The Values of the Portuguese
Results of the European Values Study
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1. Introduction

The results of the European Values Study (EVS: www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu) reflect the values, attitudes and opinions of citizens with regard to a variety of topics central to day-to-day life, such as family, religion, politics, and work. However, issues involving perceived well-being and happiness, morality, human migration, the role of the welfare state, social networks and climate change are also covered among the diversity of opinions gathered from the study’s samples of the population.

These results represent a large quantity of information of potential interest to a wide-ranging audience, from academia to political decision-makers, teachers, students of various academic levels, journalists, and the general public. Through this data, we can learn how the Portuguese are similar to and different from the people of other European countries, as well as identify trends of change or stability over the past three decades, comparing them to trends seen in the rest of Europe.

The EVS is one of Europe’s oldest comparative longitudinal studies on attitudes and values. The data collected provide an understanding of beliefs, preferences, attitudes, values, and opinions of people throughout Europe. It is a one-of-a-kind undertaking in terms of monitoring and mapping values on work, family, religion, politics, and living in society. Its first edition was done in 1981, with the involvement of 10 European countries. The number of member countries gradually grew, with 27 participants in 1990, 33 in 1999 and 47 in 2008, representing around 70,000 respondents. The EVS’ fifth edition (2017-2020), which provided the source for this report, had 34 participating countries. EVS data are openly accessible, and have given rise to countless publications, both academic as well as more general in scope: more than 2,000 of these publications are available for consultation at EVS-Publications.¹ The results obtained until now have identified a series of social and cultural transformations in European countries, although differing in terms of their pace and make-up. The 2017-2020 edition continues to monitor this process of change, now in the light of the recent economic crisis.
The EVS in Portugal

Portugal participated for the first time in 1990, under the coordination of researcher Luís de França from the Instituto de Estudos para o Desenvolvimento (Institute for Development Studies). In 1999 and 2008, a research team coordinated by Manuel Villaverde Cabral and Jorge Vala, both researchers from the University of Lisbon’s Institute of Social Sciences, was in charge of conducting the EVS. In 1990, 2008 and 2020, the project received financial backing from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, as well as from the “la Caixa” Foundation in this last edition. Portugal’s involvement in the EVS has not been limited to collecting interviews. In addition to the Principal Investigator’s attendance at the General Meeting since 1990, members of the Portuguese team of the University of Lisbon’s Institute of Social Sciences (ICS-ULisboa) have been elected on various occasions to the Theory and Methodology Groups and to the Executive Board. The EVS is part of the “Social Attitudes of the Portuguese” program, one of the components of the PASSDA (Production and Archive of Social Science Data; passda.pt/?lang=en) infrastructure, a national consortium under the Research Infrastructures Roadmap of the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), which includes ICS-ULisboa (who leads it) and several top research centres in Portuguese social sciences.

The fieldwork of the EVS’ latest round was done by GfK-Metris between 11 January and 31 March 2020. From an initial sample group of 3,032 households, 1,215 interviews were obtained with a response rate of 41% and a sampling error of ± 2.8%, for a 95% confidence interval.
2. Family and gender roles

What do the Portuguese think about gender equality? It depends whether the context is the family (the most important sphere of life for 88% of respondents) or the “outside world”. For instance, while almost half of the respondents thought that “a job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children” and that “when a mother works for pay, the children suffer”, the opinions change outside of the family, since only a minority believes that “when jobs are scarce, men have more right to a job than women” or that “men make better political leaders than women do”.

The family was, and continues to be, the most important aspect of people’s lives, the cornerstone around which all other aspects revolve. Against the voices denouncing the deterioration of family values, the results of the EVS show that these values remain quite prominent, and have kept pace with the transformations, which have marked European societies in recent decades. These changes are reflected in the practices and portrayals of the family and are experienced at different paces and intensities according to the country, region or characteristics of the families themselves. These changes balance out on a line of continuity between traditions of the past and trends of the present.²

The EVS survey included a set of questions asking respondents to rank six spheres of life (work, family, leisure, friends, politics, and religion) in terms of their importance on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 – very important; 2 – important; 3 – somewhat important; 4 – not important). The responses obtained show the prominent role of the family in the lives of Portuguese people. Note that, since 1990, the highest score was recorded in 2020 (Figure 1).

![Figure 1 – Central role of the family in 2020 and trends in the importance of the family between 1990 and 2020 (% of “very important” responses), Portugal, European Values Study.](image-url)
This central role of the family remained consistent in every country, ranging from 78% in Russia to 98% in Albania.

Marriage continues to be an institution of value to most respondents. In Portugal, only 25% of respondents believed that marriage was “an outdated institution”, and that the determining factors for the success of a marriage (or a de facto union) are faithfulness, considered very important by 85% of those surveyed, followed by having children and adequate income (both at 59%).

Associated with the portrayals of the family are aspects involving the roles of men and women (inside and outside of the home), their ideas of happiness and fulfilment, and the values, which the nuclear family should teach to children. After the Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974, Portuguese society set the stage for a paradigm shift in women’s rights, namely access to education and the job market. In 2019, the activity rate for women was around 55% (compared to 27% in 1970), and 83% for women with higher education. In the same year, close to 60% of degree holders were women.

However, this influx of women into the public arena was not accompanied by the involvement of men in the private arena, with the resistance of these same women contributing in this regard. The questions of the EVS clearly show this interplay between gender roles. When asked about the true calling of women, the findings are quite revealing: 43% of those surveyed in 2020 “agree” or “completely agree” that “a job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children”; contrary to expectations, this is not a predominantly male assertion, since the differences between genders are not statistically significant. With regard to the consequences of women’s paid work on the well-being of children, the trend is similar: 46% agree or completely agree that “when a mother works for pay, the children suffer”, an opinion shared by both men and women. Furthermore, despite the consensus that “Both the husband and wife should contribute to household income” (92% of responses in agreement, regardless of gender), 26% of men and 22% of women believe that “a man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family”. Compared to the 34 participating countries, this puts Portugal in 13th place, with the highest and lowest percentages of agreement, respectively, being Armenia at 68% and Denmark at 5%.

Outside of the private domestic domain, when asked about the role of women in public life, respondents in Portugal clearly defend gender equality: only 18% believe that “when jobs are scarce, men have more right to a job than women”; 17% agree that “men make better political leaders than women do”, clearly below the European average of 30%; 89% disagree that “on the whole, men make better business executives than women”; and just 11% of those surveyed say that “a university education is more important for a boy than for a girl”, identical to the global average.
3. Ethics and morality

There are different traits that can be taught to children at home: independence, good manners, responsibility, thrift, tolerance, creativity and others, which reflect the norms (or values) considered most important by parents in guiding the lives of their children. In Portugal, great importance is placed on good manners and a sense of responsibility, with less importance placed on imagination and religious faith. With regard to ethical questions on life and death, suicide is the most highly condemned act in every country. Over the past 30 years, Portugal has become more open to euthanasia, while the low approval for abortion remained practically the same.

Social values serve as guidelines for evaluation and orientation in different situations and spheres of life. They help us distinguish between right and wrong, desirable and undesirable, or beautiful and ugly. In individual terms, they shape our choices, viewpoints and behaviour. In cultural or national terms, it has been shown that when there is more consensus and cooperation around values, there is less internal conflict.4

As a backdrop for primary socialization, the home is the place where children begin to learn social values. To find out which values are considered most important to teach children at home, respondents were asked to choose up to 5 qualities from a list of 11. Figure 2 shows the hierarchy of values in Portugal in 1990 and in 2020.
Overall, there was more stability than change. However, there were major differences in the importance placed on “being independent” and “determination and perseverance”, characteristics which were more often chosen in 2020 than in 1990 and, by contrast, in the importance placed on “obedience” and “religious faith”, which decreased. These findings raise two observations: on the one hand, they support the theory that values tend to remain stable, while on the other hand they show that values change, albeit slowly. The changes we can observe are consistent, since they show a greater affiliation with values encouraging a child’s empowerment and autonomy, with values favouring conformity and submission to social norms being less prominent.

Another survey topic in the area of ethics and moral values involving people’s judgements and assessments of aspects related to private life, such as attitudes on life and death (euthanasia, suicide, abortion), sexuality (sexual orientations and practices) and citizenship, will be analysed in point 4 of this document. Moral values are assessed by measuring the degree of justification given to them on a scale of 1 (never) to 10 (always). Figure 3 shows trends in the Portuguese people’s degree of permissiveness to the four practices evaluated in the four editions of the EVS in which they participated.
Greater openness to homosexuality and euthanasia can be seen over time. In the case of the former, this is reflected by the evaluation of parenthood, with more than half of respondents believing that “homosexual couples are as good parents as other couples”. Conversely, suicide and abortion had no major changes. “Suicide” is the systematically most condemnable act, in line with the global trend.

Figure 3. Extent to which practices are perceived as “justified” Sample mean, from 1 (“Never justified”) to 10 (“Always justified”), Portugal, European Values Study.

Compared to the answers obtained from the other participating countries, Portugal is among the less permissive, far removed from Nordic countries, and closer to Baltic and Eastern European countries. Figure 4 shows Portugal’s position on abortion.
“To what extent can abortion be justified?”

Figure 4. Extent to which abortion is perceived as “justified”. Sample mean, from 1 (“Never justified”) to 10 (“Always justified”), 2017-2020 European Values Study.

4. Civic culture

Over the past 30 years, the Portuguese have become increasingly less tolerant to behaviour such as tax evasion, claiming ineligible benefits, accepting bribes and even not paying for public transport. However, in other less direct aspects of what can be called “civic culture”, the changes are harder to see. The Portuguese continue to be among the Europeans with the lower levels of trust in their fellow citizens, as well as those least involved in volunteering.

One of the most important characteristics of a community is the sharing of values and beliefs which encourage cooperation to reach common goals, what many authors call “civic culture” (or “civic capital” or even “social capital”). All societies face common problems: although we share interests with other members of the community, we also have our own interests. If those interests are in conflict, the incentives for cooperation go down. The problem of the “free rider” — someone who benefits from a common good without contributing to it — can become so serious that the common good ultimately is no longer produced. The pandemic we are currently experiencing is an example of this problem. “Social distancing” and the containment of the virus...
it provides is a public good from which we all benefit, but which also comes with individual costs. If individuals disregard the shared benefits of distancing because of personal costs, they will stop distancing. But if everybody behaves similarly, these shared benefits will not be obtained. A number of different studies now show that, in countries and regions of the world with low levels of civic culture — which hamper the ability to internalize the negative externalities of individual decisions — there was less social distancing and mobility was less reduced.6

Existing research offers several ways — more and less indirect — of measuring civic culture through surveys. These include:

- the respondents’ tendency to consider behaviour generating personal benefits at the expense of society as unjustifiable;7
- the respondents’ general degree of interpersonal trust, under the assumption that, when people have low levels of trust in others, they also reveal their belief that civic capital in a given society is low, which in and of itself becomes an obstacle to cooperation;8
- behaviours — such as donating blood or volunteering — which indicate a predisposition to take on personal costs to the benefit of strangers and the community as a whole.9

EVS surveys have measured some of these variables, positioning Portugal both from a comparative and from a longitudinal standpoint. Figure 5 shows changes over time in the responses from those surveyed in Portugal to the question on the extent to which they consider justifiable — on a scale of 1 (“never justifiable”) to 10 (“always justifiable”) — certain behaviours generating personal benefits but with potential collective costs: tax evasion, fraudulent claims to government benefits, accepting bribes and using public transport without paying.
Figure 5. Justification of behaviours with personal benefits and collective costs.
Sample mean, from 1 (“Never justified”) to 10 (“Always justified”), Portugal, European Values Study.

One can see that, on average, the position of the Portuguese vis-à-vis all of these behaviours is that they are much more unjustifiable than justifiable. However, there have been important changes in recent decades. The tolerance for tax evasion has clearly decreased between 1990 and 1999, and has continued to do so since then, albeit more slowly. Similar but less pronounced trends can be seen for the remaining behaviours in question, with the latest survey (2020) showing lower values in all four cases. Because of this change in some indicators of “civic culture”, for example, we are the fourth least tolerant country for failing to pay for public transport, and the eleventh least tolerant to tax evasion among the 34 countries which conducted the 2017-2020 EVS.

However, we cannot ignore that there may be some sort of “social desirability” in these responses. In other words, it is possible that this change since 1990 is not
an actual change in Portuguese values, but rather a change in the strength of the social norm against these behaviours, which in turn may cause some respondents to hide their true values. Moreover, the tendency to hide true values in these responses will likely be greater among individuals with less civic culture. Thus, the use of more indirect approaches is worthwhile. One of these approaches entails measuring the extent to which respondents have trust in people in general. A high level of overall interpersonal trust indicates a belief that others do not want (or at least are unable) to systematically seek benefits for themselves to the detriment of our own interests.

Figure 6 shows trends in the percentage of respondents in Portugal who, when asked “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?”, chose the first option. The proportion of respondents who say they trust most people was never higher than one in five in the last three decades, with even lower scores in 1999.

Compared to Europe on the whole, these figures put Portugal among the countries with the lowest levels of interpersonal trust. As shown in Figure 7, we are on a par with countries such as Bulgaria, Serbia and North Macedonia; only Croatia, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Albania have lower scores in this 2017-2020 edition of the EVS.
Finally, the issue of civic culture can be approached from a behavioural standpoint: to what extent do the Portuguese report behaviour showing the ability to incur personal costs to the benefit of the community? In the 2017-2020 EVS, after questioning the sample group on belonging or not to a long list of volunteer organizations, they were asked “Have you done volunteer work in the last six months?” (in the case of Portugal, this time period corresponds approximately to the second half of 2019, still before the pandemic). In Portugal, 8% of respondents said yes. This is the third lowest percentage in the 34 countries where the survey was conducted, as shown in Figure 8.
In brief, the evidence over the last 30 years is not particularly favourable to the notion that the Portuguese have a strong civic culture. It is true that progress has been made in considering certain social behaviours seeking personal benefits to the detriment of the community as increasingly more unjustifiable. However, these measurements are always subject to pressure on respondents to conform, during a survey, to a social norm they do not necessarily espouse. When we use more indirect indicators — namely interpersonal trust and volunteer work — Portugal has much less favourable positions compared to the rest of Europe, with figures very far from those found in Northern Europe, and even lower than most Eastern and Southern European countries.
5. Social distance and opposition to immigration

Who do the Portuguese dislike as neighbours? From eight groups of people, there are three who are most rejected: gypsies, heavy drinkers and drug addicts, with the latter two being most rejected in all countries. Immigrant workers and people perceived as belonging to another race are the two groups who would be less bothersome as neighbours. With regard to immigrants, Portugal has been increasingly more open to their presence and their importance to the country’s development, although a significant proportion of respondents believe that they “take jobs away from nationals”, “contribute to increase crime” and “are a burden on social security”.

According to Park (1924)10, what we normally call prejudice is a more or less instinctive and spontaneous disposition to maintain social distances. While we can say that we have no prejudices, we still choose our own company. And when we do not choose people of different colour or religion, or whose ways of life or ancestors fall outside of established social norms, we are activating a mechanism of separation: social distance Bogardus (1925)11 created a scale that is still used today to measure this distance, where respondents are asked whether they would like or dislike to have as neighbours groups of people, whose characteristics differ from the majority.

Figure 9 shows the percentage of references to each group in Portugal. Previous studies on the same type of data identify an organization of different groups of people according to two dimensions: one focusing on people’s characteristics, and another focusing on their behaviour.12 The proximity between heavy drinkers, drug addicts and gypsies stands out quite clearly in these results, suggesting a perceived high risk associated with this last group.
In overall terms, the groups “heavy drinkers” and “drug addicts” are most often rejected in all countries, with ranges of 41%-87% and 64%-96%, respectively. The remaining groups vary considerably: for instance, the group “gypsies” was mentioned by 8% of Albanians and 75% of Italians, while the group “homosexuals” was selected by 2% of the Icelanders and 80% of Albanians. The group “people of different race” was particularly interesting. The results are the second lowest (after the “Jews”) of all the minority groups, cited by 1% in Sweden and 38% in Georgia. It is highly likely that this result is influenced by the effect of social normativity, since the fight against racism has become highly visible. One possible consequence is that, while rejecting “people of different race” can be immediately identified as a racist attitude by the respondent (since people of a different colour than the majority are protected by the anti-racism norm), the same does not hold true for gypsies (who have no specific norm to protect them).
Figure 10 shows trends in social distance in relation to some of these groups in Portugal. We chose these groups to show how the group “homosexuals”, who in 1990 belonged to the groups characterized by their behaviour (along with heavy drinkers and drug addicts), is since 1999 relatively accepted, contrary to the group “gypsies”, which continues to be associated with groups perceived as deviant. This acceptance is consistent with the answers to questions on morality and the parental qualities of homosexual couples.

![Figure 10](image)

Figure 10. Social distance in relation to minority groups (% of references to each group), Portugal, 1990-2020 European Values Study.

We have seen above how immigrant workers belong to the groups of people more widely embraced as neighbours. Let us now examine what the Portuguese think about immigration and its impact on society. Figure 11 shows the percentages of respondents in each country who answered how immigrants impact the country’s development.
In Portugal, immigration is seen as a “positive” or “very positive” factor for the country’s development by 49% of respondents; 14% of those surveyed believe that immigration is “negative” or “very negative”. The countries most open to immigration are Albania and Iceland (with positive assessments above 60%), while the least open are the Czech Republic and Hungary (with negative assessments above 50%).

Opposition to immigration is expressed not only by the degree of openness/resistance to the presence of immigrants in the country, but also the extent to which they are perceived as a threat for not contributing to the country’s economic development, being a burden on social security, being responsible for a rise in crime or damaging the nation’s culture. To evaluate the perception of immigrant threat, respondents were asked to categorize their opinion between two opposing positions on a scale of 10.

In the first pair of statements, where 1 means that “Immigrants take jobs away from natives in a country” and 10 means that “Immigrants do not take jobs away from natives in a country”, the average response was 5.6, very close to the average of all countries (5.7). In the second pair of statements, which evaluate the perceived impact of immigrants on crime, ranging from 1 (“Immigrants make crime problems worse”) and 10 (“Immigrants do not make crime problems worse”), the average response was 5.2, compared to the European average of 4.7. The third pair of statements assesses immigrants’ strain on social security, from 1 (“Immigrants are a strain on a country’s welfare system”) to 10 (“Immigrants are not a strain on a country’s welfare system”).

Figure 11. Impact of immigrants on the country’s development. 2017-2020 European Values Study.
in Portugal, the average was 5.3. The pair of statements against maintaining (or abandoning) immigrant customs and traditions had a similar value (5.2).

This apparent impartiality, with average responses around the middle point of the scale (5), may suggest that respondents truly have a moderate, intermediate position. However, it may also mean that they have not formed an opinion, or even that they do not want to reveal their attitude, once again due to the pressure of social norms. Even so, when asked whether the Portuguese or immigrants should be prioritized when jobs are scarce, the responses obtained place Portugal among the countries with a more equitable orientation (see Figure 12). This attitude of openness to immigration and immigrants is a phenomenon that has been consistently observed in other surveys (e.g. the European Social Survey), and is unique compared to other attitudes, ranking Portugal close to Western and Northern European countries which, generally speaking, have less conservative and traditional attitudes.

"When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to Portuguese over immigrants" (% “agree”)

Figure 12. Right to employment, “prioritizing Portuguese over immigrants”. 2017-2020 European Values Study.
6. Democracy

Nearly 9 in every 10 respondents in this study say that “having a democratic political system” is a good or even very good way of governing the country. However, for many, this embracing of democracy coexists with the acceptance of certain ideas, such “experts not governments, should make decision” and even “having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections”. Furthermore, over time, the proportion of respondents rejecting these ideas has had a downward trend, a phenomenon also found in countries such as Italy, Spain and the United States.

Since at least the mid-1980s, the issue of political systems has no longer been a major dividing line in Portuguese public opinion. Particularly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, vast majorities of people in most of the world’s countries say they prefer “democracy” over any other political system. However, what this preference might mean is not entirely clear. With the gradual delegitimizing of other systems, it is possible that people will express support for “democracy” at an abstract level, while actually meaning very different things, some objectively incompatible with any conventional definition of “democracy” in terms of protecting individual rights and free political participation and competition.

The EVS can be used to explore some of these potential contradictions. In Figure 13, we show the percentages of respondents in Portugal who, since 1999, say they support democracy as a system and reject other types of political systems: autocracies of “strong men” (“having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections”); technocracies (“having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country”); and military dictatorships (“having the army rule the country”). It is clear to see that, over the last two decades, a solid majority supports democracy as a suitable system for Portugal (at least 4 in 5 respondents), a majority which is growing (from 81% in 1999 to 86% in 2020).
However, it is also easy to see that many of those who, in Portugal, express support for democracy as a system still do not reject certain forms of non-democratic government. For instance, in 1999, while 81% of respondents said they thought democracy was a “good” or “very good” form of government for Portugal, only 50% thought that an autocratic system would be “bad” or “very bad”.

Even more important, the rejection of non-democratic forms of government has gone down over time in Portugal. This occurs in the case of technocracy (from 40% in 1999 to 28% in 2020), autocracy (from 50% in 1999 to 37% in 2020) and even military dictatorship (from 75% in 1999 to 66% in 2020).
All of these differences are statistically significant, i.e. one can infer that they occur not only in the sample group, but most likely among the general population as well.

From a comparative standpoint, this trend does not position us today among the European countries whose populations most often reject non-democratic forms of government. Figure 14 shows the rates of rejecting technocratic forms of government in the last edition of the EVS. From this standpoint, Portugal falls below all other Western European countries, and is at the same level as countries such as Poland, Armenia and Georgia.

"Experts should make decisions, not government"

Those responding that it is a “bad” or “very bad” form of government for the country (%)

2017-2020 EVS

Figure 14. Rejection of technocracy. 2017-2020 European Values Study.

Figure 15 shows the rates of rejecting autocratic forms of government. Portugal’s relative position is even lower, close to countries such as Armenia and Lithuania, and 20 points below the nearest Western European country (the Netherlands).
Portugal thus joins other Western democracies — the United States, Italy and Spain — where, over the course of the century, one can find a similar trend towards increasingly less rejection for non-democratic forms of government. However, this decline comes from a relatively low base, today putting Portugal closer to the democracies (and some authoritarian regimes) of Eastern Europe than the rest of Western Europe.

3 The trends in answers to these two questions since 1990 cannot be analysed, since the response scale was changed in 2020.
7 Guiso et al., Op. Cit.