreement excluded everything that may have detonated the *geringonça*.”¹⁰ Even beyond their policy agreements, *geringonça* also represented a new political agency in Portugal, in which compromise and bargaining took precedence over ideological purity, with a new-found focus on practical policy results.

Overall, the *geringonça* experience of 2015–2019 was a success. The legislative accomplishments included reforms to reduce inequities, new job protection measures, and a new health law.¹¹ The economy remained robust, and both the unemployment rate and the public deficit dropped.¹² André Azevedo Alves perceptively observes that Prime Minister Costa “displayed a remarkable ability to balance leftist demands to reverse recession-era belt-tightening with a cautious thrift that’s pleased foreign investors and Portugal’s partners in the eurozone.”¹³

There were also several challenging situations for the *geringonça* government, including the problematic handling of widespread wildfires across the countryside,¹⁴ corruption charges

¹⁰ Paul Ames, “European Left Wants Piece of Portugal’s ‘Contraption,’” *Politico*, February 24, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/antonio-costa-ps-socialists-european-left-wants-piece-of-portugal-contraption/>.

¹¹ Enrico Borghetto and Marco Lisi, “Legislative Activities Before and After the Great Recession,” in Marco Lisi, Andre Freire, and Emmanouil Tstasani, eds., *Portugal: From Crisis to Renewal* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2020), p. 182.

¹² Marta Rodriguez Martinez; Miguel Roque Dias, Joao Vitor Da Silva Marques, Sandrine Amiel, “Portugal Elections: Is It the End of the ‘Contraption’ Left-Wing Coalition?” *Euronews*, October 6, 2019, <https://www.euronews.com/2019/10/05/portugal-elections-is-it-the-end-of-the-contraption-left-wing-coalition>.

¹³“António Costa, The Successful Leftist,” 2018.

involving former Socialist Prime Minister José Sócrates,¹⁵ and an odd plot involving government officials, military police, and a criminal gang relating to the theft of grenades and plastic explosives from the military arsenal at the Tancos military base.¹⁶ Although these scandals started to erode some of the popular confidence in the prime minister, Costa maintained a steady hand, and kept his government focused on finding solutions to a variety of policy problems.

The legislative elections of 2019 rewarded Prime Minister Costa for his skillful leadership and policy successes. As indicated in Table 2, Costa's Socialist Party won the most seats in the National Assembly, with 108. Whereas the Left Block performed well, the Communist-led alliance, known as the Unitary Democratic Coalition, struggled, and the traditional right-wing parties (PSD-PP, CDS–People's Party) received fewer seats in 2019 than in 2015. Another surprise of the election was the success of four small political parties: a green party with a particular focus on animal welfare, called the People-Animals-Nature (PAN) party, won four seats, and three other small parties each elected one representative: the right-wing/far-right party Chega (Enough), the ecological party with socialist views, called LIVRE, and the libertarian party known as the Liberal Initiative.

Needing an additional eight seats for a majority in the 230-seat chamber, talks soon began of a *geringonça 2.0* governing coalition among Prime Minister Costa and his coalition partners, but policy differences soon emerged between the Communists and the Left Bloc—the Communists were open to working with the PS on a case-by-case basis, whereas the Left Bloc preferred a written policy deal.¹⁷ *Geringonça* was a fascinating and innovative chapter in Portuguese politics, but its

¹⁴ Catarina Demony, “Wildfires Blaze Across Unseasonably Hot, Dry Portugal,” *Reuters*, March 27, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-portugal-wildfires/wildfires-blaze-across-unseasonably-hot-dry-portugal-idUSKCN1R81OK>.

¹⁵ Andrei Khalip, “Portuguese Ex-PM Socrates Indicted on Corruption Charges,” *Reuters*, October 11, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-portugal-corruption-socrates/portuguese-ex-pm-socrates-indicted-on-corruption-charges-idUSKBN1CG1U5>.

¹⁶ Paul Ames and Ivo Oliveira, “António Costa's Last-Minute Popularity Dip,” *Politico*, October 4, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/antonio-costa-prime-minister-portugal-election-contraption-tancos-weapons-last-minute-popularity-dip/>.

¹⁷ Celso Gomes, “Portuguese Election: What Comes after the Geringonça?” *Europe Elects*, October 5, 2019, <https://europeelects.eu/2019/10/05/portuguese-election-what-comes-after-the-geringonca>. Also see “Portugal's Far-Left Open to Working with New Minority Socialist

continuation was far from certain at the end of 2019 as Prime Minister Costa moved to form a PS-led minority government.

Table 2: Main Results of the National Assembly Election, October 6, 2019

Political Parties	Number of votes won	Percent of votes won	Number of seats (2019)	Number of seats (2015)
Socialist Party (PS)	1,866,407	36.65	108	86
Social Democratic Party-People's Party (PSD-PP)	1,420,553	27.90	79	89
Left Block (BE)	492,487	9.67	19	19
United Democratic Coalition (CDU) Communist/Greens electoral alliance	329,117	6.45	12	17
People's Alliance (CDS-PP) Center-Right Coalition	221,094	4.22	5	18
People–Animals–Nature (PAN) [Pessoas-Animais-Natureza]	166,854	3.28	4	1
Chega (Enough) right-wing	66,442	1.30	1	*
Liberal Initiative (IL)	65,545	1.29	1	*
LIVRE (L)	55,656	1.09	1	1

Source: Electoral Commission <http://www.legislativas2015.pt/resultados/>. Turnout : 54.50%.

* = Did not participate in the 2015 legislative campaign.

The National Response to the Pandemic of 2020

Then, suddenly and without warning, the *geringonça* politics of 2019 began to fade from view with the arrival of the coronavirus in Portugal. The first cases of the COVID-19 virus in

Government,” *Euronews*, September 9, 2019, <https://www.euronews.com/2019/10/09/portugal-s-far-left-open-to-working-with-new-minority-socialist-government>.

Portugal were reported on March 2, 2020, and the first death took place on March 16.¹⁸ Two days later, Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa declared a 15-day state of emergency for all of Portugal, the first such crisis declaration since the April 25, 1974, revolution. The president sought to offer strong and steady leadership to a shaken country in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁹ Prime Minister António Costa also announced several measures designed to limit COVID-19 transmission, including restrictions on and/or closures of cafés, restaurants, shopping malls, places of worship, schools, and universities.²⁰

According to the Portuguese Constitution, any presidential emergency decree could not last more than 15 days, unless the National Assembly renewed it. Under the leadership of Prime Minister António Costa, the National Assembly quickly gained consensus, approved the presidential decree, and prolonged the state of emergency until April 17. The parliamentarians were concerned that failure to act could increase the risk of contagion, possibly overwhelming the medical system; they therefore voted to approve the president's declaration of emergency.²¹

Arguably, the political cooperation and emphasis on progressive pragmatic policy solutions among the leftist governing coalition—which defined the *geringonça* period—continued to help the prime minister, who needed to secure majority support for the required emergency

¹⁸ The first recorded coronavirus death in Portugal was an 80-year-old man with other medical conditions; he had been a physical therapist for the Portuguese soccer team named Estrela da Amadora (“Portugal Confirms First Coronavirus Death, Says More to Come,” *Reuters*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-healthcare-coronavirus-portugal/portugal-confirms-first-coronavirus-death-says-more-to-come-idINKBN2132TV>).

¹⁹ Ahmed Nabil Shaaban, Barbara Peleteiro, and Maria Rosario O. Martins, “COVID-19: What Is Next for Portugal,” *Frontiers in Public Health*, August 21, 2020, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2020.00392/full#B13>; Direção-Geral da Saúde (DGS), *Relatório de Situação n° 015*, <https://www.dgs.pt/em-destaque/relatorio-de-situacao-n-015-17032020-pdf.aspx>; *Relatório de Situação n° 001*, <https://covid19.min-saude.pt/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Relato%CC%81rio-de-Situac%CC%A7a%CC%83o-1.pdf>.

²⁰ “Portugal Orders Schools, Night Clubs Shut Due to Coronavirus,” *Reuters*, March 2, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-portugal/portugal-orders-schools-night-clubs-shut-due-to-coronavirus-idUSKBN20Z3OP>.

²¹ Leonete Botelho, “Presidente dá por garantido estado de emergência até 1 de Maio. Depois logo se vê,” [President is granted a state of emergency until May 1. We will soon see] *Publico*, April 10, 2020, <https://www.publico.pt/2020/04/10/politica/noticia/presidente-garantido-estado-emergencia-ate-1-maio-logo-ve-1911859>.

measures. The government did not panic and collapse like a house of cards with the onset of the pandemic. To the contrary, the COVID-19 pandemic produced a most interesting cross-alignment of voting in the National Assembly, in which the right and the left voted in unexpected ways. Costa managed to patch together a majority of the representatives, ranging from the left, center, and right, to vote in favor of the continuation of the national emergency throughout 2020 and 2021. One of the renewals of the state of emergency even took place during the presidential campaign in January 2021.²²

Some members of the National Assembly did not agree with the prime minister. Although Costa argued that the urgent public health crisis required emergency measures, the PCP, along with the ecologist party, PEV, and the right-wing party Chega, were reluctant to give that much power to the president, so they abstained during the vote on the national emergency.²³ The sole opposing vote was cast by the one libertarian in the National Assembly, João Cotrim de Figueiredo, who considered the loss of individual freedom under the state of emergency to be “absolutely excessive,” even in light of the public health situation.²⁴ For the most part, the members of the National Assembly respected the guidelines and social distancing recommendations of the health authorities, but there were disagreements among them over the scope of control by the administration.²⁵

²² “Parliament Votes Today to Extend State of Emergency until 15 January,” *Portugal News*, January 1, 2021, <https://www.theportugalnews.com/news/2021-01-06/parliament-votes-today-to-extend-state-of-emergency-until-15-january/57540>; Tobi Hughes, “COVID-19, Parliament Authorizes State of Emergency,” *Madeira Now*, November 6, 2020, <https://www.madeiraislandnews.com/2020/11/covid-19-parliament-authorizes-state-of-emergency.html>.

²³ The PCP, PEV, Chega, and the non-registered deputy Joacine Katar Moreira all abstained on the national emergency extension vote.

²⁴ “Parliament Votes Today to Extend State of Emergency Until 15 January,” *Lusa News*, January 6, 2021, <https://www.theportugalnews.com/news/2021-01-06/parliament-votes-today-to-extend-state-of-emergency-until-15-january/57540>.

²⁵ Tobi Hughes, “State of Emergency About to be Declared,” *Madeira News*, March 18, 2020, <https://www.madeiraislandnews.com/2020/03/state-of-emergency-about-to-be-declared.html>; “The State of Emergency Renewal Approved in the Assembly of the Republic,” April 16, 2020, <https://www.madeiraislandnews.com/2020/04/the-state-of-emergency-renewal-approved-in-the-assembly-of-the-republic.html>. The state of emergency lasted 15 days; it was subsequently

***Geringonça* during the Pandemic?**

One important leader in the *geringonça* government, Caterina Martins, noted that her Left Bloc parliamentary group would vote in favor of the national emergency, but not without some reservations:

On behalf of the Left Bloc [Bloco de Esquerda], and aware of the difficulties we face, we admit this instrument, considered necessary by the President of the Republic and which the government is favorable to. And we'll be here, within two weeks, to evaluate the terms of its application. The State of Emergency—exceptional and transitory—can't serve to suspend democracy or essential rights. In two weeks, the Government must create and impose contingency mechanisms that protect workers' health, requesting the private health sector, strengthening the essential industrial production. This is one of the priorities: ensuring the ... response and supporting its professionals. Think about people and about their income at the same time.²⁶

Even without *geringonça*, the Left Block may certainly have voted for the national emergency given the severity of the public health threat. However, it is not unreasonable to consider the possibility that four years in a leftist unity *geringonça* government, along with the able leadership of Prime Minister Costa, facilitated that favorable vote.

For their part, the Portuguese Communist Party [PCP], a traditional rival of the Socialist Party [PS], and another important player in the *geringonça* government, returned to its wariness of their leftist rivals. In an official “Communiqué of the Central Committee of the PCP,” issued on January 26, 2021, the PCP explains its decision to abstain:

The Central Committee of the PCP reinforces that Portugal needs measures for the prevention and containment of the virus and points out reservations that led to distancing itself from the State of Emergency, *which more than responding to the epidemic has served to justify restrictions on rights, the activity thousands of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and the destruction of the associative, cultural and sporting fabric.* [Italics added]²⁷

renewed a few times. Another state of emergency was declared in January 2021 following a new surge of the virus.

²⁶ Speech by Caterina Martins, “The State of Emergency Can’t Serve to Suspend Democracy or Essential Rights,” *Esquerda*, March 20, 2020 <https://www.esquerda.net/en/artigo/state-emergency-cant-serve-suspend-democracy-or-essential-rights/66449>.

²⁷ Communiqué of the Central Committee of the Portuguese Communist Party, January 26, 2021, <https://www.pcp.pt/en/communique-central-committee-pcp-january-26-2021>; “Parliament Votes Today to Extend State of Emergency until 15 January,” *Lusa News*, January 6, 2021,

The Portuguese Communist Party’s skepticism of the president and the prime minister is noteworthy; however, in light of the national health emergency, the PCP did not vote against the emergency declaration. It does appear that accepting *geringonça* was a temporary strategy, and not a fundamental change, for the PCP.

The COVID-19 National Emergency Declaration in Portugal

Specifically, the vote to approve the national emergency declaration permitted the government to take several drastic measures to reduce the spread of the virus, including limits to the right of assembly, strike, and protest; health checks at airports and other points of entry; adoption of distance learning at all educational institutions; and a variety of restrictions on social gatherings and movement, including religious events and travel within Portugal. In addition, no acts of resistance to the emergency orders were permitted.²⁸ The national lockdown resulted in a significant reduction in the number of pilgrims attending the annual commemoration of the Miracle of the Sun at the Sanctuary of Fátima—only 4,000 pilgrims were there on October 13, 2020, and around 7,500 in 2021. Before the pandemic, approximately 300,000 pilgrims would ordinarily visit Fatima every year for the annual commemoration.²⁹ Table 3 lists some of the key dates of the pandemic in Portugal.

<https://www.theportugalnews.com/news/2021-01-06/parliament-votes-today-to-extend-state-of-emergency-until-15-january/57540>.

²⁸ “Coronavirus: Portugal—State of Calamity and State of Emergency,” *Lexology*, May 5, 2020, <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=bdf523f4-ad8f-4871-988e-f1133c3db26d>.

²⁹ “Virus Fears See Fatima Pilgrims Keep Their Distance,” *France 24*, October 13, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20201013-virus-fears-see-fatima-pilgrims-keep-their-distance>.

Table 3: Key Dates in the Pandemic in Portugal, 2020–2021

March 2, 2020: The first two recorded cases of COVID-19 confirmed.
March 18, 2020: President Rebelo de Sousa, declares a State of Emergency, for fifteen days.
April 2, 2020: National Assembly approves the extension of the State of Emergency.
May 2, 2020: State of emergency canceled.
October 14, 2020: Government declares State of Calamity due to surge in new cases.
December 25–January 1, 2021: Government relaxes lockdown restrictions.
January 15, 2021: New surge of the coronavirus. State of Emergency is renewed.
January 17, 2021: Portugal registers the highest number of coronavirus cases in Europe per capita over the past seven days.
January 23, 2021: Terrible day of the pandemic: Portugal registers record number of daily cases (15,333) and the highest number of people in intensive care units (720) since the March 2020 beginning of the pandemic. Death toll passes the 10,000 mark (10,194).
March–April 2021: Situation is improving. National lockdown, social distancing, and vaccination program is beginning to have a positive effect.
May–July 2021: Country slowly starts to re-open.
August 11, 2021: 993,241 confirmed cases and 17,514 recorded deaths in Portugal.
August 2021: Portugal ranks among the top performers in the world in terms of the number of vaccines administered per 100 residents.

Sources: Direção-Geral da Saúde (DGS), <https://covid19.min-saude.pt/relatorio-de-situacao/>; Portuguese National Assembly, Estado de Emergência: COVID-19, <https://www.parlamento.pt/Paginas/covid19.aspx>; COVID-19 Data Repository by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University, <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>; Financial Times Visual & Data Journalism Team, “Vaccination doses administered in UK, Israel, US, European Union and Portugal” <https://ig.ft.com/coronavirus-vaccine-tracker/?areas=usa&areas=eue&areas=prt&cumulative=1&doses=total&populationAdjusted=1>.

During the lockdown, Prime Minister Costa’s socialist government adopted several policies designed to help marginalized people, including price controls; job security measures; and a streamlined process to apply for social inclusion benefits as well as unemployment benefits.³⁰

³⁰ Viera de Almeida, “Portugal: State of Calamity and State of Emergency,” *The International Comparative Legal Guides*, August 19, 2020, <https://iclg.com/briefing/12416-state-of-calamity->

In October 2020, the government relaxed the state of emergency and moved to the lesser state of calamity, in which the government imposed restrictions on a variety of public services, including public transportation; water and energy supply services; and, communications.³¹ As the country reached some 2,544 COVID-19 related deaths and over 144,341 cases, a day of national mourning for those killed by the virus was observed on November 2, 2020.³² Prime Minister Costa asked President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa to issue another state of emergency that same day, lasting 15 days, and subject to renewal.³³

Two Presidential Elections Following a National Emergency Declaration in Portugal

There have been two presidential elections in Portugal following the declaration of a national emergency since the democratic transition: it is interesting to note that the Portuguese people overwhelmingly voted for stability both in 1976 and in 2021.

In 1976, six months after the declaration of a national emergency in November 1975, the centrist military hero of November 25, António Ramalho Eanes, received 61.41 percent of the total vote, avoiding a second-round runoff. Eanes was known for his military bearing and strong leadership style, traits deemed necessary to move Portugal away from the brink of civil war and on to a democratic future.³⁴

[and-state-of-emergency](#). Also see “Portugal Widens Social Security Support, Simplifies Some Benefits,” *National Post*, May 7, 2020, <https://nationalpost.com/pmn/health-pmn/portugal-widens-social-security-support-simplifies-some-benefits>.

³¹ L. Cordeiro-Rodrigues, “Social Justice for Public Health: The COVID-19 Response in Portugal,” *Bioethical Inquiry* 17 (2020): 669–674, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11673-020-10058-z>. Also see “Portugal Widens Social Security Support, Simplifies Some Benefits,” May 7, 2020.

³² “COVID-19: November 2 Pronounced National Day of Mourning,” *Portuguese-American Journal*, November 2, 2020, <https://portuguese-american-journal.com/covid19-november-2-pronounced-national-day-of-mourning-portugal/>.

³³ “Portugal PM Costa Asks President to Declare COVID-19 Emergency,” *Reuters*, November 2, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-portugal/portugal-pm-costa-asks-president-to-declare-covid-19-emergency-idUSL8N2HO3A2>.

³⁴ Marvine Howe, “Army Chief Wins in Portugal Vote for a President,” *New York Times*, June 28, 1976, <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/06/28/archives/army-chief-wins-in-portugal-vote-for-a-president-eanes-receives-61.html>.

The news during the week leading up to the 2021 presidential election was grim: Portugal was reporting the highest daily averages in the world for new coronavirus cases and deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, leading to calls to postpone the election, supported by many voters.³⁵ However, given the many complications of a postponed presidential election, the decision was made to go forward. The number of polling stations was increased, and provisions were made for early voting, as strategies to reduce lines at the polling centers. Voters appeared at polling stations in masks; they observed social distancing rules; and they used their own pens to mark the ballots.³⁶ With the country in lockdown, the voter turnout was only at 38 percent, significantly down from other presidential elections.³⁷

Every Portuguese president since Ramalho Eanes has been reelected to a second term. That pattern continued in 2021, when another centrist presidential candidate, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, promising a steady hand, won over 60 percent of the votes, as indicated in Table 4, in a most unusual national election. Known for his balanced, affable, and easy-going leadership style, Rebelo de Sousa was exactly the kind of president the Portuguese needed during the pandemic.

³⁵ Data available at the Coronavirus Virus Center, Johns Hopkins University, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/portugal>.

³⁶ Victoria Walderssee, “Portugal Holds Presidential Election as COVID-19 Cases Spiral,” *Reuters*, January 23, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/portugal-holds-presidential-election-covid-19-cases-spiral-2021-01-23/>; “Portugal Chooses President Amid Severe Pandemic Surge,” *VOA*, January 24, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/europe/portugal-chooses-president-amid-severe-pandemic-surge>.

³⁷ Election Guide, Portugal, January 24, 2021, <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2901/>.

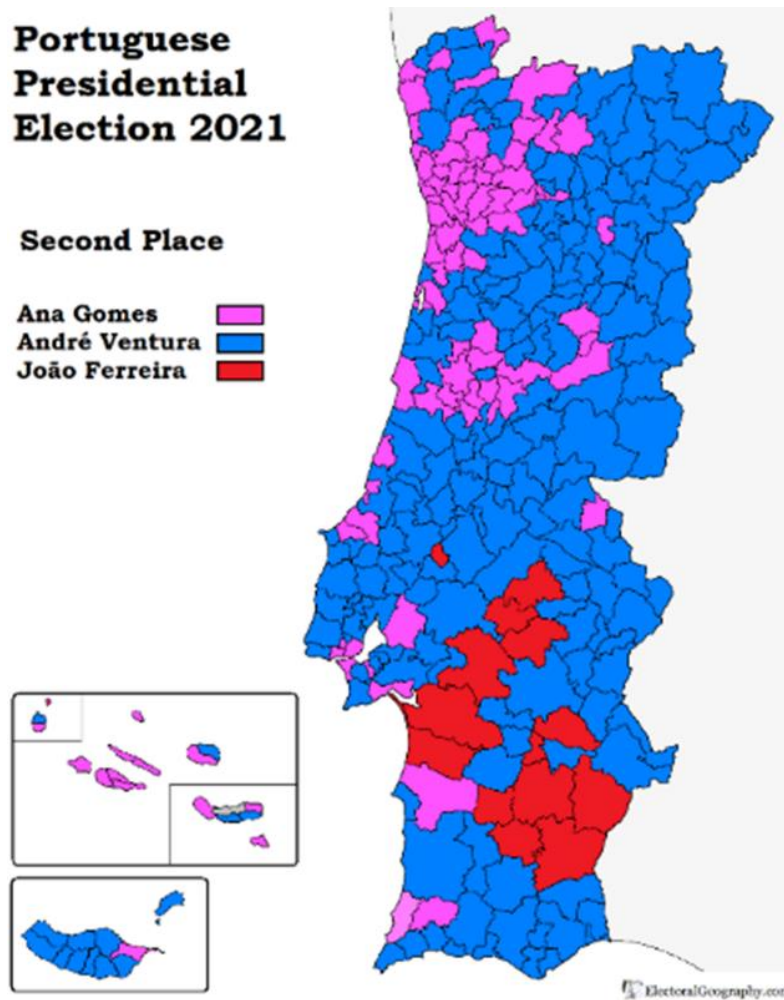
Table 4: Results of the Presidential Election of January 24, 2020

Candidate	Political Party	# of Votes	%
Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa	Social Democrat Party PSD/Independent	2,531,692	60.69
Ana Gomes	Socialist Party (PS)	540, 823	12.96
Andre Ventura	Chega! (Enough!) Right-wing	497, 746	11.93
Cândido Ferreira	Portuguese Communist Party (PCP)	179,764	4.31
Marisa Matias	Left Block (BE)	165, 127	3.96
Tiago Mayan Gonçalves	Liberal Initiative	134,991	3.23
Vitorino Silva	Recycle (RIR)	123,031	2.95

Source: Election Guide, Portugal, <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2901> & Comissão Nacional de Eleições, <https://dre.pt/application/conteudo/156971146>. Turnout: 39.26%.

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa was the first presidential candidate to win all municipalities across Portugal, but that does not tell the whole story of the 2021 Portuguese presidential election. As indicated on Map 1, the second-place results reveal the locations of some significant ideological variation in Portugal. The support for the Socialist Party and the Communist Party corresponded with established voting patterns: Ana Gomes, the Socialist Party Candidate, did well both in the areas surrounding Coimbra in the center of the country and also in the northern areas close to Oporto (indicated in purple); and, João Ferreira, the Portuguese Communist Party candidate, performed very well in the traditional Communist-dominated area in the Alentejo (indicated in red). The real surprise of the night was the strong second-place finish of André Ventura, who founded the right-wing party called Chega (Enough) in 2019. Chega gained close to 12 percent of the presidential vote in districts across Portugal, which was a huge jump from the total 1.3 percent of the votes Chega received in the 2019 parliamentary elections. The COVID-19 pandemic dominated the presidential election of 2021, so it is perhaps too soon to come to any definitive conclusions about the meaning of the surprising strong showing of Chega—but it is clearly a phenomenon worth observing in future elections.

Map 1: Second Place Finishers in the 2021 Presidential Election



Source: Alex Kireev, "Portugal. Presidential Election 2021," *Electoral Geography* 2.0, <https://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/p/portugal/portugal-presidential-election-2021.html>.

European Union Support to Portugal during the Pandemic

European Union assistance to Portugal has been an essential element to the government's response to the pandemic. Following the March 19, 2020, grant of the first round of economic support for Portuguese industries impacted by the pandemic, EU official Margrethe Vestager noted that "we are working to manage this impact as much as we can. . . . to help Europe's economy weather this storm and bounce back strongly afterwards."³⁸ Table 5 provides a partial list of EU support to Portugal during the pandemic.

³⁸ "State aid: Commission Approves €3 Billion Portuguese Guarantee Schemes for SMEs and Midcaps Affected by Coronavirus outbreak," *European Commission Press Release*, March 22,

Table 5: Partial List of European Union Support to Portugal During the Pandemic, 2020–2021

March 22, 2020: €3 billion guarantee schemes made available for a variety of Portuguese industries hurt by the pandemic, including tourism, restaurants, and manufacturing.
April 8, 2020: €20 million to help fishery and aquaculture industries.
June 10, 2020: €1.2 billion rescue loan to Air Portugal [Transportes Aéreos Portugueses, “TAP”].
June 22, 2020: €40 million to support companies in Madeira.
October 20, 2020: €9.35 million to preserving employment on the Azores.
November 30, 2020: €750 million for smaller companies actively impacted by the coronavirus.
March 31, 2021: €500 million trade credit insurance to all companies (for liquidity needs).
April 16, 2021: €150 million to support Portuguese companies in the Azores.
April 29, 2021: €462 million support to Air Portugal [Transportes Aéreos Portugueses].
May 3, 2021: €12 million to support SATA Air Azores company [Sociedade Açoriana de Transportes Aéreos].
May 10, 2021: €22 million to support small enterprises in Madeira.

Sources: European Commission, Aid to Portugal During the Coronavirus Pandemic of 2020-21, https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/jobs-and-economy-during-coronavirus-pandemic/state-aid-cases/portugal_en.

In the very midst of the national fight against the coronavirus, Portugal assumed the presidency of the European Union in January 2021. Domingos Fezas Vital, the Portuguese ambassador to the United States, observed that both the fight in Europe against the pandemic and the economic recovery were top priorities for the Portuguese EU presidency, noting “I would say one thing goes with the other. It is not possible to have an economic recovery if we do not beat the pandemic.” Other priorities for Portugal during its EU presidency include environmental protection

2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_506. Also see Catarina Demony and Joao Manuel Vicente Mauricio, “Coronavirus Pushes Portugal Jobless Rate to 7% in June,” *Reuters*, July 29, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-portugal-economy-unemployment/portugal-jobless-rate-rises-to-7-in-june-ine-idUKKCN24U1IS?edition-redirect=uk>.

and the oceans, and to strengthen Europe’s strategic autonomy, but recovery from the pandemic remains the paramount concern.³⁹

Views of the Portuguese People During the Pandemic

A few recent Eurobarometer surveys indicate a general satisfaction among the Portuguese with the performance of the national leadership and the European Union during the national emergency, but not without some areas of caution, as follows:⁴⁰

1. Most Portuguese continue to support membership in the European Union, and credit the European Union for helping Portugal secure COVID-19 vaccines;
2. Most will take the vaccine, believing it to be the only way to end the pandemic, even though there are some concerns about the unknown side effects of the vaccine;
3. Most support the restriction measures imposed by the government during the pandemic; but,
4. Whereas confidence in political institutions (government, political parties, and the National Assembly) was strong in the period between fall 2018 and summer 2020, confidence in these institutions dropped during the pandemic winter of 2021.

The national economic struggles related to the COVID-19 lock-down in 2020 and 2021 may have negatively impacted Portuguese public attitudes and perceptions toward political institutions. At the same time, the data indicates that the Portuguese understand, support, and will continue to follow the public health measures to help bring the pandemic to an end.

³⁹ Natalie Liu, “COVID-19 Tops List of Priorities for Portugal’s EU Presidency,” VOA, March 10, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/europe/covid-19-tops-list-priorities-portugals-eu-presidency>. Also see European Commission, “Details of Portugal’s Support Measures to Help Citizens and Companies During the Significant Economic Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic,” https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/jobs-and-economy-during-coronavirus-pandemic/state-aid-cases/portugal_en; Council of the European Union, 2021 Portugal Priorities, <https://www.2021portugal.eu/en/programme/priorities/>.

⁴⁰ Eurobarómetro Standard 94, Comissão Europeia, Onda EB94.3 – Kantar Portugal, Winter 2020–2021, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home>. Other interesting information is available at the Polling Center ICS/ISCTE (Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa (ICS-ULisboa); ISCTE– Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ICS/ISCTE); and Impresa Publishing. Available at <https://sondagens-ics-ul.iscte-iul.pt/>.

Mistakes During the Pandemic?

Throughout the crisis, the political leadership in Lisbon has attempted to provide support, stability, meaning, and a path forward, but mistakes have been made. Prime Minister Costa himself notes, “there were certainly errors: often [in] the way I transmitted the message to the Portuguese . . . and, when the recipient of the message did not understand the message, then it is the messenger’s fault, I have no doubt about it.”⁴¹ Perhaps António Costa’s biggest mistake during the crisis was when his government relaxed the lockdown restrictions too soon, during the week between Christmas and New Year’s Day of 2021. That faulty decision led to a new surge of the coronavirus that ravaged the national public health system a few weeks later, causing the president to declare another national emergency in January 2021.⁴²

Figure 1 shows the results of Prime Minister Costa’s mistake to relax restrictions during Christmas week 2020: the January 2021 surge in Portugal was much higher than in Spain and the United Kingdom. Journalist Ann Abel lived through this vicious surge in Portugal, and notes that, “the news is full of reports about overwhelmed hospitals, failing oxygen systems, doctors choosing whom to save. The streets of Lisbon have an eerie calm again, but with far more ambulances than anyone remembers seeing last spring. The police are out in force (also more than anyone remembers seeing last time), and the Portuguese are hunkered down.”⁴³

Portugal was having a difficult time in the early spring of 2021. The economy was badly suffering, and cracks in the *geringonça* alliance appeared over policy differences and mistakes by

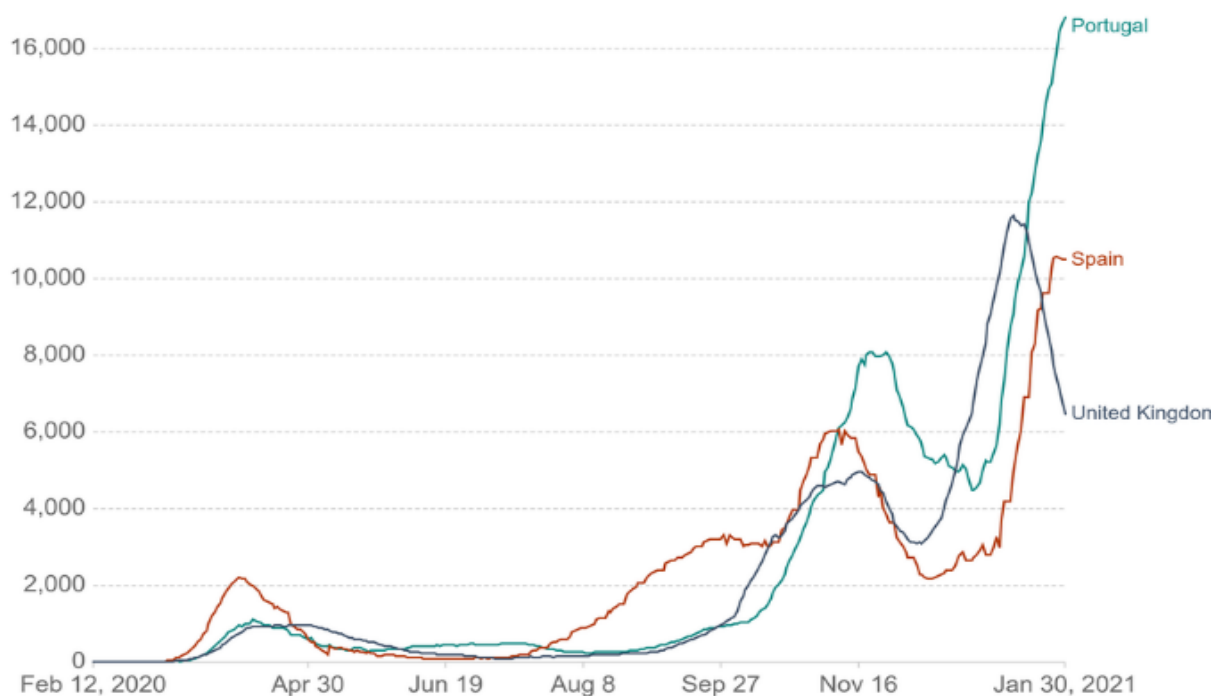
⁴¹ Sergio Goncalves, “Portugal Is in ‘Terrible’ Phase of Pandemic, PM Costa Says,” *Reuters*, January 28, 2021 <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/portugal-is-terrible-phase-pandemic-pm-costa-says-2021-01-28/>; “COVID-19 apos o Natal e Ano Novo. Portugal tem o dobro da incidencia da Alemanha,” *Sic Noticias*, January 5, 2021, <https://sicnoticias.pt/especiais/coronavirus/2021-01-05-Covid-19-apos-o-Natal-e-Ano-Novo.-Portugal-tem-o-dobro-da-incidencia-da-Alemanha>.

⁴² Sofia Rodrigues, “Primeiro-ministro assume responsabilidades pelo alívio do Natal,” *Público*, January 19, 2021, <https://www.publico.pt/2021/01/19/politica/noticia/primeiroministro-assume-responsabilidades-alivio-natal-1947061>.

⁴³ Ann Abel, “How Portugal Went from a Coronavirus Success Story to the Epicenter,” *Forbes*, February 1, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/annabel/2021/02/01/how-portugal-went-from-a-coronavirus-success-story-to-the-epicenter/?sh=fb8167e19d17>. Also see “Portugal Extends COVID -19 lockdown, Will Plan for Lifting Restrictions,” *Reuters*, February 25, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/portugal-extends-covid-19-lockdown-will-plan-lifting-restrictions-2021-02-25/>.

the national leadership.⁴⁴ Government ministers also appeared to be occasionally overwhelmed during the crisis. On that point, journalist Barry Hatton observes that “recent flubs include mixed government messages on mask types and online teaching, regular pandemic news conferences discontinued without explanation, scant official information on what foreign help is coming and scandals over queue-jumping for vaccines.”⁴⁵ The pressure was on the prime minister to right the ship and to develop and implement new and effective anti-COVID-19 measures.

Figure 1: Biweekly Cases in Portugal per million people, February 12, 2020, to January 30, 2021



Source : Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data—Last Updated January 31, 2021, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/>.

⁴⁴ Peter Wise, “Pandemic Exposes Cracks in Portugal’s ‘Leftwing Pact:’ Tensions over Social Spending and Fiscal Prudence are Undermining Informal Agreement” *Financial Times*, December 21, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/f3d22d4f-39da-4623-828a-eb04aeb4ce20>.

⁴⁵ Barry Hatton, “Deadliest Virus Month Piles Strain on Portugal’s Government,” *Associated Press*, February 2, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-portugal-coronavirus-pandemic-lisbon-b7642cd41a86f3bf2a31a049ef5be8de>.

Approaching the End of the Pandemic?

To his credit, Prime Minister Costa learned from his mistakes, and made the necessary adjustments. The large number of new COVID-19 cases rendered the spring of 2021 very difficult, but the newly adopted anti-coronavirus lock-down measures quickly showed positive signs: the surge of January 2021 fell to controllable numbers by early April. In addition, according to information provided by the Direção-Geral da Saúde [General Directorate of Health], all of the key COVID-19 indicators were improving. At that point, Health official Dr. Ricardo Mexia declared that the pandemic is “very much under control ,”⁴⁶ and Henrique Gouveia e Melo—the Portuguese national vaccine program coordinator— noted that herd immunity “should be achieved in August or early September.”⁴⁷ In light of this progress, Prime Minister António Costa issued a new plan to gradually re-open the country in April of 2021.⁴⁸ The national vaccine program has also been very successful; Portugal ranked among the top performers in the world in terms of the number of vaccines administered per 100 residents in the summer of 2021, ahead of the US and EU averages.⁴⁹

As Portugal re-opened, President Rebelo de Sousa offered his support to the Portuguese, noting, “I know that each opening implies more responsibility and that the times ahead will be

⁴⁶ Barry Hatton, “Portugal Reaps Benefits of a Prolonged COVID-19 Lockdown,” *Associated Press*, April 16, 2021, <https://ca.finance.yahoo.com/finance/news/portugal-reaps-benefits-prolonged-covid-145546915.html>.

⁴⁷ “Portugal Aims for 70 Percent Vaccination Rate in Summer,” *Agence France Presse*, February 22, 2021, <https://www.barrons.com/news/portugal-aims-for-70-percent-vaccination-rate-in-summer-01614029704>.

⁴⁸ Catarina Demyon and Sergio Goncalves, “In Fight Against COVID-19, Portugal Continues to Cautiously Ease Lockdown,” *Reuters*, April 15, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/fight-against-covid-19-portugal-continues-cautiously-ease-lockdown-2021-04-15/>. Also see Ahmed Nabil Shaaban, Barbara Peleteiro, and Maria Rosario O. Martins, “COVID-19: What Is Next for Portugal?” *Front Public Health*, August 12, 2020, ;8:392, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32974253/>.

⁴⁹ Financial Times Visual & Data Journalism Team, “Vaccination doses administered in UK, Israel, US, European Union and Portugal: Cumulative doses administered per 100 residents,” August 9, 2021. <https://ig.ft.com/coronavirus-vaccine-tracker/?areas=usa&areas=eue&areas=prt&cumulative=1&doses=total&populationAdjusted=1>.

even more demanding.”⁵⁰ The Portuguese people have responded admirably to the pandemic lockdown restrictions: they clearly understood the nature of the public health emergency and generally supported the efforts of their elected officials. Although the situation is trending in a positive direction, there remain many challenges and an uncertain future—but there is hope.

Any Political Lessons from *Geringonça*?

In his political opinion commentary in *Portugal Digital*, journalist Alfredo Prado perceptively observes that “it remains for us to believe that the vaccine against COVID will arrive soon and that it will arrive for everyone. . . . Perhaps Costa will thus gain time to make peace with progressive forces and reach the end of the legislature. . . . It will not be easy.”⁵¹ The pandemic of 2020-2021 has certainly not been easy. Effective leadership, consensus building, and correct policy adoption and implementation have all been put to the test. Both President Rebelo de Sousa and Prime Minister Costa used their considerable and differing leadership skills to respond to the crisis by offering parliamentarians and citizens alike a strong rationale for their actions; providing an account for each measure; and adjusting along the way, as needed—the hallmarks of a healthy, robust, and effective democratic regime⁵²

Caterina Martins, a leader in the *geringonça* government, accurately noted that “Portugal managed to effectively ‘flatten the curve’ both due to voluntarily confinement of a big part of the Portuguese people, initially, and due to lockdown measures, that were quickly implemented by the authorities. This accounted for a robust and effective response.”⁵³ The declaration of a national

⁵⁰ Barry Hatton, “Portugal's COVID-19 State of Emergency to End Friday,” *Reuters*, April 16, 2021 <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/portugals-covid-19-state-emergency-end-friday-president-2021-04-27>.

⁵¹ Alfredo Prado, “Será que Costa conseguirá lançar uma ‘Geringonça?’ ” *Portugal Digital*, November 26, 2020, <https://portugaldigital.com.br/sera-que-costa-conseguira-lancar-uma-geringonca-2/>.

⁵² On July 1, 2020, Prime Minister António Costa, President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, King Felipe VI of Spain, and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez all met at the Spanish-Portuguese border, which had been closed since May of 2020 (“Spain Reopens Border with Portugal after three-month Closure Due to Coronavirus,” *El País*, July 1, 2020, <https://english.elpais.com/society/2020-07-01/spain-reopens-border-with-portugal-after-three-month-closure-due-to-coronavirus.html>).

emergency gave the government the *time and space* it needed to develop a robust and effective response. The moderating role of the president as well as the political skill of the prime minister, the aid from the European Union, and the support of the Portuguese people were all crucial elements of the effective national response to the crisis.

The experience of Portugal during the pandemic strongly diverges with that of Spain. Sebastián Royo notes that, “in contrast with other European countries like Portugal ... where the pandemic brought together the main parties and reduced the level of political confrontation, in Spain, the polarization and lack of cooperation between the government and the main opposition party made the response to the crisis even harder to manage.”⁵⁴ Royo points to lack of dialogue and party polarization as factors that impeded the Spanish response to the crisis; Portugal, perhaps thanks in part to the politics of *geringonça*, avoided such acrimony.

Royo’s observation brings us back to our main question: did the politics of *geringonça* help with the national response to the coronavirus pandemic in 2020–2021? This paper suggests that yes, but not to exaggerate the point, *geringonça* may have facilitated negotiations, conversations, and placed a premium on pragmatic solutions among members of the National Assembly during the crisis, precisely because they had become accustomed to behaving in that manner during the 2015 to 2019 legislative session and party polarization as factors that impeded the Spanish response to the crisis; Portugal, perhaps thanks in part to the politics of *geringonça*, avoided such acrimony.

⁵³ Catarina Martins, “If the EU Won’t Be able to Answer the Crisis, the EU will Hardly Survive” *Transform Europe!*, May 13, 2020, <https://www.transform-network.net/en/blog/article/catarina-martins-left-bloc-portugal-if-the-eu-wont-be-able-to-answer-the-crisis-the-eu-will-h/>.

⁵⁴ Sebastián Royo, “Responding to COVID-19: The Case of Spain,” *European Policy Analysis* 6.2 (Dec. 2020): 180–190. Quote is from page 188. Published online November 18, 2020, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/epa2.1099>.