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**THE IMPACT OF IDEOLOGY IN THE VOTING DECISION
MAKING PROCESS**

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The Impact of Ideology in the Process of Voting Decision Making*

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to better understand the importance of ideology for the Portuguese voter, in particular its impact on the voting decision making process. The importance of such a study is due to a common understanding, between Political Marketing and Communication scholars, that the ideology is being replaced by other more important features, such as political brand, among others.

The objective was, therefore, to understand what is the voters point of view on the subject, most importantly, to pinpoint the actual relevance of ideology from the voters' perspective when they cast a political vote. Being that it was necessary to inquiry the voters themselves, quantitative methodology was used, in the form of a questionnaire. The research has shown that, contrary to the widespread trend between academics, the voters consider, still, the ideology as a highly important feature for them to undertake a voting decision.

This study can be of benefit to political Marketers, so that used techniques can be enhanced and methods devised, in order to not only gain political campaigns but, and more importantly, the voters' loyalty.

Key-words: Ideology; Voting Decision Making Process; Political Marketing; Political Product.

* All quotes from foreign language authors have been freely translated.

Introduction and Objectives

Ideology has always been a very important and indivisible statist feature, and since politics has been a reality, so has been ideology (Bobbio, 1994). As the differential matrix that establishes politicians' and political party's lines of thought and action orientation, it's still a present feature in current political affairs. Its importance has, nonetheless and irrefutably, diminished, as other characteristics, that are more in line with today's methods and communication systems, slowly started taking a toll on the former imperative trait (O'Shaughnessy, 2001; Needham, 2006).

With the technological boom, and specifically with television, came the overpowering importance of image, which nowadays is an undisputed trophy, or demise, to any politician. The message and its content are considered to be almost as import as the image of the person who is conveying it, sometimes even surpassing it. This phenomena is called political professionalization, personalization or spectacle (Della Porta, 2003; Martins, 2006; Davis, 2010), meaning that speech eloquence, good and relevant ideas or driven personalities are no longer enough to gain the voters' trust; image, poise, and even good looks, are just as relevant and decisive. Politics has, indeed, been morphing over the decades, especially with the growing importance of political marketing, that has been emerging as an indecisive key instrument for politicians to carry out their goals, that is, win elections and voters' loyalty (Davis, 2010; Needham, 2006).

These changes are not only a symbol for a structural change at a communication level between politicians and their voters. This may very well have been a much more profound transformation in what politics means and stands for. If image has, in fact, overcame content, it is only natural to assume that ideology – the absolute antithesis of lack of intellectual depth and political action definition – is proportionally decreasing its magnitude.

The reasons for the shadowing ideological attribute in politics mustn't be attributed only to the emerging political marketing, though. It is also very important to understand that the voters themselves have been seeing it under a different light, and that ideology has in itself changed, according the new political order. Thus, the inevitable question must be answered: does ideology still have major relevance for the voting decision making process? It is this papers' objective to understand to which extension should the political communication professionals use ideology as a prominent factor. Voters will ultimately answer this question, once the acknowledgment has been made on whether they still weight in ideology as a very important feature taken into account in order to make their bulletin choice.

Conceptual Framework

Even though the main focus of the following investigation is ideology, the conceptual framework must be extended to other related, and intrinsic, concepts. In that sense, and in order to fully answer the earlier pinpointed question, three different axis of discussion must be taken into account, and these are definite intertwined elements that, together, make for the current reality of politicians and their campaigns, defining how voters make their voting choices. These three different, and yet tangled, concepts are, first of all, ideology itself, then political marketing and, last but not least, political product.

For this study to be conducted, it is necessary to firstly understand what the very idea of ideology stands for in the current political scheme of things. Political marketing has to be, subsequently, deeply understood, as it tempers with the ways in which the political product's perception will be sold to voters. It's nonetheless than the responsible mechanism for election wins. Finally, political product is to be portrayed as no other than the personification of political communication, as the ultimate vehicle through which the message is to be passed on to voters, who are the final consumer for whom every communication strategy is devised.

Following the enlightenment of these three major concepts, and as a result of their scrutiny, a hypothesis will be settled. This hypothesis, or query, to which the conducted study should give answer to, was based on a literature review revolving around the already referenced three main concepts of interest to the study.

The understanding of the voters' point of view in the matter of ideology and its impact on their voting decision is crucial to render conclusive findings. As a result, after the theoretical approach comes the empirical study, where the voters' opinion on the subject is to be measured and analysed. The chosen questions for this query were based on the theory presented in the literature review module. Methodologies were also properly chosen, in light of the questionnaires sought out outcome and purpose. Theoretical and empirical approaches are consequently convergent in order to correctly conclude what is ideology's impact on the voting decisions making process. The study's conclusions shall be seen not only as a means to understand voters' perspectives on electing, but also as an instrument for political marketers. From here on in, it's given way to the literature review, where the already seen three main related concepts will be demystified in order to not only carry out the study, but also to take comprehensive conclusions from it. The following theoretical exploration will, therefore, be consistent with these interconnected academic concepts: ideology, political marketing and political product.

Ideology

The concept of ideology has evolved throughout the centuries, from earlier philosophic meanings to today's commonly accepted definition, which can be "translated into the doctrinal and super structural component of the State. It has as its foundation a set of key principles of cultural, political, social and economic order, whose resumption and implementation reflect the permanent interpretation of the political power's decisions in relation to themselves" (Espírito Santo, 2006: 137). Meaning, ideology has morphed from a first philosophical assumption of a thought in itself, to the very system of ideas through which societies are governed and ordered by.

In a less abstract manner, the concept has matured as inseparable from politics. Its application has an even more elevated meaning when it comes to the development of the political party system and, hence, to democratic constitutions and societies, necessarily including voters' interests. Indeed, "ideologies and political parties are constituted [...] as mechanisms of political mediation between public opinion, political power and the State ending up on reflecting necessarily the needs and aspirations of the public opinion" (Espírito Santo, 2006: 132). Political parties, or in a broader sense, politicians themselves, are set out to convey a message that will, ultimately, convince the elector to exchange their vote for the fulfilment of promises and overall political planning.

This perspective on the wide political arrangement, and this conveyed message, are perceived to be of ideological nature, and for that reason, this creed should be one of the most differential traits amid political actors and institutions. And as such, what distinguishes one political party from another is, in fact, ideology, as it "assumes [...] a fundamental purpose for the organization, because it constitutes long term interests and, so, the very identity of its actors. This allows to reinforce solidarity amongst party members and contributes to form and solidify the conviction of sharing common goals" (Della Porta, 2003: 159). As so, it would seem to be only natural for the electors to perceive ideology as one of the main constituents for them to make a bulletin choice.

In terms of how ideology is, in practice, utilized as a means to separate candidates and parties from which other may be seen has a horizontal line where we can distinguish the 'left and right' extremes, which, respectively, represent the more socialist¹ or liberal² politics.

¹ It defends limited private propriety in favour to the proletariat interests. It's a somewhat analogous ideology to communism, even though a more moderate one. In the ideological spectrum it can be represented by the far or medium left.

² Firmly interconnected to the rise of the bourgeois class and of capitalism. Rationalism and individualism are strongly attached concepts to this ideology. It opposes socialism, representing the far or medium right spectrum.

Centred in the ideological guideline are the moderate political representatives, converging around the dimming of extremist political dogmas, where differences between them are harder to stand out, as candidates and parties share many of the same political convictions (Bobbio, 1995). Contemporary and democratic societies choose to elevate this temperate ideological spectrum, giving way to the Welfare State as we know it. This was a natural consequence of the ongoing value exchange between liberal and socialist policies, where “socialism becomes bourgeois, importing solutions from capitalism and liberalism. On the other hand, liberalism and capitalism socializes, doing the inverse” (Lara, 1995: 126). Social-democracy is the outcome, thus managing to reach a balanced rule to govern and establish societies.

The dim of extremist political points of view has inevitably led towards an ideological normalization. Even if the Portuguese Parliament is still politically pluralist, the parties that actually get elected as governments share most of their political convictions, with little or no distinction whatsoever between them. New political and social cleavages, the sophistication of different ways to participate as an interested citizen and the all-around novelty of new concepts have changed the ways in which public opinion understands and perceives all of the already discussed political assumptions. In reality “when we use the term ‘ideology’ nowadays, or when it’s used by others, we may not be completely sure if this is used descriptively or prescriptively, if it is used to simply describe a state of things (for example, a system of political ideas) or if it is also used, or maybe primarily, to evaluate a state of things” (Thompson, 1990 *apud* Espírito Santo, 2006: 140). Meaning, today’s ideological conceptualization acquires a substantially broader meaning and, proportionately, is less significant for the interpretation of political science. This realization might be sub sequential to the undeniable growing importance and use of mass communication media, and especially with the new found World Wide Web potentialities, as a primary vehicle to undergo political communication. Indeed, “parties are now less dogmatically-ideological and better at consulting and communicating with citizens” (Davis, 2010: 151).

In Portugal’s specific case of study, the weakening of the “traditional party loyalties and divisions” (Jalali, 2007: 310) is notorious, while “voters became increasingly less tied to a particular party, thereby generating partisan misalignment” (*idem*: 310). Standing by this statement is the fact that, since the fall of Portugal’s Salazar regime³, there have only come to

³ Also known as the New State period (1926 to 1974), it references the dictatorial regime led by António Salazar, President of the Council of Ministries.

govern and share Parliament majority the country's two main political parties⁴ (Jalali, 2007). With no surprise, these are the only two ideological moderate parties. In addition, Portuguese voters are considered to be highly volatile, especially when it comes to change a vote from one of these two parties to another (Jalali, 2007).

The normalization of ideology is, hence, an undeniable truth, being that “[...] the distinction between left and right that, since the French Revolution and for about two centuries, has served to divide the political universe into two opposite blocks, is outdated” (Bobbio, 1995:28). This has led to the technocratic ideal elevation as a new statist concept, which should eventually, and at some level, replace ideology's role in politics. Technocracy's meaning is set on the realization that ideal-free political propositions are prevalent over theorization, what some may call, ideology's demagogic tenor; action and actual technical know-how, in a very literal sense, are much more valued than the ideological beliefs of political candidates or parties, meaning, the voters' mindset is being conducted towards the elevation of a candidates' technical knowledge, whilst overshadowing his traditional political understanding of how societies should be governed.

This tendency can be explained through the intrinsic transformations in the ways politics is nowadays communicated, discussed, and also viewed by the general public opinion, as “modern parties now rely less on traditional party organisations and ideologies, and more on centralised management structures and the inputs of a range of external ‘professionals’ from marketing, media and elsewhere” (Davis, 2010: 35). Undergoing all these many changes, politics has been suffering a decisive ideological appeasement, and this is a reality experiencing an exponential growth.

Political Marketing

As the main responsible and interest party for the study of voters' behaviour, political marketing devises communication tactics and strategies so that politicians may communicate with public opinion to the best of their abilities. One can assume that it aims to “establish, maintain and enhance long term voter relationship at a profit for society and political parties, so that the objective of the individual political actors and organization involved are met. This is done by mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises.” (Henneberg, 1996 *apud* O'Shaughnessy, 2001: 1048).

⁴ These parties are known as the Socialist Party (PS) and Social-Democratic Party (PSD), respectively, they are representatives of the left-centre and right-centre ideological dogmatic positioning.

The now considered sub-science, derived from political science (Needham, 2006), also draws knowledge from a wide range of other related crafts, such as “administration, when it seeks to systemize and rank procedures to be adopted by candidates and/or parties [...]; with psychology, when it adopts persuasion as a communication strategy [...]; and, at last, with electoral publicity, which involves communication through different vehicles” (Queiroz, 2006: 30), and so this is a very rich and networked craft.

It has been growing immensely, as candidates and parties develop themselves as, proportionally, more and more dependent on its strategies. This dynamic sub-science is the current main responsible for every political communication conceptualization and production, but in order to validate political marketing as an empirical study strand, and also to understand its current strategies and instruments, it is firstly necessary to understand how it has drawn from commercial marketing a great deal of its functional gears and knowledge.

The direct transfer of implements between political and commercial marketing is sometimes considered to be necessary for statist marketing to deliver results (Shama, 1973 *apud* O’Cass, 1996; Needham, 2006), and both are reciprocally intertwined (Peng and Hackley, 2009). The incidence and nature of this exchange has, nonetheless, suffered many changes over the last few years, and one cannot assume that the transfers are necessarily direct, due to political marketing’s very specific contexts and roles.

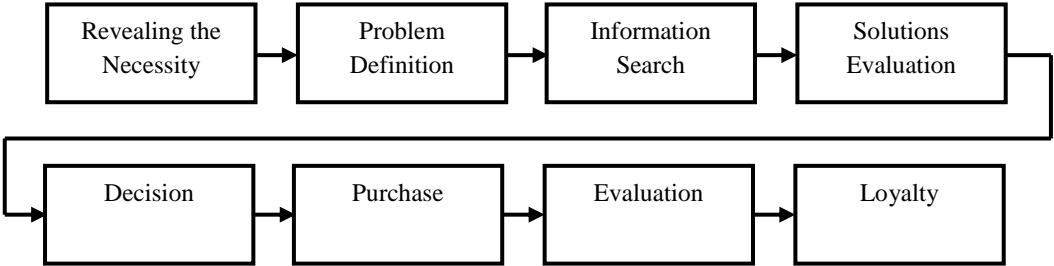
The idea of an exchange of some sort is present in both, though its trade objects are of a very different nature. In politics, the elector exchanges the vote – an evaluative referent – for the fulfilment of a political promise. In order to do this, it is political marketing’s job to ensure that voters do believe in the candidate/party’s governing capabilities (O’Shaughnessy, 2001; Needham, 2006).

In a nutshell, political marketing makes use of the commercial one, but instead of directly shearing its tools and strategies for success, it establishes new ones. For example, it makes use of the marketing-mix⁵ configuration, using the basis of its structure but ultimately applying its own components in search of a communication plan that will lead political actors to the ultimate success: win campaigns and maintain their voters’ loyalty. Notwithstanding, “we should not assume that political contexts are invariably analogous to business to the extent that methods can be imported and used with equal effect” (O’Shaughnessy, 2001: 1047)

⁵ “We call marketing-mix to the set of decisions that result from orientations [...] the ones related to segmentation, positioning and definition of primary actions of (marketing) strategy; it, generally, includes four main rubrics (product policy, price, promotion and communication, sales and distribution)” (Lindon, et al, 2004: 459).

Still, and in addition to the use of the marketing-mix and its basic composition, and for this study in particular, the design of models that structure consumer behaviour are also strongly suggested as tools of great importance for political studies. In fact, it's possible to transition some of these models constituents from one matter of study to the other, as can be understood from the image below.

Fig. 1: Consumer Behaviour Model (in: *Lindon, et al. (2004: 111)*)



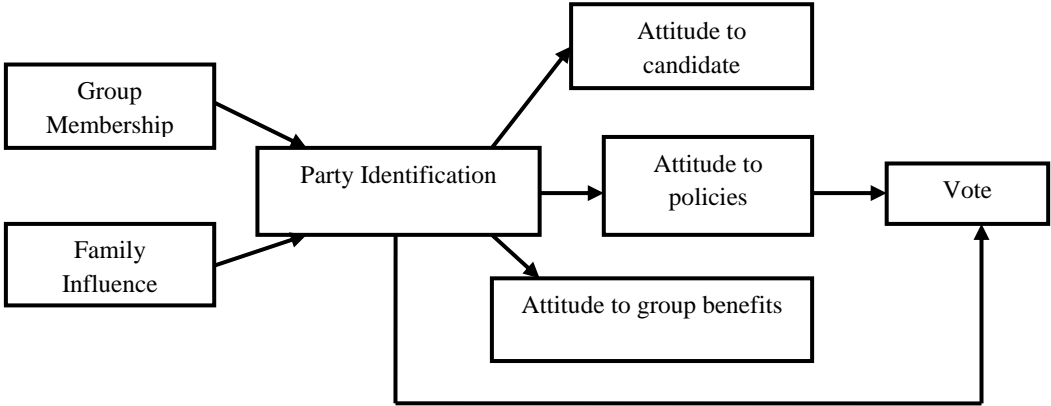
Easily replacing ‘purchase’ for ‘vote’ would make it clear to identify behaviour similarities, but what makes this an almost obsolete model for the study at hands is the absolute disregard for imposing elements in politics such as ideology, and similarly important elements. Although, according to O’Cass (2002), the application of this model to the distinct reality of political marketing is possible due to the assessment of voters’ as no more than a very specific type of consumer, of an also very specify type of product.

This assumption leads to an obvious correlation between how voters and consumers make a choice on either a vote or a purchase. But for political marketers to comprehend how do voters actual make their voting decision, it is imperative for them to figure out a specific model, detailing very important characteristics, that are otherwise oblivious to the general consumer, in order to empirically understand the voters’ behaviour, a very special type of consumer, nonetheless. However, the study and execution of such a decision making process model is not consensual among political scholars, and some of them consider these types of models reality alienated, since voters “use cognitive short-cuts and cues in order to facilitate a decision” (Newman e Sheth, 1987 *apud* O’Shaughnessy, 2001: 1049).

Nevertheless, most of political scholars still choose to observe and study the voters’ behaviour and, in conformity to their quantitative or qualitative studies, elaborate new models of voting decision making process.

There are, in fact, many models that aim the understanding of voter decision making processes, but there is one of particular interest for this study; a pioneer model which includes ‘partisan identification’ in its midst, as seen in the Fig. 2. This model designed by Campbell *et al.*, present in *The American Voter* (1960) study is consensually referred to and quoted by many of political marketing’s scholars.

Fig. 2: Michigan Model (in: Bannonn (2003: 140))



Even though partisan identification includes ideology as an impartibly characteristic of a party’s constitution, and is present in this model as a presumably decisive element for voters to make their decision, it is also undeniable that while “party identification remains high, the strength of the identification is rapidly reducing and thus the potential for persuasion increases with the potential number of less strongly committed voters increasing” (Denver, 1994, Lees-Marshment, 2001 *apud* Bannon, 2003: 140). Electoral volatility as a growing reality is, yet again, very important to realize, as partisan identification is no longer, and since the end of the WWII, a unique way of mobilizing vote (Espírito Santo, 2006).

The transformation of parties into professional institutions, a direct result from the mutations introduced by the overture of marketing planning and tools amid politics, all of these realities have changed political parties into “[...] ‘mass’ or ‘catch-all’ parties [...] with weaker ideologies and broader policies, design to appeal to wider citizen bases” (Davis, 2010: 36).

Since it has been decisive to this new order in communication exchanges between political actors and their voters, political marketing and mass media growing sophistication have forced these mutations not only upon parties and/or candidates, but also upon the way through which electors make a voting decision, being that they are now basing their decisions on more grounded and rational terms and no longer through vote psychology or inherit loyalty towards a specific party’s ideological beliefs.

Political Product

When discussing political marketing and ideology, it is of imperative necessity to highlight the political product as the ultimate vehicle for all communicational purposes. Included in the political marketing-mix strategy, the product of such a specific sort of communication is of crucial significance once it's seen as the 'object' that parties' and marketers' aim to sell to the electorate.

Due to its complexity and overall importance, the political product must be understood as a subdivided conception. As such, it is an intersection between ideology, the leaders' image, the inherit memory and promise (O'Shaughnessy, 2001). In reality, political product is classified as "complex and intangible" (Peng and Hackley, 2009: 175), and so its characteristics, and specifically those O'Shaughnessy has evoked in his study, should be deeply scrutinized in order to understand the whole of the theory behind such a view of a political actor.

Hence, ideology associates itself with the product through the candidate's affiliation with a specific political party, and even when a political candidate is an independent one, advocated policies will most definitely be more social or liberal ones. One can argue the assumption that ideology maybe an outdated concept, still; it remains an intrinsic way of categorizing political data, policies and general opinion on social, economic and all remaining society's issues.

The leader's image is directly associated to the candidate's personal appeal, sustained not by rational arguments, but instead by sheer emotional and subjective identification in the way that the voter perceives the political candidate; in this sense, empathy is a core attribute.

Inherited memory is, on the other hand, a very objective feature of the political product. It regards former performances that have already been in the public opinion's domains, such as previous interviews where opinion has already been disclosed or even, and more importantly, how was the candidate's performance while occupying a political, and public, position. Lastly, promise is related to the actual belief, or non belief, that the candidate will actually be able to support, maintain and implement all that has been pledged during the campaign.

That being said, the question must be asked: which of these elements is the most determine one to any politician's success? Studies have shown that the leader's image is a more important element for voters to make their bulletin choice than any values or ideologies supported by the partisan aggregation (Needham, 2006).

As a result, political marketing is now assuming the need to focus its communication strategies on the political personalization phenomenon. The political leader is, more than ever, the core of political communication (Peng and Hackley, 2009; Lock and Harris, 1996). As

such, “[...] tendency for increasing personalization of power is observed, a situation that dislocates the representative action for the executives at the expense of parliaments [...] a notion that is strongly influenced by forms of political intervention based on media” (Martins, 2004 *apud* Martins 2006: 32).

Traditional partisan system wear and tear, emerging media power and overall political professionalization have converged into a candidate’s manipulation in order to gain votes and maintain loyalties. In order to do this, ‘branding’ is now a very common deployment for political marketing. This is yet another element brought originally from commercial marketing’s studies, not only the nomenclature, but the idea of branding in itself.

For commercial purposes, brands aim to lessen the risk for consumers when purchasing, unequivocally identifying the brand through graphics, publicity campaigns, among others. It also assumes the objective of differentiating products, allowing the consumer to recognize himself in the communicated value (Mercator XXI, 2004). This is, more than ever, also true in the case of political leaders and candidates. Nowadays, candidates rarely are spontaneous characters, as personal appeal and presentation, from choice of clothes to haircut, are meticulously manipulated by the professionals that have infiltrated the political background.

In politics, branding is enhancing the leader’s strongest features, and lessening the not so appealing ones, thus creating a very empathic and emblematic packaging. It is set to be a strong and cemented way for voters to gain confidence in their vote, and “through using the party leader as the brand, a shortcut to sum up all the desirable attributes of the party, it is possible for parties to reconfigure loyalty in an era where institutional values are weak” (Needham, 2006: 182).

In short, “it just so happens that private life acts of a politician count more than his programme; looks become a more important quality than rhetoric; personal appeal prevails over content” (Della Porta, 2002: 109). This is an undisputed tendency that overcomes not only parties and their leaders, but also voters. History has made this a winning adage with such examples as Margeret Thatcher, Tony Blair or Bill Clinton’s, where personality and simple messages overcame any political affiliations, ideologies and overall policies, generating loyal voters and imperishable memory.

It ultimately changes the ways in which political communication is both produced and consumed, and it tags along with a very consensual critic among political scholars, and that is that politics is growing more superficial and shallow (Peng and Hackley, 2009) than ever before, as former contents and values, where ideology is met, are now oblivious to both ends of communication.

Research Model and Methods

Based on this paper's theoretical framework, the hypothesis to be confirmed or refuted by the empirical study is set as follows: **political marketing should not consider ideological identification as a relevant factor for the voter's decision making process.** This hypothesis, or research question, rests on the theory based belief that ideological cleavages are weakening, even if this only happens in a more literal and traditional sense.

Regardless of the reasons that might have led to this current statement – meaning, being this an immediate consequence of the emerging impact of mass media and external agents in the political background or not, or just a natural progression and mature of politics in its conceptualization in a general sense – ultimately, it is in the voters' highest interest to interpret and use this reality in their advantage. For this reason, it's imperative to understand if ideology diming does truly transpire from the theory to the actual public opinion conception of the voting process.

In order to do this, the chosen method was the inquiry by questionnaire, based on quantitative methodology. This specific sort of method and in-depth instrument enables general experimental measurement of a population's knowledge and opinion (Quivy and Campenhoudt, 1998) in general, and the electorate's attitude and opinion towards voting, and specific evaluation of the impact of ideology when voters actually make their voting decision, in this particular investigation. The broad purpose of the used questionnaire is, therefore, to inquiry the actual voters on their attitude during the filling of the election bulletin.

The questionnaires were distributed in person, and as for the questionnaire's construction in itself, the first two questions were of segmentation purposes only (age and gender). Following, the questionnaire was divided into two sections, the first one to identify the regularity and type of vote– and the second to measure political and ideological identification. Following the segmentation questions, and for the first section, respondents were asked to identify the frequency of their vote, using five adverbs of frequency, which range for 'never' to 'always' (Moreira, 2009). Following was a triage question, in order to discard any respondent that had never voted. This was a multiple choice question to which only the respondents who have answered 'never' to the previous question should respond to. The objective was only to determine why the respondent had never voted, and this being absolutely oblivious to this investigation, its findings will not be referred to.

Succeeding this query was a question regarding the political product constituents. These are, drawing from O'Shaughnessy (2001) and as presented to questionnaire respondents, the

candidate/political leader, the ideology associated to the candidate/party, the policies and proposals presented by the candidate/party and the former performance of the candidate/party. Respondents were asked to give a number, from 1 to 4, to each item – 1 being the most important one, 2 the second more important and so on –, according to its importance in the moment of making the voting decision. This created a scale in order of importance.

Moving on to the second and final section of the questionnaire, six final questions were devised, all corresponding to the Likert scale, in order to establish the agreement level of the respondent when faced with certain statements. The first three are intrinsic with literature review conclusions and the remaining three are to assess identification with any of the three main ideological references, these are, left, right or intermediate ideologies. These Likert scale questions were presented having in consideration the need for half negative and half positive statements (Hill and Hill, 2009). The table 1 below discriminates both the affirmations and the corresponding scales.

Tabel 1: Likert Scale Items

Item	Type of Scale
I don't really think about the candidate/party's ideology when I vote.	Negative (1 = Strongly Agree; 5 = Strongly Disagree)
The parties that govern or have governed don't have strong ideologies that distinguish them.	Negative (1 = Strongly Agree; 5 = Strongly Disagree)
Party's ideology is overshadowed by the importance that media gives the leader.	Negative (1 = Strongly Agree; 5 = Strongly Disagree)
I identify myself with the Central Block parties ⁶ .	Positive (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)
I identify myself with left wing parties.	Positive (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)
I identify myself with right wing parties.	Positive (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)

⁶ In the Portuguese party system, and for public opinion conceptualization, the statement 'central block parties' refers to the already named two parties that constitute the moderate range of the ideological spectrum.

When it comes to sampling and testing this questionnaire, and ideally, the sample to inquiry should have been all Portuguese population, with aging majority, that exercises, or has at some point exercised their voting rights at least once, residing in all Portuguese continental territory. This being a very vast universe to inquiry upon, the conclusions drawn from the study should not be extrapolated to the general population. On the other hand, data was gathered from a convenience and non-probabilistic sample (Hill and Hill, 2008). As a result, it's this study's objective to only demonstrate tendencies in the Portuguese voters' behaviour. In relation to the sample size, its determination depends upon the number of variables and the types of questions used in the questionnaire. The purpose of this inquiry will be to recognize differences between the subjects' dissimilar attitudes and one variable only will be studied, and that is ideology. Surrounding the study of this variable, it is expected the finding of its importance degree amid all other political product constituents, its impact in the voting decision making process and, additionally, a correlation will be set between generationally tendencies and similar voting attitudes.

In order to do this, and furthermore to descriptive statistical study, two different analyses test were performed on the gathered data, namely, an analyses of variance (Friedman test), which utilizes the chi-squared applied, in this particular study, to one sample only. According to the rules of thumb (Hill and Hill, 2008), and being that the test will be applied to four items, sample size for this test in particular should be fixed at 65 case studies. Parametric Pearson's correlation coefficient was also an applied test on the gathered data, and for this test, the necessary amount of cases is fixated in 40. For overall minimum data, 100 case studies were collected. For additional descriptive statistic, frequencies and measurements of central tendency and dispersion were also included in the data analyses.

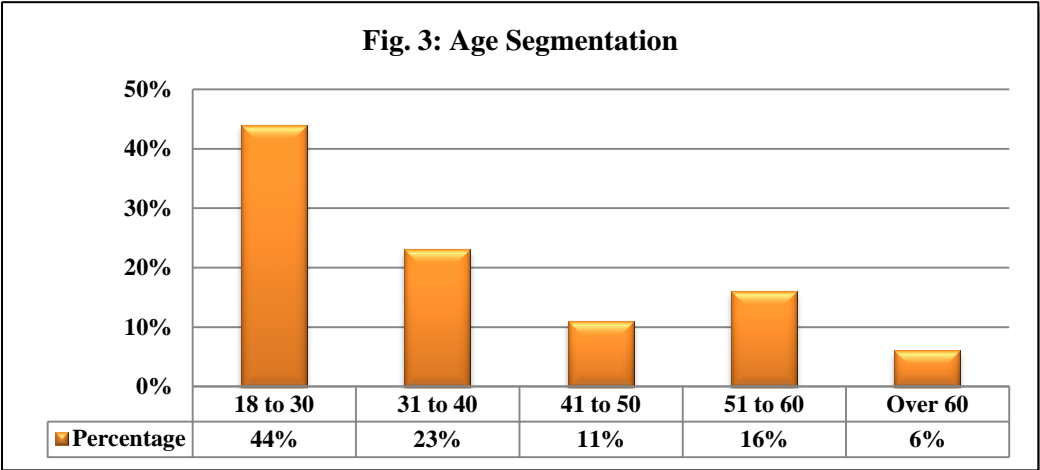
Before moving on to the study's findings, it is imperative to understand the importance and overall necessity of such tests implement. Firstly focusing on the Friedman test, this was applied in order to establish a comparison between the four characteristics present in the political product. To retrieve findings from the question where asked to established importance degrees to the four political product characteristics this is the ideal inferential assessment. The test will, therefore, allow to identify is the respondents' answers were distributed in a standard fashion. In order to do this, the test enables the inference on whether an operational hypothesis is proven or rejected. The devised hypothesis has been construed in order to determine if a uniform distribution of answers is actually found. If rejected, this operational hypothesis will therefore enable the conclusion that significant differences were found between all respondents' opinions on the subject.

Parametric Pearson’s correlation coefficient has as its objective the demonstration of correlation between variables, to be precise, the use of this test was to understand if there is a direct correlation between ideology’s darkening and the respondents’ age. As this is a mere tangible objective regarding the main focus of this study, only two variables were chosen for correspondence with the independent variable ‘age’, and those were the respondents’ answer to the following statements: ‘I don’t really think about the candidate/party’s ideology when I vote’ and ‘I identify myself with the central block parties’. The related operational hypotheses are expected to be, for this test in particular and having as line of thought the theoretical framework, a significantly negative correlation between age and the disregard for ideology when voting and also central block parties’ identification. It is to say that it is expected that the younger the respondents, the greater the identification with the ‘I don’t really think about the candidate/party’s ideology when I vote’ and ‘I identify myself with the central block parties’ statements.

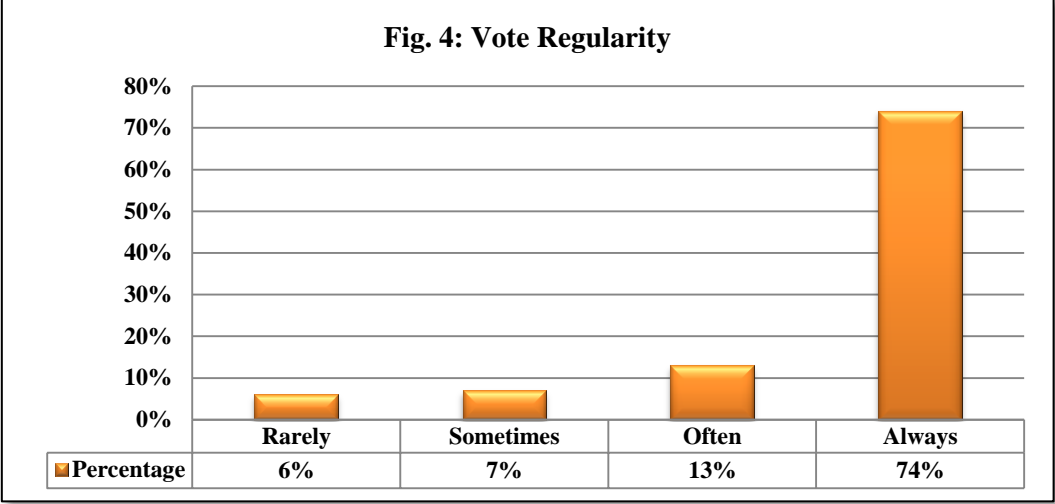
Finally, to all Likert scale six questions, which only purpose is to establish a ratio, no other tests will be applied, as it will only be necessary to analyse the descriptive values observed in the data. Note that data analysis was done resorting to the statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

Findings

Data analyses and outcomes are set as follows, starting with the respondents’ segmentation, which can be seen as very balanced when it comes to gender, where 49% were female respondents, opposing 51% male ones. Not so equilibrated in age, and as seen in Fig. 3, 44% are aged 28 to 30, and the remaining 56% are scattered from 31 years old to over 60.



Regarding vote regularity, the numbers are set as demonstrated in the graph below. Note that the response ‘never’ has been subtracted from the figure as there were only two respondents on the original sample that gave this answer. The two correspondents’ questionnaires have been replaced in conformity, and so the answer ‘never’ relates to 0% of the sample.



As for the importance degrees of the political product’s characteristics, the Friedman test has shown the results presented in the second and third tables below. A p-value⁷ equal to zero was obtained, and so the earlier drawn hypothesis was rejected to any level of significance. This means that a statistical significant difference was found among answers; that is to say that there is not uniformity in the ranking of the four features of the political product.

Table 2: Friedman Test

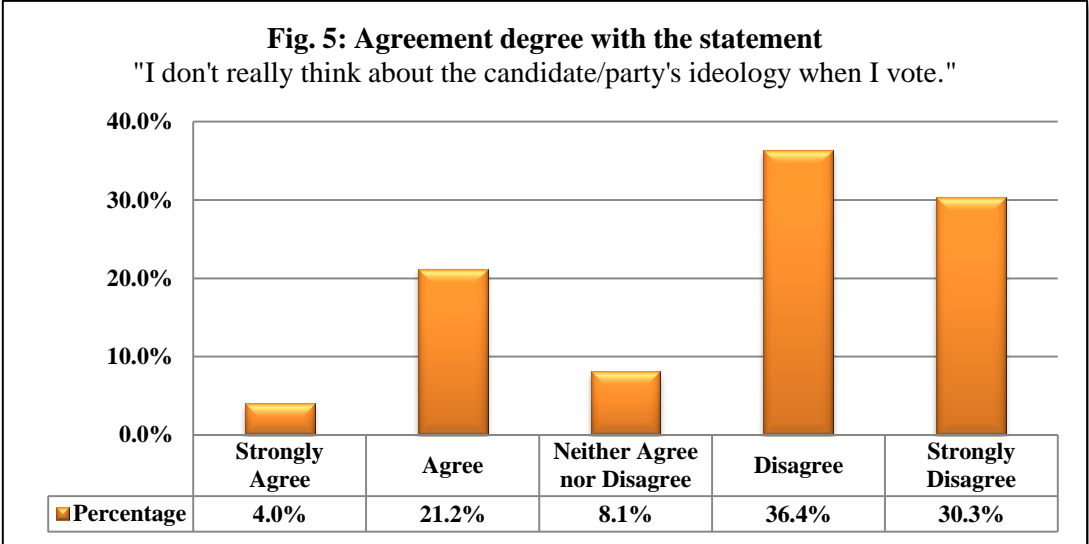
N	100
Chi-squared	23,304
Degrees of Freedom	3
Significance Level	0,000

Table 3: Importance Degree’s Mean and Mode

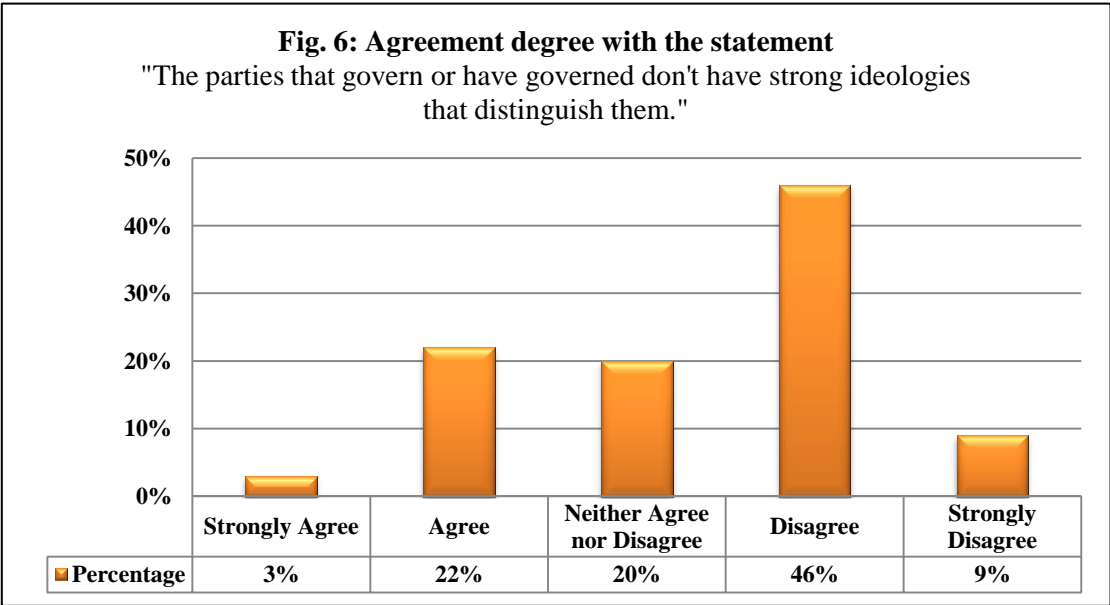
Item	Mean	Mode
Candidate/political leader	2,23	1
Ideology associated to the candidate/party	2,39	2
Policies and proposals presented by the candidate/party	3,03	4
Former performances of the candidate/party	2,35	3

⁷ P-value is represented in the table 2 by the “Significance Level” item.

Succeeding are the findings concerning the Likert scaled answers. As for the fifth graphic, the mean was fixated at 3,68 and the median and mode at 4 – which is correspondent to the answer ‘Disagree’. This shows a very evident symmetry in the given answers, with very similar values. The standard deviation⁸ is hereby set at 1,227.

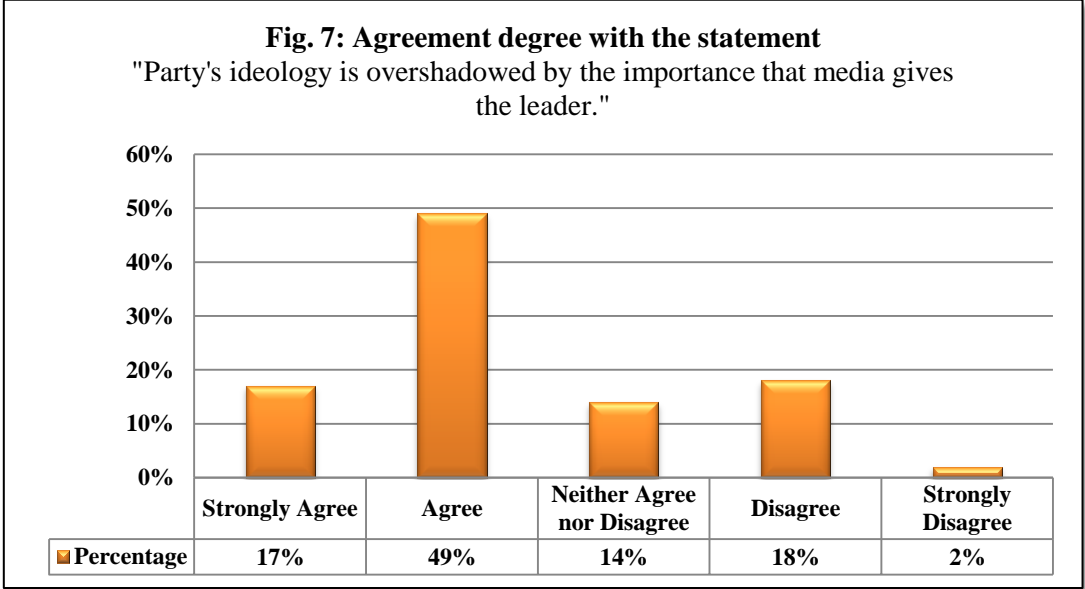


Following is the sixth Likert scale graphic, where measurements of central tendency are analogous to the preceded data. Median and mode are therefore also set at 4 (Disagree), and mean correspondents to 3,36. Which means that for this question also a unequivocal symmetry is observed, with a standard deviation at 1,020.

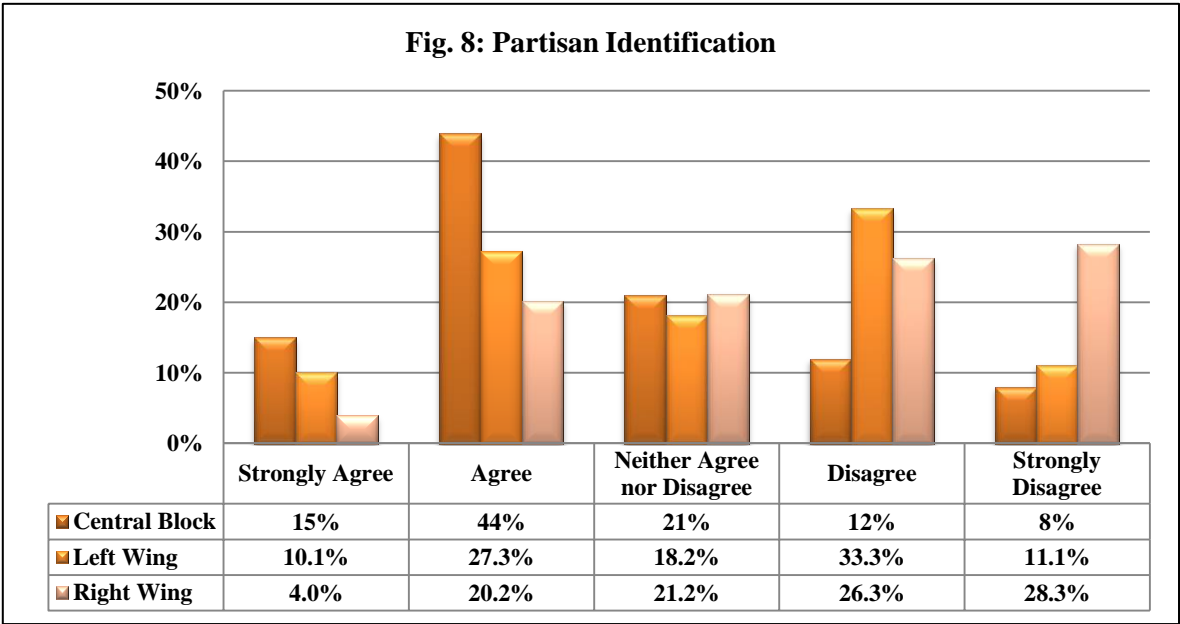


⁸ Standard deviation represents, on average, the overall deviation of answers from the observed mean.

As for the third answer measured by the Likert scale, represented by the seventh Figure below, the mean is set at 2,39. As for the median and mode, both are represented by the codification 2, which corresponds to the answer ‘agree’. Yet again, the symmetry is very evident, with a standard deviation of 1,034.



Graphic number eight represents the three remaining questions regarding the respondents’ partisan/ideological identification. Identification with central block parties, and specifically the answer ‘agree’, defines a great majority with a mean set at 3,46. As for the identification with the left ideological extremes, symmetry is not present. On the other hand, right wing identification is represented with a positive symmetry, where the mean is set at 2,45.



Finally, and in order to identify possible correlations between age and tendency to disregard ideology, it's given way to the parametric Pearson's correlation coefficient test. Table 4 below shows a -0,071 correlation with a p-value of 0,486. In this sense, the test reveals that the older the respondent, the lower is the disagreement with the statement 'I don't really think about the candidate/party's ideology when I vote'. Regardless, the finding is statistically insignificant.

Table 4: Correlations between age and ideology's cogency

		Age Echelons	I don't really think about the candidate/party's ideology when I vote
Age Echelons	Pearson's Correlation	1	-0,071
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,486
	N	100	99
I don't really think about the candidate/party's ideology when I vote	Pearson's Correlation	-0,071	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,486	
	N	99	99

In relation to the correlation presented in the table 5, a p-value of 0,339 was obtained, which means that the variables are positively correlated. It is possible to draw the conclusion that the higher the age, the greater the identification with the Central Block parties. Once again, this correlation is not statistically significant, nonetheless, with a significance value over 0,05.

Table 5: Correlations between age and Central Block identification

		Age Echelons	I identify myself with the Central Block parties
Age Echelons	Pearson's Correlation	1	0,097
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,339
	N	100	100
I identify myself with the Central Block parties	Pearson's Correlation	0,097	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,339	
	N	100	100

Discussion

Interpretation of empirical findings and its correlation with the theory framework will be formulated from hereon in and, through it, a final deduction on the earlier pinpointed hypothesis will be articulated.

First of all, it's imperative to highlight that the majority of case studies gathered through the questionnaire correspond to respondents who vote with high regularity. Even though the used scale to infer this used somehow vague adverbs, questioned voters perceive their political participation as consistent and exacerbated. As for the segmentation of the inquired, respondents' gender was much equilibrated. The same did not happen in terms of age, being that most of the respondents were aged between 18 and 30 years old, even though the inquiry gathered considerable amplitude in age. A probabilistic sample could possibly have solved this issue, which can potentially lead to dubious deductions. Even so, the age range allows inducing on eventual generational differences in voting decisions.

This is somewhat relevant for this investigation, as historical facts points towards partisan misalignment (Bobbio, 1995), high electoral volatility in Portugal (Jalali, 2007), a growing difficulty in interpreting the concept of ideology (Thompson, 1990 *apud* Espírito Santo, 2006) and increasing professionalization of general politics (Davis, 2010). These are phenomena that are viewed as tendencies, and as such, younger voters should not perceive politics and voting according to traditional ideological processes, as they tend to have consumed political messages already highly manipulated by political marketing. As more exposed to these new political cleavages and concepts, younger voters should be more inclined to obliterate ideology in their voting decision making process.

To take conclusions on this matter, the Pearson's correlation coefficient test was applied to the two questions that would specifically and directly measure ideology's impact in the voting decision making process. The test has shown that, in reality, younger voters tend to agree with the statement "I don't really think about the candidate/party's ideology when I vote". On the other hand, as age got higher, also was the agreement with the statement "I identify myself with the Central Block parties". It is elementary to understand that the test has also shown that these findings were not statistically significant, but further data analysis brings enlightenment on this matter. In reality, dispersion in responses shows a pronounced lack of indecisive respondents regarding either correlation. In addition, and firstly regarding the first correlation (Table 4), the disagreement is highly accentuated. As for the second Pearson's correlation, the answer "agree" gathers a high consensus.

That being said, this test has managed to make up two different conclusions. The first is that age as little, or nothing, to do with the impact of ideology during the voting decision or with the identification with the ideological moderate parties. On the other hand, one should consider the weak equilibrium in the age segmentation of respondents to this inquiry, which may explain the weak significance in the test's findings. It is also determinant not to ignore the presence of the tendency for younger voters to ignore ideology when voting, even if this happens in a not so strengthened fashion.

Moving on to the remaining exploration of findings, the first Likert scale question, relative to the degree of agreement with the statement "I don't really think about the candidate/party's ideology when I vote", and independently from age, shows that the general tendency is for voters to disagree or strongly disagree. Based on the observed symmetry, this is highly consistent throughout the case studies. Recalling the study's theory, this seems not to be, at all, consistent with the political marketing scholars' former findings. However, this may not be the case; in fact, Bobbio (1995) considers that ideology is not a current and contemporary concept. On the other hand, as suggested by Thompson (1990), the gradual transformation of such a notion may betoken the voter as not fully understanding of the concept. This might be explained by the fact that parties and candidates themselves are relegating ideology over other political features (Davis, 2010; Della Porta, 2003). If so, it is moreover important the realization that voters themselves might have difficulties in grasping the concept's meaning.

The agreement level with the following statement, "the parties that govern or have governed don't have strong ideologies that distinguish them", might enlighten this issue. In fact, the disagreement with this statement is high, but not as consistent; it is suggested that voters are more torn when it comes to this statement. In this matter, the discussion is set not one the voters' relationship with one ideological wing in particular, but more on the guarantee of a majority vote on the moderate parties (Jalali, 2007) and partisan identification.

Contrary to Bobbio's (1995) finding that the ideological extremes are weakening in terms of electoral identification, the questioned voters do assess Central Block parties as ideologically differential between them. Still, Jalali's (2007) findings regarding the high volatility of Portuguese voters, who also seem to be less loyal to one party in specific, is yet to be understood. As of now, it is only evident that voters can be loyal to both of the Central Block parties.

To thoroughly analyze these deductions, it is now imperative to examine the respondents' partisan identification. The first conclusion from this data analysis is the lack of standardization between answers, where only the identification with the Central Block parties

reunites consensus. In this sense, respondents assure that they weight in the parties ideological wings when deciding their vote, which gives strength and is, in fact, consistent with the disagreement with the preceded affirmation concerning the moderate parties' ideological differences. Still, and given all the deduction above, the confirmation that voters highly identify themselves with the two most undistinguished Portuguese parties, ideologically speaking, speaks higher to the illation that ideology is an unclear notion.

Partisan formation occurs in an autonomous way, that is to say, with no strings attached to public opinion, and ideological appeasement cannot be entirely viewed from the voter's perspective. Meaning, the voter might not understand the ideological untying as a given asset, but that does not mean that it isn't a reality when it comes to the institutionalized party system. On the other hand, political actors are obliged to transform themselves as public opinion demands such mutations. The reciprocal value exchange (Henneberg, 1996), meaning, a vote for a promise fulfillment, is therefore a two way interest, so that both intervenient might see through their objectives.

Politics is a bidirectional game of benefits, and as for the parties/candidates' interests, it is imperative to make use of persuasion and communication tools (Queiroz, 2006). To communicate value and promise are imperative traits (O'Shaughnessy, 2001; Needham, 2006) and to do is, political marketing's influence is imperative (Davis, 2010).

In this sense, it is now necessary the analysis of the agreement level with the affirmation "party's ideology is overshadowed by the importance that media gives the leader", in order to understand if the electorate is fully aware of the political marketing's role. The majority of the respondents have, in fact, agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. In conformity, the illation is that the voters are actually very aware of media impact in the political background and, above all, in the ways through which political messages are broadcasted (Martins, 2006; Davis, 2010).

In addition, this question also refers to other theoretical frame; the progressive greater impact of the leader's image for political marketing to reach its objectives (Needham, 2006; Martins, 2004; Della Porta, 2003). Mass media are the main vehicle through which political communication is brought to the public opinion and being so, its importance is undisputed. Even though the media's interference is certain, and also is the public's notion that mass media renounces ideology over image, reinforcing the idea that the political product is, progressively, a brand (Peng and Hackley, 2009; Needham, 2006), it is determinant for this investigation to deduct on whether the voter chooses to contradict this mass media reality; that is to say, if voters still consider ideology a more important feature than a leader's image, the

current core of political communication according to marketing standards (Peng and Hackley, 2009; Lock and Harris, 1996).

For the purpose of this deduction, the Friedman test was applied to the question that asks the respondent to directly rank all four political product constituents. The test has demonstrated that answers were not convergent with one another, that is to say each one who has answered the questionnaire had ranked the four features in a very different way; consistency, standardization or pattern were not observed. Even so, modes and means allow further discussion. According to these measurements of central tendency, the most important features for the voter to make a voting decision are the leader and the ideology; both obtained similar means in terms of order of importance – set at level 2 out of 4. The obtained modes are also interesting to observe. According to them, and by descending order, the rank of importance is set as follows: candidate/leader, ideology, former performance and, finally, presented policies and proposals. If the voter understands that mass media extols the leader's image over ideology, and accordingly sets the candidate's image as the most decisive feature, the theory surrounding the emerging media influence in political communication and consequent way in which the voter determines the voting decision is reinforced.

According to the gathered data and sub-sequent findings, conclusion is set on an unclear voting decision making process. Main lines of thought are that voters see ideology as a primary aspect to make a voting decision. On the other hand, majority identification with ideological appealing parties. This deduction is aligned with Bannon's (2003) theory defending the maintenance of ideology as an important factor of voting decision making. Simultaneously, the Michigan Model can be seen as still current by centralizing ideological identification as a central missive in the voting decision making process. The voter is also perceptive to political marketing's interference in the way political messages are conveyed and consumed, namely giving higher importance to the candidate's image, which is a way to condense and cut short cognitive identification with a party's leader. The voter is receptive to this reality, and admits to use such short cuts in order to make a voting decision.

It is demonstrated, conclusively, that the empirical exploration converges towards the theoretical framework at the level of media impact on the party system formation, which subsequently influences the development of voter opinion. There is indeed a tendency for younger age groups to be less aware of the ideological impact, and simultaneously it appears that the blurring of ideological extremes is evident in the voter's choice. However, the impact of ideology is, for the voting decision making process, a factor envisaged by the voter as imperative. Thus, the investigation's hypothesis is hereby rejected, meaning that political

marketers should, in fact, consider ideological identification as a relevant factor for the voter's decision making process.

This does not mean that the conclusion is in any way linear, on the contrary. A generational tendency was observed, where younger voters are inclined to ignore ideology when making a voting decision, as well as the candidate's image was highlighted as fundamental. This means that political marketing scholars should take into account that the direction of political communication, increasingly geared to set the candidate as core, produces the desired effect. Upon further discussion, voters express certain, and latent, confusion around the current concept of ideology, but they seem to be expressing a desire for a new change in the way parties communicate their values. Redirecting focus from the brand to political dogmatic debate might be the voters' desire.

If this repositioning was actually made, it could lead to greater political participation, and also bring new found interest for politics. Mutual interests would be met, and voter satisfaction with conveyed messages and rhetoric would necessarily reflect a greater display of active voters. Subsequently the number of opportunities to ensure the majority vote would increase, while facilitating engagement and loyalty.

In conclusion, it is undeniable that politics is constantly changing along with the electorate's view of it, either by force or external interference or simply because of a growing disinterest. But the maintenance of a party system and the consequent suffrage is a necessity, a guarantee that power is exercised democratically. In this sense, it is crucial to stipulate what the wishes and aspirations of the electorate are, in order to be feasible to keep freely formed contemporary societies.

Limitations

Research overlooking the impact of ideology on voting decision making process is complex and relevant, as well as the multiple concepts and theory framework suggest interest in the study of two different sciences.

Although political science has abundant authors and references, political marketing is still a limited core research when it comes to the Portuguese scientific community. The lack of references to bring about relevant case studies for this research may have limited the theoretical exploration and literature review.

Another limitation of this investigation concerns the methodological approach solely based on quantitative methodology. Indeed, certain aspects remain unclear, and the use of a qualitative

method and research model would not only explain certain aspects more thoroughly but also allow exploring other discussion dimensions. The single use of gathering and analysing of quantitative data limits the empirical study to a mostly expository exploration; applying qualitative methods enables a clarification based on cause-effect paradigms. Including the qualitative methodology would also allow to include yet another relevant branch of study, and that is vote psychology. The use of the outlined questionnaire would not be obsolete, rather enhanced.

Another possible methodology enhancement, and given that the ideal sample size is a very large one, would be the use of the Bayesian inference, based on Bayes' rule, that would probably allow a more precise sampling measurement, while also taking into account uncertainty in parameter estimates. This usage would not only enable more precise probability statistic, but also determine whether the chosen method was, in fact, effective.

Regarding the questionnaire's execution, and specifically when it comes to determine the partisan identification (i.e. Fig.8), the option "none of the existing parties" should have been considered, as nonpartisan voters represent a valid, and often very important spectrum of the voter mass as a whole. This concern is greater for the study at hand, given that nonpartisan voters are likely to have a very specific, and controversial, opinion on ideology as a political concept and voting decision making feature.

Further Research

As for possible suggestions for future research studies, a first proposition is a more thorough investigation, based on the same variables and focusing on this same subject, yet construed upon qualitative methodology in order to understand underlined reasons for these first conclusions. Such an investigation would allow new and insightful information on the Portuguese voters' perspective, namely measuring opinion in a more detailed fashion.

Another suggestion that could improve and refine this investigation would be to rearrange the study in order to devise and explore political marketing's tools. Finally, it should be noted the need for further studies aimed at investigating the assumptions of political marketing applied to the Portuguese electorate in particular, since there are few scholars who focus on such issues and problematic.

Translating these early findings into a qualitative interpretation may also provide yet another interesting and intriguing study, regarding the emotional undertone to any political endeavour. As already acknowledged, vote psychology is extremely relevant for the comprehensive study

of a voter's behaviour, and its implications in such an investigation could help to anticipate the emotional implications in voting decision making process. As such, for political marketing scholars the importance of such awareness is undeniable, as emotions play a decisive role in the voter's political understanding. More importantly, and for example, a candidate's likability, that sub-sequentially triggers a voter's emotional response, might be the decisive prompter that can ultimately lead to a smashing victory, in what is commonly known as a "Landslide victory".

Managerial Implications

The devised and explored investigation is of particular interest to both the scientific community and to public opinion.

As for political marketing, communication and general political scholars, this investigation allows the enlightenment of the Portuguese political and electoral reality, and also the possible creation or enhancement of political marketing tools. It also contributes towards a insightful look on the Portuguese voter's values.

When it comes to the public opinion's interest, the study allows extended knowledge on the voting decision making process. It also allows the voters to understand the constant mutations in the political background, values, behaviours and paradigm shifts. This unequivocally leads to a more informed public opinion which, consequently, will bear better political understanding, as it learns to make more enlightened voting choices.

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