

**Political Institutions and Democracy in Portugal: Assessing the Impact of the Eurocrisis** by Antonio Costa Pinto and Conceição Pequito Teixeira, Cham, Switzerland, Springer, 2019, x + 253 pp., index, bibliography, £92 (Hardcover), ISBN 978-3-319-98151-2.

This edited book brought together a competent network of Portuguese scholars to address a series of interrelated questions about post-austerity democracy. The authors examine whether the economic crisis contributed to worsening or improving of the quality of the Portuguese democracy, placing particular emphasis upon the role played by social actors and democratic institutions. Drawing upon an examination of the main aspects of political change in the country, this book is a significant contribution to the understanding of the impact of the Eurocrisis on Portuguese political institutions.

Relevant common themes have emerged from this book, which is divided into 11 contributions, each one of them dealing with the diverse effects of the economic crisis on democracy, with varied methodological approaches. I highlight three common themes here. The first is the emphasis on the *emergence of new political actors*, such as left-wing political parties and trade unions, which played an important role in anti-austerity mobilisation. These new political actors draw a valuable distinction between the risks and opportunities for legitimate political participation, the cycle of anti-austerity protests and the continuous support for democracy. Building upon this foundation, the chapters on political participation and protests present relevant analysis on the conditions under which people's increasing discontent turned into protest and social conflict.

The second major theme which emerges from this book concerns the *increased potential for cooperation between left and right parties*. Portugal received a 78 billion financial aid package from the Troika of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This financial assistance came with a set stringent conditions, subjecting Portugal to a severe austerity programme from 2011 until mid-2014. The forced adherence to Troika's term obliged Portuguese citizen's and political parties to deal with economic crisis and austerity measures. Such adherence was not just symbolic: it had an impact on the party system, promoting a "unprecedented level of cooperation between the parties of the left" dubbed "contraption" (or *gerigonça* in Portuguese, which means something improvised or poorly built) (77). This unlikely left-wing interparty cooperation consists of political support from BE (Bloco de Esquerda), PCP (Partido Comunista Portugues) and the PEV (Partido Ecologista) in backing the secretary-general of the Socialist Party, António Costa for the formation of a minority government. These parties had long history of political disagreements, but in order to remove the right from government, they entered into agreements around specific issues.

Most of the chapters in the book refer to the "contraption" as evidence of change in the party system, because it signalled the decline of votes in the two major parties and unprecedented parliamentary configuration that resulted from the 2015 elections. This change illustrates the

erosion of political support for core traditional parties and the creation of a new governance formula in Portugal that seems to have attracted popular support. In democratic terms, it is too early to draw conclusions on whether the “contraption” will be transitory, or if it will have strong effects in the legitimacy of party systems, as suggested by several authors in the book.

The third theme concerns *political institutional reforms*, including changes in parliament and in the role of the presidency. Changes in the legislature happened to accommodate the conditions imposed by Troika, to make sure the conditions of the bailout were being followed. These changes did not include only fiscal retrenchments, but also changes in welfare policies, such as housing, with the opening of the housing market to the international private sector. In this context of the “gerigonça” have re-established the political centrality of the Portuguese Parliament, which in previous years had seen the growing influence of the president.

The book makes a strong case for the need to evaluate the impact of the Eurocrisis. While the authors in this book discussed in detail the changes of Portuguese democracy, the book does not answer the question posed in the initial pages: whether the above mentioned major changes impact democracy in a positive or negative way. In that sense, the book is quite inconclusive. It has done a good job in tracking the major changes brought about by economic crisis and austerity, but most chapters do not link these changes back to the main question. A minor problem is the copy-editing of the book. In a printed book published by a traditional publishing house, the reader expects to find a clear and error-free text. In this case, however, the chapters are filled with typos, word repetition, poor translation of Portuguese words, inconsistency in acronyms and citation, etc.

In addressing the relation between the economic crisis and democracy, *Political Institutions and Democracy in Portugal: Assessing the Impact of the Eurocrisis* provides readers with a significant and timely examination of the current state of democracy in Portugal. This relation is very complex, and it allows for different interpretations about the dynamics of political change in our current post-austerity context. The book is worthwhile for scholars interested in post-austerity democratic challenges and impacts of the Eurocrisis in political institutions, as well as those seeking to understand the consequences of the austerity measures in Portugal.

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