



Article

Unraveling the Heterogeneity of Electoral Abstention: Profiles, Motivations, and Paths to a More Inclusive Democracy in Portugal

Nuno Almeida ^{1,2,3,*} and Jean-Christophe Giger ³ ¹ FAROTESTE—Avaliação Psicológica, 8000-220 Faro, Portugal² Centre for Research in Psychology (CIP), University of Algarve, 8005-139 Faro, Portugal³ University Research Center in Psychology (CUIP), University of Algarve, 8005-139 Faro, Portugal; jhgiger@ualg.pt* Correspondence: nmfalmeida@ualg.pt

Abstract

Electoral abstention is a growing phenomenon in contemporary democracies, raising concerns about the representativeness and legitimacy of elected governments, particularly in Portugal where youth participation remains low. This study explores the heterogeneity of non-voting behavior by comparing insights from voters and non-voters through online focus groups. Employing content analysis on qualitative data from 42 participants, the research identifies distinct non-voter profiles, systemic barriers, and potential pathways to increased participation. Key findings reveal heterogeneous abstainer types—including disbelieving citizens, disinterested youth, pragmatic non-voters, and protest non-voters—driven by distrust, practical obstacles, and insufficient political literacy. Despite non-voting, many express conditional willingness to participate in high-stakes scenarios or following reforms. The study concludes that addressing these barriers requires holistic measures, such as enhanced civic education, technological voting modernization, and improved political representation, to foster trust and democratic engagement. These insights offer actionable recommendations for policymakers to enhance voter turnout and strengthen democratic legitimacy.



Academic Editor: Andreas Pickel

Received: 3 August 2025

Revised: 22 September 2025

Accepted: 3 October 2025

Published: 11 October 2025

Citation: Almeida, Nuno, and Jean-Christophe Giger. 2025.Unraveling the Heterogeneity of Electoral Abstention: Profiles, Motivations, and Paths to a More Inclusive Democracy in Portugal. *Social Sciences* 14: 601. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14100601>**Copyright:** © 2025 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).**Keywords:** electoral abstention; non-voting behavior; voter turnout; political disengagement; non-voters profiles; focus groups; civic education; democratic participation; Portugal; blank vote; null vote

1. Introduction

Electoral abstention, i.e., non-voting behavior, remains one of the most understudied topics. While political science has extensively examined voting behavior over many years, research on voter abstention itself reveals significant gaps in scientific knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon. Moreover, electoral abstention is virtually absent from social psychology research. The research deficit on electoral abstention stems from a fundamental methodological challenge: the inherent difficulty of identifying and accessing abstainers as a research population. How can researchers effectively reach individuals who, by definition, do not participate in the electoral process? How do we capture the perspectives of this demographic group that increasingly represents a substantial portion of the electorate while remaining largely invisible to both researchers and policymakers? The challenge is compounded by the fact that abstainers constitute a heterogeneous population

with diverse motivations for non-participation, making comprehensive study even more complex. Understanding abstention is crucial. Indeed, conventional forms of political participation, such as voting, continue to decline (Della Porta 2011), as voter turnout is decreasing across all modern democratic systems (Deschamps et al. 2005). Furthermore, in many European democracies, political parties are experiencing a significant decline in membership levels, both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the electorate (Van Biezen et al. 2012). Every electoral event is defined by a mathematical interplay between the number of citizens registered to vote (i.e., those with the effective capacity to participate) and the number of individuals who actually choose to exercise this right/duty. This concept, therefore, lends itself to straightforward quantification through a mathematical formula (Costa 2010). Age emerges as one of the most robust explanatory factors for electoral participation in Portugal, even when controlling for other potentially relevant variables (Magalhães 2019). Consistent with the literature on non-voting behavior, younger citizens tend to vote less frequently (e.g., Cancela and Vicente 2019; Dassonneville and Hooghe 2017). This dynamic raises concerns about the underrepresentation of certain social groups, such as youth, in electoral outcomes. From a broader perspective, when abstention rates exceed 50%, a paradox emerges where a voting minority represents a non-voting majority. Understanding why certain citizens (particularly young adults) abstain from voting remains crucial for democratic legitimacy and for designing interventions that reduce barriers to participation. On average, Portuguese youth are less likely to vote than other age groups in a longitudinal and comparative European perspective [ESS 2002–2019] (Magalhães 2019). This article focuses on learning directly from the “voice of abstainers” through a series of online focus groups and systematic qualitative analysis to identify profiles, barriers, and triggers for participation that contribute to improving policies aimed at reducing voter abstention.

1.1. Voter Abstention

Several scholars, like Lane and Ersson (1999), Gray and Caul (2000), Freire and Magalhães (2002), and Deschamps et al. (2005), have documented a consistent and progressive rise in abstention rates across Western democracies. Electoral abstention has become a critical social issue for Western democracies (Deschamps et al. 2005). It is no longer the majority of the population that expresses itself through voting but rather the majority of a minority (Deschamps et al. 2005). This reality raises significant concerns about the social and democratic legitimacy of electoral outcomes.

There is no unanimous explanation for why citizens disengage from participating in elections through voting (Costa 2010). Globally, the proportion of Portuguese respondents who self-identify as abstentionists is approximately 20%, roughly half of the actual percentage (Martins 2023). Norway and Portugal both exhibit high levels of abstention (Perea and Cabral 2003). However, literature consistently highlights a key demographic characteristic influencing voter turnout: age. Older individuals exhibit higher rates of participation (e.g., Antunes 2008; Doppelt and Shearer 1999; Magalhães 2019), while younger populations tend to have higher rates of abstention (e.g., Cancela and Vicente 2019; Dassonneville and Hooghe 2017). Portuguese youth (ages 18–24) vote significantly less than their older counterparts. Moreover, according to data from the European Social Survey (ESS), an average of only 47% of young Portuguese reported voting in the most recent elections across nine waves of the survey. Among the countries surveyed, only Ireland, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and France had lower proportions of young people claiming to have voted than Portugal (Magalhães 2019). Building on these findings, Magalhães (2019) sought to rule out the possibility that the observed relationship between age and electoral participation could be attributed to spurious correlations. Specifically, he examined whether

factors such as educational attainment, income, marital status, or ideological orientation could interfere with the age-participation relationship. Using a Generalized Additive Model (GAM) (Hastie and Tibshirani 1990), which optimizes data fit while controlling for the effects of other variables, Magalhães (2019) demonstrated that age remains one of the most significant predictors of voting propensity, even after accounting for the influence of these factors. His analysis revealed that an 18-year-old has an estimated 30% likelihood of reporting having voted in the last election, whereas a 70-year-old has an 80% likelihood. In light of these results, high abstention rates raise questions of representation and social equity in a system that aims to be pluralistic and diverse. It is necessary to find these actors (young non-voters), perhaps in universities, for example, where they will already be over 18 years of age. Interview them, mapping their reasons and the conditions for (re)entering the vote, something complementary to the existing quantitative aggregate analyses.

1.2. Profiles of Non-Voters

Some quantitative studies have already been conducted on the profiles of abstainers. Amnå and Ekman (2014) proposed a new framework for analyzing political passivity, demonstrating that this is not a one-dimensional reality among young people, but rather a reality composed of distinct orientations toward politics. Based on an empirical study of 863 Swedish adolescents, using cluster analysis and MANOVA on data on political participation and interest, the authors identify four distinct profiles: active citizens, standby citizens (interested, informed, and available to act if necessary), disengaged, and disillusioned. The concept of standby citizens highlights the existence of attentive and competent young people who are capable of intervening politically when circumstances require it, despite not demonstrating permanent active participation. This distinction reveals that not all inactivity reflects alienation, underscoring the importance of overcoming simplistic dichotomies between participation and abstentionism in order to better understand the new contours of citizenship among contemporary youth. Bagozzi and Marchetti (2017) argue that abstainers are a heterogeneous group and include two distinct types of abstainers: Routine abstainers: people who rarely or never vote, whose decision does not change easily in the face of specific factors in an election; Occasional abstainers: voters who may miss a specific election due to temporary reasons, such as dissatisfaction with candidates, bad weather, among others. The authors conclude that treating all abstainers as a single homogeneous group can lead to biased inferences about the effects of covariates on voting behavior and abstention. Alvarez et al. (2018) seek to clarify and organize the concept of electoral protest, developing a detailed taxonomy of behaviors identified as protest voting in academic literature and discussing the conceptual and methodological challenges involved in this analysis. The authors warn of the difficulties in differentiating protest voting from other electoral behaviors (strategic voting, error, disinterest, etc.), arguing for the need for better conceptual and methodological tools—such as specific surveys—to clearly identify the underlying motive for each unconventional vote. The study distinguishes five main behaviors often labeled as protest voting. (1) voting for insurgent parties is based on support for anti-establishment, unconventional, or extreme parties, not because of their platform, but to reject mainstream parties; (2) in tactical protest voting, voters who, dissatisfied with the direction of their preferred party, strategically vote for another party to send a message of discontent; (3) intentional blank, null, or invalid voting relies on the use of invalid ballots as an explicit form of protest, although it is difficult to distinguish between intention and error; (4) organized protest vote is based on campaigns led by political elites that encourage protest voting, as in historical cases in Argentina, Peru, or Bolivia; finally, (5) officially sanctioned protest vote refers to the “None of the Above” (NOTA) option, present in some countries, allowing for a formal protest recognized by the electoral system.

The existence of NOTA resolves some of the ambiguities present in other types of protest votes (such as blank or invalid votes), as it is explicitly offered as an official alternative to rejecting the options in dispute. However, for countries where this option does not exist, such as Portugal, we do not know whether non-voting—electoral abstention—could be one of the responses in this regard.

1.3. Focus Groups as a Method for Studying, (De)politicization and Study Electoral Abstention

The depoliticization of citizens is primarily influenced by external factors. Among these, the erosion of social capital, the pervasive influence of modern media, globalization—which obscures political accountability—and neoliberalism, which emphasizes the individualization of social relations, stand out as significant drivers (Zürn 2016). Collectively, these factors diminish citizens' engagement with political issues, distancing them from active political participation and interest. Focus groups, when carefully designed, provide a robust method for examining (de)politicization among citizens (Duchesne 2017). Previous experimental studies, including three focus groups on delinquency, have demonstrated the value of this methodology and its capacity to generate meaningful insights (Duchesne and Haegel 2004, 2010). According to Duchesne (2017), three core elements are essential when designing focus groups to explore politicization: recruiting lay citizens, achieving a balance of social homogeneity and political heterogeneity, and implementing non-directive moderation. For research on depoliticization, it is crucial to recruit lay citizens who reflect the diverse social and political landscape of the population. Political sociology often skews findings by predominantly interviewing over-politicized individuals (Gaxie 1978). Instead, it is necessary to recruit participants from varied social classes, ethnicities, genders, and generations to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives. This recruitment process, however, is resource-intensive, requiring active outreach efforts in participants' everyday environments, such as workplaces, shopping areas, and community spaces (Duchesne 2017). In this study, the focus group design sought to balance social homogeneity (e.g., voters versus non-voters, students versus non-students) with political heterogeneity, as well as diversity in terms of age, gender, and socioeconomic background. Duchesne (2017) highlights that such segmentation fosters meaningful discussions by creating common ground while preserving a variety of political perspectives. Although incorporating these criteria complicates the formation of groups, this approach significantly enhances the ability to analyze and understand electoral abstention. When lay citizens participate in political discussions, they often reinterpret political concepts through the lens of their everyday experiences. This translation of political categories into accessible terms underscores the cognitive and socially mediated gaps between citizens' lived realities and formal political structures (Duchesne 2017). Ethnographic studies have further shown that while individuals may avoid political discussions in public, they frequently express political concerns in private settings (Eliasoph 1998; Hamidi 2010; Cramer Walsh 2004). These studies, which examine civic groups or informal social interactions, illuminate how depoliticization manifests in everyday life. Incorporating focus groups into such research could enrich these findings by encouraging naturalistic discussions (Duchesne 2017). Focus groups have a dual heritage: the qualitative research tradition, which emphasizes context-sensitive data collection, and the behavioral sciences, which adopt experimental methods (Morgan 1996). This dual framework makes focus groups particularly versatile for investigating politicization. The group setting empowers participants to reframe questions and discuss issues on their terms. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2014) emphasize that focus groups often transform personal reflections into collective political discussions, making them especially relevant for exploring political engagement and disengagement. Effective focus groups rely on skilled moderation to ensure open and natural discussions. Duchesne (2017) recommends

small groups of four to seven participants, enabling each individual to contribute without requiring direct prompting. In this study as conducted multiple focus groups comprising four to eight participants. These sessions were video-recorded to capture non-verbal cues and group dynamics, and the discussion was guided by a limited number of questions to allow an in-depth exploration of attitudes toward electoral abstention. The analysis of focus group discussions employed an interpretative narrative approach, supplemented by content and discourse analysis (Duchesne 2017). Video recordings proved indispensable for understanding interaction patterns and non-verbal communication. The analysis focused on how participants constructed meaning and the ways in which their identities influenced their perspectives on electoral abstention. As Tilly (2003) observes, shared identities are crucial for fostering coordinated social and political action. In the focus groups, participants often articulated shared identities based on common experiences, which helped establish a foundation for discussion. The depth of insights generated through focus groups arises from deliberate methodological choices, including thoughtful recruitment, careful segmentation, and innovative moderation techniques (Duchesne 2017). While focus groups are sometimes employed for quick data collection in applied research, they also provide rich qualitative insights that resist simplistic conclusions (Andrews 2008).

1.4. Content Analysis (CA) as a Theoretical and Empirical Framework to Study Abstention

We start from the understanding that scientific research, within a qualitative approach, is conducted as a continuous movement of interconnected phases (De Sousa et al. 2010). According to Minayo (1998), research can be divided into three phases: (a) the exploratory phase, during which the object of study is refined, and the research problem is defined; (b) the data collection phase, where information is gathered to address the research problem; and (c) the data analysis phase, in which collected data are treated, interpreted, and inferred upon. In this context, various scientific methodologies are applied to analyze data and process results, among which Content Analysis (CA) stands out (Lima et al. 2021). While interconnected with other phases of the research process, CA aims to interpret the collected data, confirm or refute the research hypotheses, and broaden the understanding of contexts beyond the surface of the studied phenomenon (De Sousa et al. 2010). CA facilitates systematic, qualitative, or quantitative descriptions, which are used to process and interpret the content of texts and documents. Furthermore, it helps reinterpret messages and derive their meanings, serving as a methodological approach with distinct characteristics and possibilities (Moraes 1999). Even before becoming widely adopted in the social sciences, CA was already employed in the fields of communication and symbolic political domains, particularly in the United States between the 1940s and 1950s (e.g., Santos 2011). Historical investigations reveal cases that can be recognized as rudimentary applications of CA techniques (Bardin 2011). Content Analysis involves a set of analytical techniques aimed at systematic and objective procedures for describing message content. Its goal is to derive indicators—quantitative or otherwise—that facilitate inferences about the conditions of message production or reception (Bardin 2011). The increasing use of CA in research highlights its importance, particularly for the analytical conditions it provides in processing data collected in studies (Lima et al. 2021). Within CA, the categorization of information emerges as a critical step for structuring the investigated reality, aiming to conceptually grasp it (De Sousa et al. 2010). Bardin (2011) characterizes analytical description as a method that classifies the semantic components of a message into categories, which she metaphorically refers to as “drawers.” According to Bardin, Content Analysis is fundamentally an analysis of meanings. It involves an objective, systematic, and often quantitative description of content extracted from communications and their subsequent interpretation (Santos 2011). In this sense, Content Analysis has become an indispensable methodology in contemporary

research, offering robust tools for analyzing and interpreting information across a wide array of disciplines.

1.5. Overview of the Study

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the heterogeneity of electoral abstention in Portugal, with an emphasis on young adults, comparing the perspectives of voters and non-voters. Using online focus groups as the main method of data collection, complemented by content analysis, the objective is to identify distinct profiles of non-voters, systemic and motivational barriers, and proposals to increase democratic participation. The novelty lies in comparative analysis, which reveals nuances between groups, contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of abstention and implications for democratic legitimacy. The methodological procedures, including participant recruitment and ethical analysis, are detailed below, ensuring reproducibility and scientific rigor.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

2.1.1. Sample Total

The total convenient sample is composed of 42 participants, from 20 to 64 years old (Mdn = 31; IQR 21–40.50) of whom 23 are female (Mdn = 29; IQR 20–42) and 19 are males (Mdn = 31; IQR 22.75–35.00). In the sample 24 participants were single, all Portuguese 20 participants are students and most had higher education: 15 participants had a bachelor's degree and five participants a master's degree. 24 participants are sympathetic to a political party; 19 participants believe abstention from voting is just as valuable as voting behavior. Most of the time the participants revealed that they voted on the left: 14 participants; on the center: ten participants; on the right: six participants. All participants volunteered to participate in the study. Because the study was aimed at understanding the motives of young adults for not voting, the total sample was divided into two sub-samples: the students and the non-student sub-samples. Figure 1 displays the distribution of participants by gender and by student versus non-student status.

2.1.2. Student Subsample

The sample is composed of 20 participants, from 20 to 40 years old (Mdn = 21; IQR = 20–28.50) from whom 10 are female (Mdn = 20.50; IQR = 20–21) and 10 are males (Mdn = 23; IQR = 21.50–31). In the sample 15 participants were single, all Portuguese, most had higher education: eight had a bachelor's degree and one a master's degree. Fourteen participants were not sympathetic to a political party; nine participants believed abstention from voting is just as valuable as voting behavior. Most of the time the participants revealed that they voted on the left (9 participants).

2.1.3. Non-Student Subsample

The sample is composed of 22 participants, from 20 to 64 years old (Mdn = 37; IQR = 29.50–45.00) from whom 13 are female (Mdn = 41; IQR = 29–47) and 9 are males (Mdn = 34; IQR = 27–41). In the sample nine participants were single, all Portuguese, most had higher education: seven had a bachelor's degree and four a master's degree. Eight identified with a political party, ten believe that abstention from voting is just as valuable as voting behavior. six participants revealed that they voted on the center.

2.2. Procedure

A series of online focus groups were conducted, leveraging several advantages highlighted in the literature. These include the ability to access geographically dispersed

participants and increase participant diversity (Eysenbach and Wyatt 2002), schedule flexibility (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999), enhanced anonymity, and a reduction in group bias. The online format allows participants to feel more at ease, which can lead to greater openness and honesty during discussions (Im et al. 2007). Additionally, online focus groups facilitate data collection, as sessions can be recorded for careful and detailed analysis at a later stage (Stewart et al. 2014). All participants signed an informed consent form prior to the online sessions, which clearly indicated that their participation was voluntary and that they retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any adverse consequences. Before the session, they also completed a sociodemographic questionnaire (see instruments). Upon joining the online platform (Zoom), participants were asked again to confirm their willingness to participate. The focus groups were recorded to enable a thorough and accurate analysis. Approximately nine hours of audio and video recordings were collected for examination.



Figure 1. Distribution of participants by gender and students and non-students.

Data analysis was conducted using the Constant Comparison Analysis method, which is particularly suitable and effective when working with multiple smaller subgroups (Onwuegbuzie et al. 2009). Through a continuous and systematic procedure, participants' information was grouped and organized into categories and concepts that emerged from the training itself. The data was analyzed to find similarities and differences, refining the categories until they were well defined and saturated with all the information. For example, in an initial coding to identify units of meaning in the data and assign descriptive codes to the question "In your opinion, what are the reasons why some people do not vote in elections?" to create the category "uninterested," expressions verbalized by participants such as "uninterested," "lack of interest in the country's affairs," "it's because they think it's not worth it, they're not interested"; "they prefer not to vote because they think it doesn't matter"; "because they're not interested"; "lack of interest"; "uninterested"; etc. Throughout

the reading and categorization of information, a constant comparison was made between each new piece of coded data and the previous data to confirm whether that code already existed; adjust existing categories; create new categories, if necessary; refine categories; continue the process until no new or relevant information emerged, i.e., the categories were complete/saturated. All procedures adhered to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki, the American Psychological Association's (APA) ethical principles, and Portuguese regulations on data protection. The sociodemographic questionnaire and the focus group script were approved by the institutional Data Protection Officer and the Ethics Committee of the University of the Algarve (CEUAlg No. 136/2023). The study protocol was registered on the Open Science Framework (OSF) with the DOI 10.17605/OSF.IO/FBD9X and made publicly available. Participant recruitment was conducted via advertisements posted on social media and through student networks across various universities. Data collection took place between January and August 2024, employing a convenience sampling technique. Participation was entirely voluntary.

2.3. Material

Informed consent to participate in online focus group. Participants were informed that the study was part of a research project on Electoral Abstention. Detailed information was provided about the nature, objectives, and procedures of the research, as well as the participants' rights. These included the voluntary nature of participation and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any personal or professional consequences. Consent was sought to record the interviews, including both audio and video, to enable a more thorough analysis of the responses. Participants were also assured that no risks associated with their participation were anticipated, and no costs would be incurred by them. Collected data were securely archived, with access limited exclusively to the research team. Participants' privacy was rigorously protected and never compromised. It was emphasized that participants would not be identified in any scientific report, publication, or other forms of dissemination. The results of all participants remained anonymous and confidential, and any findings shared with third parties were presented only in aggregated form.

Sociodemographic questionnaire. Information on gender, age, marital status, nationality and education was collected. Questions about voting was also added: "Are you sympathetic to any political party?" (yes or no); "Is the behavior of abstaining from voting as valuable as the behavior of voting?" (yes or no); "Most of the time, which way do you vote?" (extreme left, left, center, right, extreme right). If participants did not vote, they did not answer this question.

Moderator Instructions and Discussion Questions for the Focus Group. The session began with the moderator welcoming the participants and providing a brief overview of the purpose of the focus group. It was explained that the session would be recorded to facilitate the systematic analysis of all opinions shared by the participants. Participants were reminded that they had the right to withdraw from the focus group at any time without any consequences or penalties and could choose not to respond to any specific question posed by the moderator. Each participant was asked to briefly introduce themselves by stating their name and confirming their willingness to participate in the focus group (in addition to having already signed the consent form).

The discussion questions posed to the group were as follows:

Q01. What is electoral abstention? How would you define electoral abstention? What meaning do you attribute to it?

Q02. What does it mean to cast a blank vote? What is a null vote? Are these the same, or can they have different interpretations?

Q03. Since voting is a right, in your opinion, does it make sense to make voting mandatory?

- Q04. In your opinion, what are the reasons why some people do not vote in elections? // Why didn't you vote in the last elections (municipal, legislative, presidential, European)?
- Q05. What do you consider to be the profile or characteristics of people who vote // do not vote? What defines them?
- Q06. What motivates your voting behavior (to not abstain)? // What motivates your non-voting behavior (abstention)?
- Q07. What would be an "extreme" situation that would make you decide not to vote? // decide to vote?
- Q08. What is your opinion of people who do not vote? // people who vote?
- Q09. In your opinion, what are the consequences of electoral abstention?
- Q10. What changes would need to occur for more people to participate in elections? What measures could be taken to encourage people to vote? How could we make the voting process more accessible? What role do schools/universities, the media, and civil society organizations play in this context?

3. Results

3.1. Data Curation

The data was processed using Microsoft Excel ([Microsoft Corporation 2018](#)), IBM SPSS 28.0.1.0 (IBM Corp., Chicago, IL, USA), R version 4.3.2 ([R Core Team 2022](#)) and MAXQDA Analytics Pro 24.2.0 ([VERBI Software 2019](#)) in a Windows and MacOS environment. The overall workflow of data processing and analysis is illustrated in Figure 2, which outlines the sequential steps from data collection to category saturation.

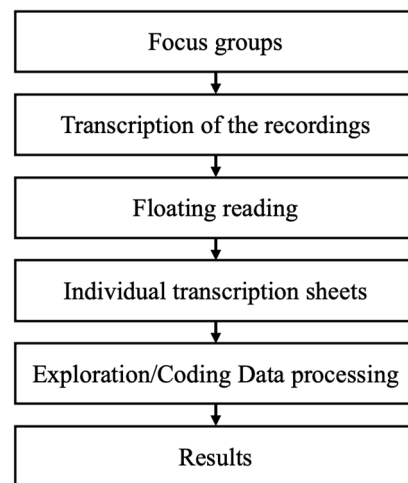


Figure 2. Flowchart work.

3.2. Main Findings

3.2.1. Meaning of Electoral Abstention for Nonvoters and Voters

From the perspective of non-voters, abstention was commonly viewed as a form of expressive behavior, allowing individuals to convey their discontent with the political options or the electoral system as a whole.

For some non-voter participants, abstention was a deliberate choice, a way to protest what they considered to be inadequate or unrepresentative political alternatives.

(NV01, Male, 64 years old, Businessman, Political Party Sympathizer, "Abstention is not a lack of interest, I am informed, but I don't want to be part of a system that I don't believe in; NV02, Male, 31 years old, International Relations and European Studies Student, "The meaning of abstention for me is a person who decides not to exercise their right to vote and has the right not to exercise it").

Other participants cited factors such as lack of interest, knowledge, or availability at the time of elections as reasons for their abstention. Importantly, non-voters tended to interpret abstention as a complex phenomenon, with multiple underlying motivations and drivers.

(NV03, Woman, 33 years old, Master’s degree, “In my case, I never decided to vote. I’ve just never been one for looking at the options and getting ahead of myself. I didn’t feel that I wanted to have an active voice in the country’s decisions; NV14, Female, 20, Languages, Literatures and Cultures Student, Political Party Sympathizer, “Voter abstention is when people don’t go to vote in elections, it’s the choice not to participate in the vote. It can indicate dissatisfaction with politicians or a lack of interest in the election”; VN15, Female, 26 years old, Monitors in a youth association, “Abstention has several meanings, lack of interest, lack of knowledge about what to vote for, lack of availability”).

From the perspective of voters, electoral abstention is perceived as a threat to democracy and democratic process, representing a breach of civic responsibility and a withdrawal from political engagement.

(V01, Female, 20 years old, Psychology Student, Political Party Sympathizer “Abstention has to do with the fact that we give up a right we have, which is to be represented. Therefore, it puts the proper functioning of democracy at risk; V06, Male, 38 years old, Military member of the GNR—National Republican Guard, Political Party Sympathizer, “Abstaining from elections is giving up a right that we have, which is the vote that was acquired through democracy. By abstaining from voting, we are not choosing to abstain from voting. We are giving up a right that is very important to us. Basically, voting is the basis of democracy, isn’t it? As I see it, that’s the point of view from which people, by abstaining from voting, are losing a great right. They have one of the primary rights that we have as a democratic society”).

Voters tend to interpret abstention as a manifestation of discontent or lack of interest, which they may see as a form of protest.

(V08, Female, 40 years old, Psychology Student, Political Party Sympathizer, “Many people don’t go to vote, often as an act of showing displeasure or not agreeing with things. And other people simply don’t go because they don’t care”).

However, voters also see abstention as an imperfect choice that enables others to decide on behalf of those who have forgone their right to vote. Furthermore, some voters believe that if abstention rates exceed 50%, it should prompt changes to the political system.

(V11, Woman, 47 years old, Mayor, Political Party Sympathizer and Militant, “There’s a lack of interest in party representation in society, and this is a serious risk, and as such, I think there’s a lot of work to be done to get people to vote, at least by raising awareness that we’re losing free democratic systems in the world (. . .). . .] The case of the Algarve is paradigmatic, not in these last elections, which was a different phenomenon, but when we had an abstention rate of 60%, I would say that half the population, the majority, didn’t really choose who they wanted to govern.”)

[see Appendix A Table A1].

3.2.2. Nonvoters’ Profiles and Motivations for Choosing Not to Cast a Vote

The analysis of responses to questions about the profile of non-voters and the reasons why participants themselves and others are not voting reveals a coherent structure of relationships between non-voters’ profiles and their motivations for abstention. This correspondence suggests that non-voting behavior is not random, but rather a consistent

reflection of citizens' personal characteristics, practical circumstances, and ideological positions. Several prototypical profiles emerged.

1. *The Disbelieving Citizen.*

This profile is fundamentally characterized by a lack of conviction and hope in the political system. Abstention manifests as a direct consequence of disbelief and disillusionment with the democratic process. This group is marked by systematic distrust, and their justification for not voting is based on the perceived ineffectiveness of the political system. Their abstention reflects a collapse of belief in politics as a meaningful vehicle for change. They are resigned non-participants.

2. *The Disinterested Youth*

The youth segment stands out for its characterization based on disinterest and lack of political understanding. This profile directly corresponds with motivations related to disinterest and lack of engagement with the electoral process. The absence of political knowledge appears as a characteristic, a cause, and a justification for abstention. They do not see the relevance of politics in their daily lives and may be influenced by social media and alternative forms of civic engagement.

3. *The Pragmatic Citizen*

The practical and organizational issues faced by this group of non-voters create significant barriers to voting. Factors like transportation expenses and navigating bureaucratic voting processes pose major hurdles, especially for those facing disorganization or time constraints. These logistical challenges likely discourage or prevent participation, leading to higher rates of abstention within this segment of the electorate. They would potentially vote if practical obstacles were removed.

4. *The Protest Abstainer*

The *Protest Abstainer* is a distinct profile among non-voters, identified by their critical and challenging stance towards the political system. This group is characterized by active discontent with the current state of affairs, and they consciously choose to abstain from voting as a form of protest. They deliberately choose not to vote as a form of political protest or objection, rather than simply not voting out of apathy or disengagement. These non-voters exhibit substantial political knowledge and well-defined preferences, challenging the traditional paradigm that equates non-participation with political ignorance or apathy. They are active non-participants.

[see Appendix A Table A2].

3.2.3. Perception of Abstentionists by Voters and Non-Voters

Non-Voters' Perspective

Non-voters express a diverse range of views on their own decision not to vote. Some consider that they are exercising their right and are doing the right thing by not voting, as they do not believe in the current system. In other words, they considered non-voting as a re-appropriation of political action. Other non-voters believed that those who vote are more active, informed, and democratic, contributing to the development of the country.

(NV21, Male, 20 years old, Undifferentiated worker "In a way, people who vote are altruistic. They think about society"; NV17, Female, 42, Unemployed "I think they are informed people, they are people who want to contribute to the country, to the development of the country").

Finally, some nonvoters reported being neutral and respecting the decision of each individual.

(NV20, Female, 20 years old, Undifferentiated Worker “I’m completely neutral”).

Voters’ Perspective

Voters tend to view non-voters more critically. They believe that people who do not vote may have a lack of interest in politics, a lack of information, or a lack of understanding of the consequences of abstaining from voting.

(V04, Male, 31, Researcher “People who don’t vote may not be interested in politics. It can also happen that they don’t know how to vote because they’re far away. In fact, this can be due to two things: either because the ways to vote mobile aren’t being well publicized, or because people aren’t interested in actually seeing it”; V05, Female, 21 years old, Psychology student “I think it’s a great lack of interest on the part of those who don’t go to vote”).

Some voters displayed a moral stance. Indeed, they considered abstention as an irresponsibility and a form of egoism.

(V06, Male, 38 years old, GNR Military—National Republican Guard, Political Party Sympathizer, “In my opinion, I think they are missing a great opportunity to contribute to democracy and to what is expected of citizens. This isn’t just about rights, we also have duties and I think we should fulfill this duty, which is to go and vote”).

Others understand that people may be resigned to the current state of affairs or disillusioned with the political system. However, voters considered that being a citizen involves duties, such as voting, and that it was necessary to seek information to make a conscious decision.

[see Appendix A Table A3].

3.2.4. Limit Situations That Would Lead Nonvoters to Vote

Some participants considered that making voting compulsory would be a way for them to go vote. Others believed that they could mobilize themselves to vote, if they thought that their vote could make a difference and lead to a notable change, with effective changes in the country. Concerns about the risk of totalitarian governments, both far-right and far-left, which would lead them to vote were reported as motivating reasons for participating in elections. In this extreme scenario, the fear of losing fundamental freedoms and rights would drive participants to exercise their civic right to vote, as a way to prevent the rise of authoritarian regimes.

In summary, the main “in extremis” situations that would lead people to vote are:
Mandatory voting by law

(NV13, Woman, 41 years old, Integrative Therapist “the vote becoming compulsory”; NV15, Woman, 26 years old, Monitor in a youth association “being forced”; NV16, Woman, 46 years old, Architect “becoming compulsory”).

The possibility that their vote could make a difference and bring significant positive changes to the country

(NV12, Male, 34, Freelance Artist “To see a noticeable and clear change in the system”; NV13, Female, 41, Integrative Therapist “To believe that there will be a change”; NV10, Male, 42, Computer Engineer “To see that my vote counts”).

The imminent risk of the rise of totalitarian governments, whether far-right or far-left

(NV01, Male, 64 years old, Businessman, Political Party Sympathizer “In a situation of danger of a totalitarian government”; NV11, Female, 21 years old, Forensic Science Student “In a situation of the extreme right or extreme left governing”).

Interestingly, non-voters seemed to be still engaged with the political system and willing to vote if they believed it was critically important to defend democracy and preservation of freedoms.

[see Appendix A Table A4].

3.2.5. Perceived Consequences of Electoral Abstention

A comparative analysis of voters' and non-voters' perspectives on the consequences of electoral abstention reveals significant convergences but also important nuances in their interpretations of the phenomenon. Both groups demonstrate a fundamental concern with abstention's impact on democratic health, although they articulate these concerns in distinct ways and with different emphases.

Non-voters tend to emphasize how abstention affects the real representation of popular preferences, suggesting an acute awareness of the paradox of their own position—they recognize the negative impact of abstention despite being non-voters themselves.

(NV04, Male, Technical Assistant, Political Party Sympathizer and Militant “The consequence of electoral abstention is the representation of choices that the people don't always want, but of those who have the power (to vote)”; NV05, Female, 57, Senior Technician, Political Party Sympathizer, “A consequence, because as far as I know, we can have a very high abstention, as there has already been, and still form a government. And I think there are certain numbers from which there should be a red flag and there would be no other mechanisms, in fact, to decide or to understand what it is that people really want or don't want”).

Voters, in turn, frame the legitimacy issue from a more systemic perspective, emphasizing how abstention can compromise the stability of the democratic system itself.

(V02, Male, 20 years old, Psychology Student, Political Party Sympathizer, “So I think it discredits democracy itself, but also Europe and politics in general in the country”; V03, Female, 21 years old, Psychology Student, Political Party Sympathizer, “The biggest consequence is the lack of representation. In other words, the majority of party positions, which don't fully cover all the people they actually elect.”

A particularly interesting aspect is the divergence in the assessment of abstention's real impact. While some non-voters suggest that, even with high abstention rates, electoral results still adequately reflect Portuguese society's thinking, voters express a more pronounced concern with the distortion of popular will caused by abstention. This difference may reflect non-voters' attempt to reconcile their abstentionist behavior with their civic consciousness.

The issue of political change and maintenance of the status quo also receives different emphases. Non-voters highlight how abstention can contribute to the perpetuation of existing power structures, demonstrating awareness of the potential contradiction in their behavior—abstention as protest may inadvertently reinforce the system they are protesting against. Voters, on the other hand, focus more on practical and systemic consequences, such as the potential radicalization of the political system and the specific weakening of democracy in peripheral areas.

A subtle but significant difference emerges in the discussion of alternatives to abstention. Non-voters specifically mention blank voting as a preferable alternative to abstention, suggesting a more detailed reflection on different forms of political expression. Voters, in contrast, tend to emphasize more the fundamental importance of participation itself, without elaborating on the different forms this participation might take.

Both groups converge in their perception of abstention as a predominantly negative phenomenon for democracy, but the paths that lead them to this conclusion are distinct. Non-voters seem to reach this conclusion through a more introspective and potentially contradictory analysis, recognizing the problems caused by their own behavior. Voters, in turn, present a more externally oriented view, focusing on systemic and institutional impacts.

[see Appendix A Table A5]

3.2.6. Changes That Could Be Made for Non-Voters to Take Part in the Elections

A comparative analysis of the perspectives of voters and non-voters on the necessary changes to increase electoral participation reveals a significant set of convergences in the proposed solutions, albeit with distinct emphases and concerns that reflect their different positions in relation to the electoral process.

Both groups identify three major areas of priority intervention: technological modernization of the electoral process, civic and political education, and reforms in the political communication system. However, the way they articulate these needs and the priorities they establish presents important nuances.

Regarding technological modernization, both voters and non-voters advocate for the implementation of electronic voting, but with slightly different motivations. Non-voters emphasize the issue of transparency and traceability as means to combat disbelief and perceptions of fraud. . .

(NV08, Male, 34 years old, Designer, “Greater transparency, because we grow up hearing stories, since we were little, from our uncle who used to count the votes, and then they close the doors and start dividing up the votes and saying: Go on, take it, this one or more for you, this one for me, that’s it. All these things that we hear from an early age, whether they come from legal sources or not, I think end up accumulating in our heads and creating a system of disbelief in the voting system. That’s why I think that greater transparency, the fact that a technique along the lines of what I was talking about earlier with Bitcoin could be used, would work perfectly and could validate the votes in a unique way and through several computers, in other words, a system that is basically infallible, that can’t be falsified. I think there are several things that can be done at this level.”)

. . .while voters focus more on modernization as a way to reduce bureaucracy and increase accessibility.

(V03, Female, 21 years old, Psychology student, Political Party and Independent Movement sympathizer, “They extended the days, because normally there are people who can’t, for various reasons or even, if they wanted to, one more day to definitely go and vote. I think it would be beneficial”; V09, Male, 23 years old, Master in Molecular and Translational Neurosciences, Political Party Sympathizer, “The accessibility part, which is also directly linked to the measures we can take to change the openness, such as electronic voting, more accessible transportation for those who can’t get around, less bureaucracy. For example, it’s always important to inform all voters about polling stations, especially young people”; V14, Male, 22 years old, History graduate, Political party sympathizer and activist, “The extension of the voting period. From one day, perhaps, to two or three, I think that if it were extended it would combat abstention. And also electronic voting, I think that if voting was just a click away and there was that facility, I think that many people would end up voting instead of abstaining”).

This difference in emphasis likely reflects the distinct barriers that each group perceives in the electoral process.

The issue of civic education emerges as a central concern in both groups, but with different approaches. Non-voters seem to favor a more fundamental and structural approach, advocating for the introduction of specific subjects early in the educational journey.

(NV06, Male, 33 years old, University Professor, “I know it’s complicated, a person only starts voting when they’re 18, but like, in 12th grade maybe explain what happens when people go to vote. I think that schools and universities should intervene (. . .)”; NV07, Female, “I think that schools and universities could perhaps help with the issue of sharing

more information and blocking false information such as fake news and perhaps doing fact checking”).

Voters, in turn, present a more comprehensive view that includes not only formal education but also community awareness and active involvement of young people and the elderly in politics.

(V17, Male, 26 years old, Sociology student, Political Party and Independent Movement sympathizer, “Schools need to start teaching citizenship, explaining not only the historical process of achieving democracy, but also what it entails, with more real examples, less theory and more practice. Measures to continue with promotion, through Social Action Associations and those that intervene in society. I think this should also continue to happen because this is part of people’s political socialization, especially young people, who, if I’m not mistaken, have been abstaining more”).

In the domain of political communication, both groups identify the need for improvements, but with distinct focuses. Non-voters emphasize the need for clearer and more impartial communication that brings politicians and citizens closer. . .

(NV19, Female, 29 years old, Unemployed, “The changes that should be made are at the level of parties and communication. The media is very important in this respect. I think we allow ourselves to be influenced a lot by the media and whether we like it or not, various newspapers, various social communications have partisan tendencies, which end up influencing us.”)

. . .while voters elaborate more on specific aspects such as the reformulation of media, equal airtime between parties, and the role of political commentators

(V15, Male, 40 years old, Football Coach, “Another issue is in the media, we’re seeing the Instagramization and TikTokization of communication, which is just like that, people are watching a video in 10 s and it gets tiresome, 10 s is already too long. So the parties have to modernize there, but there has to be more media, like television and newspapers, etc., there has to be a greater explanation of political programs and greater attention to political debate. We can’t have 15-min debates between parties in 2024. There are things that need to change and improve, even culturally”).

A significant difference emerges in the discussion of structural reforms of the electoral system. Non-voters show particular concern with the representativeness of the system, proposing changes such as the creation of more electoral districts and the possibility of electing independent deputies.

(NV01, Male, 64 years old, Businessman, Political Party Sympathizer, “Essentially, we needed to call on citizens to have more of a say in the country’s decisions. This could be through voting, referendums, they would have to be asked what they really want and not just through a set of ideas that are drawn up by political groups, which, more often than not, are not implemented. Citizens need to feel represented. They need to be the authors of their own and I think that the majority of voters and non-voters don’t feel that way. We, the abstentionists, have been the vast majority, sometimes the absolute majority, of voters in Portugal, and non-voters. But at least we have a large representation in our section of the Portuguese population. And what we’re doing here is very important, because we’re giving them a voice. It’s the first time I’ve been asked why I don’t vote, without being criticized, because we have the right and the duty to do so. So that’s essentially it. There’s a lot to change, but maybe not to make it more complex, but to simplify it”; NV02, Male, 31, International Relations and European Studies student, “There should also be greater awareness among people that they’re not voting for a government, they’re voting for MPs. There should be two elections on that day. The election for who wants

to be a government and so there is a person who stands for that, a system that is still in place for prime minister, and this is a set of people for the government, and the person, when it comes to the elections, says again: I want this government, but I prefer this party or this group of citizens to represent me in my region. A group of independent citizens is accepted in the Assembly of the Republic. Let's say I'm from the Algarve, I want to represent the Algarve in the Assembly of the Republic, I can only run if I'm associated with a political party, even if it's as an independent, but for that I have to have some sympathy for that political party and I have to be invited by that political party. So there is a barrier to civic participation and democratic participation").

Voters, while also addressing issues of representativeness, focus more on practical aspects such as extending the voting period and compensating votes for smaller parties.

(N21, Female, 20 years old, Sociology Student, Political Party Militant and Member of Party Youth) "And I think that in relation to votes, a compensation circle, I think that this would also have to be changed, because many votes are lost and good votes that would be important, small parties end up suffering a lot. I think that people also. . . well, most people sometimes have the idea that their vote won't count for anything, often because the vote they had, perhaps also for small parties, didn't count for anything at all. And I think that there should be some measure, some reformulation that would make it possible for people to have a vote that really matters or has meaning").

It is interesting to note that voters present a more elaborate perspective on the role of media and political commentators, possibly reflecting greater involvement and attention to the political process. They are also more specific in their proposals on reformulating political communication and the role of different actors in the electoral process.

(NV20, Male, 23 years old, Sociology Student, Political Party Militant and Party Youth Member, "And then, this also touches on the populism that is the news these days, because we have 12-min debates deciding the future of the country and then there are three-hour programs commenting on what those people said. And you see commentators who often don't have any information to be commenting on that. So I think it's. . . to what extent can we control the media, I'm not going to be the one to say, but it would be a fundamental point to start filtering the information that is given to society in general").

Both groups implicitly or explicitly reject mandatory voting as a solution, preferring to focus on measures that make voting more accessible and meaningful. This convergence suggests a common understanding that electoral participation should be encouraged through positive changes in the system, rather than through impositions.

In conclusion, this comparative analysis reveals that, despite identifying similar areas of intervention, voters and non-voters present important nuances in their proposals for change. Non-voters tend to emphasize changes that would increase trust and transparency in the system, while voters focus more on practical reforms and improving channels of political communication. This understanding of different perspectives can be fundamental to developing effective strategies for promoting electoral participation that address the concerns of both groups. Nonvoters wanted a change of system while voters wanted to improve the system.

[see Appendix A Table A6].

3.2.7. Meaning of Blank Vote and Null Vote for Non-Voters and Voters

The responses from both voters and non-voters provide valuable insights into the nuances between blank voting and null voting.

From non-voters' perspective, both blank voting and null voting are considered forms of protest votes, although there are some distinctions between them. Blank voting is seen as a manifestation of discontent with the available options, a way of saying that the person

does not identify with any of the parties. Null voting, on the other hand, can be the result of an error or an attempt at vandalism, where the person crosses out or fills the ballot invalidly.

(NV18, Male, 31 years old, Casino Banking Professional, “For me, a blank vote is a protest vote, fulfilling my right to attend the polling station. However, as I don’t identify with any of the candidates, I choose not to participate and not to vote for any of them, while a null vote is a vote that doesn’t meet the requirements of what is asked for on the ballot paper”).

Some participants consider null voting to be a disguised abstention, while blank voting demonstrates a belief in the system, even if the person does not identify with any of the alternatives. Despite these differences, both types of votes are viewed as forms of protest and expressions of discontent with the political situation. Some participants believe that together, blank votes, null votes, and abstentions can send a strong message of dissatisfaction with the current system.

(NV04, Male, Technical Assistant, Political Party Sympathizer and Militant, “Voting blank means that a person does not identify with the parties. Voting null, spoiling the vote with banal jokes, sometimes a bit innocent, or voting in all squares, would be more appropriate as a protest vote”).

From voters’ perspective, blank voting occurs when the voter does not choose any candidate and leaves the ballot blank. Null voting happens when the voter makes some kind of error in voting, such as placing a cross on more than one candidate or drawing on the ballot

(V13, Male, 23 years old, Call-Center Operator, Political Party Militant and Enrolled in Party Youth, “A blank vote is someone who, in fact, has an interest in politics and wants there to be a party that represents them in the future, but who has no party with which they identify. While a null vote can be a lot of things, as I’ve done too, like a cross, a bet, someone who doesn’t know, who can only vote once, for example, there’s also often a lack of knowledge that is just supposed to make a cross. There are people who just draw pictures or two crosses or everything. There may also be the case where the null vote has more to do with votes that perhaps have a few small errors”).

Both are ways of expressing discontent with the presented options, but null voting can be seen as a more radical form of protest. Some believe that blank voting is valid, while others consider it to be useless. Null voting can be the result of a lack of information or an accidental error, but it can also be a form of entertainment on social media.

[see Appendix A Table A7].

3.2.8. Perception of Mandatory Voting

Non-voters present a predominantly skeptical view of mandatory voting. Their views focus on three main arguments. The first one is individual freedom. They strongly emphasized preserving voting as a right, not an obligation. Imposing voting cannot compromise individual freedom of choice. The second argument is the participation quality. They reported that mandatory voting might result in votes without genuine conviction or engagement, potentially increasing blank or null votes. Finally, they suggested alternatives to mandatory voting. Instead of making voting compulsory, they suggested greater investment in civic education to promote a deeper understanding of voting’s importance.

(NV07, Woman, “It shouldn’t be compulsory. I think that if people want to vote, they should, but if they don’t, they don’t have to either.”; (NV08, Male, 34, Designer, “Everyone has the right to choose what they want or don’t want to do. For me, it was extremely unpleasant to be asked to participate in something that I don’t believe in and with which

I think there may be a lack of transparency. There are systems of mechanisms so that voting is not the jungle it is today, in other words, that there are no doubts so that people can clearly see what has happened in the polling stations. This is the case with the cryptocurrency system and Bitcoin, all systems of centralization used for information, which work with a system of validation from different nodes, so that votes can never be repeated, nor can someone vote for me. I think there are much better systems than the current system to ensure that the system itself works well”; NV14, Female, 20 years old, Languages, Literatures and Cultures Student, Political Party Sympathizer, “Since voting is a right, I don’t think it should be compulsory. It’s important that people vote for themselves and understand the importance of it, not just because they have to”).

Voters presented a more diverse range of opinions. First, some argue that voting is a fundamental civic duty and that electoral participation should be mandatory, considering the public investment in elections. Second, there was a consensus about the need to ensure adequate conditions for everyone to vote, regardless of their location. Third, some suggested that political parties should play a more active role in motivating voters. Fourth, they proposed to create television programs to inform and encourage people to vote. Finally, some interviewees suggest that mandatory voting might be appropriate for certain groups, such as young people.

(V10, Woman, 41 years old, Project Officer, Political Party Sympathizer and Militant, “We should analyze why so many people don’t exercise this right”; (V12, Woman, Journalist, “Well, I’m at a stage where I think I’m leaning towards saying that this is obligatory, because it also hurts a lot to see people abstaining, being rational, being at the time we’re in, of course it’s a right and it shouldn’t be obligatory. However, we need to work hard, using a lot of psychology in particular, so that this right becomes a duty that is very well internalized by all of us”; V11, Woman, 47 years old, Mayor, Political Party Sympathizer and Militant, “The early vote for mobility in these elections was a great demonstration that if there is also a facility for them to exercise this right, because there is a lot of mobility between people, life is not so programmable, there is a lot of movement”; V16, Female, 48 years old, Social Manager and Consultant, Trainer and Mediator, Political Party Sympathizer and Militant, “I think that, for example, for older people, compulsory voting, especially people over 70, compulsory voting shouldn’t exist, but for younger people, I think it should, because otherwise it won’t be exercised. So, in practice, we know that there’s a lot of abstention because, as they’re not obliged, they don’t go”; V15, Male, 40 years old, Football Coach, “In my opinion, it’s about facilitating access to the vote, especially for older people. But not only that. I think the media, especially the state, should have a television program that could emphasize the positive side of voting, create documentaries, create ways of informing people better, because we are very distant, we have people who are already a bit nostalgic for other times and who don’t believe much in politics, and we have young people who are completely, not completely, but very alienated from politics, because it’s uninteresting, because even politicians, most politicians and political parties, can’t and don’t know how to communicate with young people. I’m talking about 18-year-olds, those who are just starting to vote. I think that’s important, to have programs that appeal to people to vote, documentaries and a way of seeing politics in a more positive light. I think that’s the best way to reach people”).

Both groups recognize the importance of combating abstention and encouraging civic participation. However, they significantly diverge in the methods to achieve this objective. Non-voters tend to favor approaches based on education and awareness, while voters are more open to institutional measures, including the possibility of mandatory voting. The

debate reflects a fundamental tension between conceptualizing voting as an individual right and a civic duty.

[see Appendix A Table A8].

4. Discussion

The findings from this study on electoral abstention among voters and non-voters provide a nuanced understanding of the motivations, barriers, and perceptions surrounding non-voting behavior. Contrary to the conventional narrative that frames abstention as apathy or irresponsibility, the results highlight a spectrum of attitudes and rationales that reflect both structural and individual factors.

Heterogeneity Among Non-Voters: The study challenges the traditional monolithic view of abstainers as disengaged or apathetic citizens. Instead, the study reinforces the notion of heterogeneity among non-voters, identifying distinct profiles such as the disbelieving citizen, the disinterested youth, the pragmatic abstainer, and the protest abstainer. Each profile reflects a unique interplay of systemic, situational, and personal factors. For instance, while some non-voters express profound disillusionment with political institutions, others face practical barriers, such as logistical constraints or lack of political education, that inhibit their participation. The findings suggest that many non-voters maintain an implicit connection to the democratic process, evidenced by their openness to participate under different circumstances or through alternative means, such as voting during critical elections or engaging in protest voting.

Civic duty and political agency. A notable tension arises between how both groups conceptualize civic duty and political agency. For non-voters, abstention can represent a reclaiming of agency and a rejection of unrepresentative choices; for voters, it is more often seen as a relinquishing of a critical right—and thus a potential threat to collective governance. For nonvoters, political agency can be improved by education whereas nonvoters relied on a moral obligation.

Trust and Systemic Distrust: A recurring theme across non-voter narratives is a pervasive distrust in political institutions and processes. This distrust manifests in various forms, including skepticism toward politicians, doubts about the fairness of the electoral system, and concerns about the efficacy of voting as a mechanism for change. The study's participants expressed these sentiments as major impediments to electoral engagement, aligning with broader trends in democratic disillusionment observed in other Western democracies.

Barriers to Electoral Participation: Participants identified several barriers to electoral participation, ranging from logistical challenges to psychological deterrents. Practical obstacles, such as limited accessibility to polling stations or inadequate voter registration processes, disproportionately affect certain demographic groups, particularly younger and economically marginalized citizens. Furthermore, the lack of political literacy and awareness emerged as a significant factor, highlighting a gap in civic education that could be bridged to foster greater engagement.

4.1. Implications for Policy and Practice

The study underscores the importance of addressing both systemic and individual-level barriers to electoral participation and provides clear, actionable insights for policies aiming to reduce political abstention.

Recognizing voter heterogeneity: Policies should avoid treating all non-voters as apathetic or disengaged. Distinct profiles—like disbelieving citizens (distrustful), disinterested youth (uninformed or disengaged), pragmatic abstainers (face practical barriers), and protest abstainers (politically conscious but choosing not to participate)—require different approaches. Tailoring interventions to these groups helps address the specific causes behind non-voting.

Civic and Political Education: Findings highlight deficient political literacy, particularly among younger populations. Enhancing civic education in schools and universities can cultivate a deeper understanding of democratic processes and the significance of voting. Structured programs should emphasize practical knowledge about the political system and the value of participation. In Portugal, political education is absent from the curriculum as a specific and compulsory subject, although elements of citizenship education have been integrated since 2017 through the National Strategy for Citizenship Education (ENEC), which promotes skills in democratic participation, human rights, and intercultural relations throughout compulsory schooling. However, this framework often lacks depth in terms of practical electoral literacy, such as understanding voting mechanisms, political parties, and the implications of abstention, leading to persistent gaps in youth engagement. To address this situation, curricula should be redesigned to include compulsory modules on electoral behavior, perhaps starting in secondary education in Portugal (10th, 11th, and 12th grades), with experiential activities such as mock elections and debates to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application. These programs could also be extended and deepened in university education.

Technological Modernization: Introducing secure and transparent electronic voting systems can reduce logistical barriers and enhance accessibility, particularly for young voters and those with mobility constraints. For example, Estonia has successfully implemented such a system; however, the voting system is deeply integrated into an advanced digital infrastructure, with universal use of electronic ID cards and digital signatures, which has fostered trust and adoption of e-voting by the population (see [Ehin et al. 2022](#)).

Reform of Electoral Systems: Addressing representational concerns by implementing reforms such as more proportional voting systems or enabling the election of independent candidates could rebuild trust and engagement in the political process.

Addressing Trust Deficits: Initiatives to increase transparency and accountability in governance, alongside efforts to improve communication between political representatives and citizens, are critical for mitigating systemic distrust.

Alternative Voting Mechanisms: Providing flexible voting options, such as postal or extended-period voting, can address practical barriers and increase turnout.

The Role of Mandatory Voting. While the idea of mandatory voting remains contentious, the study reveals mixed attitudes among participants. Non-voters emphasized the potential for compulsory voting to undermine individual autonomy and lead to disengaged participation. Conversely, some participants acknowledged its capacity to normalize voting as a civic duty. These divergent views highlight the need for careful consideration of mandatory voting's ethical and practical implications, particularly regarding its impact on marginalized populations.

4.2. Avenues for Future Research

Although results were congruent with previous studies (i.e., [Hooghe et al. 2011](#); [Prats et al. 2024](#)), future investigations should be done to validate the profiles, as focus group findings may not be representative of the broader population due to the small sample size and potential selection bias. Further research is warranted to disentangle the complex interplay between personal characteristics, practical barriers, and ideological positions that shape abstention. Identification of the psychosocial factors underlying attitudes toward abstention and the behavioral intention to not vote is then crucial. Future work should investigate how young people's engagement with politics develops, including the influence of social media, alternative civic activities, and educational interventions. Since lack of trust was identified as a key driver, future research should test interventions aimed at fostering political trust—such as direct engagement campaigns, representational reforms, or transparency initiatives—and evaluate their effects on participation among the most skeptical groups.

5. Conclusions

This study sheds light on the multifaceted heterogeneity of electoral abstention in Portugal, identifying distinct profiles of non-voters—including the disbelieving citizen, the disinterested young person, the pragmatic abstainer, and the protest abstainer—and revealing systemic barriers such as political distrust, logistical obstacles, and gaps in civic literacy. Through an innovative qualitative approach, anchored in online focus groups that compare the perspectives of voters and non-voters, complemented by content analysis, it is demonstrated that many non-voters exhibit a conditional willingness to vote in high-impact contexts or after reforms, challenging the simplistic perception of widespread apathy.

The strengths of this research lie in its methodological originality, integrating comparative analyses that deepen understanding of the dynamics of abstention, particularly among young adults, and in its contribution to the literature on democratic participation. By uncovering motivational nuances and practical proposals, the work provides a solid empirical basis for future interventions, promoting a more inclusive and representative democracy.

In terms of practical impact, the findings point to actionable reforms that strengthen democratic legitimacy: the implementation of civic education from elementary school onwards to combat disengagement; technological modernization of the electoral process, such as secure electronic voting, to overcome accessibility barriers; and measures to restore trust, including greater political transparency and diversity in representation. These changes can increase voter turnout, mitigate abstention, and strengthen government representativeness, fostering a more engaged and equitable society.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, N.A. and J.-C.G.; methodology, N.A. and J.-C.G.; software, N.A.; validation, N.A. and J.-C.G.; formal analysis, N.A. and J.-C.G.; investigation, N.A. and J.-C.G.; resources, N.A. and J.-C.G.; data curation, N.A. and J.-C.G.; writing—original draft preparation, N.A. and J.-C.G.; writing—review and editing, N.A. and J.-C.G.; visualization, N.A. and J.-C.G.; supervision, J.-C.G.; project administration, N.A. and J.-C.G.; funding acquisition, J.-C.G. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This work was funded by national funds through FCT—Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia—as part the project CUIP—Ref^a UID/06317/2023.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, the American Psychological Association's (APA) ethical principles, and Portuguese regulations on data protection. The study was approved by the institutional Data Protection Officer and the Ethics Committee of the University of the Algarve (CEUALg No. 136/2023). The study protocol was registered on the Open Science Framework (OSF) with the DOI 10.17605/OSF.IO/FBD9X and made publicly available.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Sample data are available from the authors upon request and the study protocol was registered on the Open Science Framework (OSF) with the DOI 10.17605/OSF.IO/FBD9X and made publicly available.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

CIP-UAL Centre for Research in Psychology—CIP-UAL
CUIP University Research Center in Psychology

FPCEUC	Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação-Universidade de Coimbra
ENEC	National Strategy for Citizenship Education
GNR	Guarda Nacional Republicana
IQR	Interquartile Range
Mdn	Median
NOTA	None of the Above
OSF	Open Science Framework
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

Appendix A

Table A1. Meaning of electoral abstention for nonvoters and voters.

	Non-Voters	Voters
Q01. What is electoral abstention? What is your definition of electoral abstention? What meaning do you attach to it?	Electoral abstention refers to the act of not exercising the right to vote, whether for voluntary or involuntary reasons. Some people abstain because they don't identify with any of the political options presented, thus expressing their dissatisfaction with the system. Others may abstain due to a lack of interest, knowledge or availability at the time of the elections. Abstention can be seen as an indication that something is wrong with the electoral system, leading some to not participate as a form of protest. There are also those who consider a blank or null vote to be a better alternative to abstention. Overall, electoral abstention is a complex phenomenon, with multiple motivations and interpretations.	Voter abstention is the choice not to vote and can be seen as a manifestation of discontent or disinterest. Some people believe it is a form of protest, while others see it as an imperfect choice that allows others to choose for them. Abstention can be a sign of disbelief in the political system, lack of interest or ignorance of electoral programs. It can also be caused by a lack of party representation or discontent with the electoral system. Abstention is seen as a danger to democracy and must be combated. In Portugal, abstention has no value, but some people believe that there should be changes to the political system if abstention exceeds 50%. Abstention is considered a failure to fulfill one's civic duty and represents a withdrawal from politics.

Table A2. Nonvoters—motivations for choosing not to cast a vote.

Category	Description
Q04. In your opinion, what are the reasons why some people don't vote in elections?	Some of the main reasons why people don't vote include: lack of identification with political parties and candidates; concerns about the protection of personal data in the voting process; disbelief in the political system and the ability of politicians to defend citizens' interests; logistical difficulties such as having to travel or be out of the country on election day; lack of information about the voting process and the options available; lack of interest and knowledge about politics; forgetting the date of the elections or the voter registration process. Many express a sense of distance between politicians and the population, with the perception that politicians only appear during election campaigns.
Q05. What do you consider to be the profile/portrayal/image of people who don't vote? What characterizes them?	People who don't vote can be characterized by a lack of conviction, hope and belief in the political system. Many are disinterested and disorganized, with a perception that voting makes no difference. Some express discontent with the current situation, conformism or lack of time. Within this group, there is a diversity of profiles, including young people who have no interest in or understanding of politics, as well as people with distrust, indifference, ignorance and dissatisfaction. Some don't want to exercise their civic responsibility or feel they don't fit into the system.

Table A2. *Cont.*

Category	Description
Q06. What makes you express your non-voting behavior (abstention)?	The behavior of not voting can be motivated by various factors, such as disbelief, revolt and disillusionment with the political system, lack of consistency and confidence in the electoral process, practical difficulties such as transportation costs and bureaucracy, as well as disinterest, forgetfulness and a reluctance to take on the responsibility of voting. Some individuals choose not to vote as a form of self-reflection or to demonstrate their discontent with the current system.

Table A3. Perception of nonvoting persons by voters and non-voters.

	Non-Voters	Voters
Q08. What do you think of people who don't vote?	People who don't vote are viewed differently. Some consider that they are exercising their right and are right not to vote, because they don't believe in the current system. Others believe that those who vote are more active, informed and democratic, contributing to the country's development. There are also those who are neutral and respect everyone's decision. In general, the opinion on non-voters is varied, with some valuing their position and others considering it negative.	People who don't vote may be disinterested in politics, lack information or be unaware of the consequences of not voting. Some believe that it is irresponsible and selfish not to vote, while others believe that people may be resigned to the current state of affairs or disbelieving in the political system. It is important to remember that being a citizen also involves duties, such as the right to vote, and that it is necessary to seek information in order to make an informed decision.

Table A4. Limit situations that would lead nonvoters to go and vote.

Category	Description
Q07. What would be the "in extremis"/limit situation that would lead you to go and vote?	The text presents different perspectives on the limit situation in which a person would vote. Some participants consider that making voting compulsory would be a way for them to go and vote. Others believe that if their vote could make a difference and lead to a noticeable change, with actual changes in the country, this would also mobilize them to vote. There are also concerns about the risk of totalitarian governments, both far-right and far-left, which would drive them to vote.

Table A5. Perceived consequences of electoral abstention.

	Non-Voters	Voters
Q09. In your opinion, what are the consequences of abstaining from voting?	Voter abstention can have several negative consequences for democracy and political representativeness. Some respondents believe that abstention weakens the legitimacy of elected governments, as they do not truly reflect the preferences of the population. In addition, abstention can lead to a lack of motivation for change and the perpetuation of the status quo, with the same groups maintaining power. Some also argue that abstention compromises society, as votes that could make a difference are not counted. On the other hand, other interviewees believe that, despite the high level of abstention, the election results still generally reflect the thinking of Portuguese society. Some suggest that voting blank is a better option than abstaining, as it demonstrates discontent more clearly. In general, abstention is seen as harmful to democracy, as it weakens the representativeness and legitimacy of governments.	Voter abstention has a number of negative consequences, such as a lack of representation and a loss of legitimacy for the democratic system. In addition, abstention can lead to the discrediting of politics and democratic instability. The lack of citizen participation can also result in poor choices and the loss of clear evidence of the popular will. Abstention can also lead to the radicalization of the political system and the weakening of democracy, especially in peripheral areas. It is important that everyone exercises their right to vote in order to guarantee the representativeness and legitimacy of the democratic system.

Table A6. Changes that could be made for non-voters to take part in the elections.

	Non-Voters	Voters
<p>Q10. What changes would have to take place for more people to participate in elections? What measures could be taken to encourage people to vote? How could we make the voting process more accessible? What role do schools/universities, the media and civil society organizations play in this context?</p>	<p>Some of the main changes suggested to get people to vote more include: Greater transparency and trust in the electoral system, such as through a more secure and traceable electronic voting system. This would help combat disbelief and the stories of fraud that circulate; Make the voting process more accessible and flexible, such as allowing more citizens to vote by post or online, including students and people with reduced mobility. This would facilitate participation; Improve civic and political education from an early age, with subjects in schools and universities that teach students how the political system works, the parties and candidates, and the importance of voting. This would help to form more informed and involved citizens; Greater communication and information efforts by the media, parties and government, in a clear and impartial way, so that people better understand the proposals and options available. This would combat disinformation and the distance between politicians and citizens; Reforming the electoral system, such as having more constituencies and allowing the election of independent MPs, so that Parliament is more representative of the will of the voters.</p>	<p>The changes needed to increase electoral participation include civic education in schools, valuing the blank ballot, accessibility to voting, giving credibility to politics, making political parties accountable, political literacy, raising awareness of politics in schools and in the community, extending the deadline for voting, electronic voting and the use of social media by political parties. It is important to involve young and old in politics and make it more accessible and relevant to people. Schools and universities have an important role to play in raising awareness of politics and civic education. Political parties must work to bring people’s interest into politics and represent them properly. One of the ideas to increase people’s participation in elections is to extend voting days to two or three days, including the weekend, and to modernize electronic voting, reducing bureaucracy. Political parties should also modernize in terms of communication and better publicize their political programs. The media should be less politicized and give equal time to all parties. It is important to have better management of information on how to vote and better participation by the parties for the public. Compulsory voting is not the solution to increasing participation in elections. The implementation of electronic voting and awareness-raising and education in schools are necessary changes to increase electoral participation. It is important that journalists filter information for the general public, while commentators should only give their opinion. Citizenship in schools needs to be reformulated and included in the school curriculum, as does financial literacy. A media overhaul is needed, and all parties should be given equal airtime. Vote compensation also needs to be reformed so that small votes have meaning. Commentators have too much influence on people’s opinions during the election period.</p>

Table A7. Meaning of blank vote and null vote for non-voters and voters.

	Non-Voters	Voters
<p>Q02. What does voting blank mean? What does a null vote mean? Do they mean the same thing, can they have different interpretations?</p>	<p>The white vote and the null vote are both considered protest votes, although there are some differences between them. The white vote is seen as a manifestation of discontent with the options available, a way of saying that the person does not identify with any of the parties. A null vote, on the other hand, can be the result of a mistake or an attempt at vandalism, when the person crosses out or fills in the ballot paper in an invalid way. Some participants consider a null vote to be abstention in disguise, while a white vote still demonstrates a belief in the system, even if the person doesn’t identify with any of the alternatives. Despite these differences, both votes are seen as ways of protesting and expressing discontent with the political situation. Some participants believe that, together, white, null and abstention votes can send a strong message of dissatisfaction with the current system.</p>	<p>A blank vote is when the voter doesn’t choose a candidate and leaves the ballot blank. A null vote, on the other hand, is when the voter makes a mistake when casting their ballot, such as putting the cross on more than one candidate or drawing pictures on the ballot paper. Both are ways of expressing dissatisfaction with the options presented, but the null vote can be seen as a more radical protest. Some believe that a blank vote is valid, while others consider it useless. A null vote can be the result of a lack of information or an accidental mistake, but it can also be a form of entertainment on social media. In terms of counting, white votes are counted for whoever wins the election, while null votes are not counted.</p>

Table A8. Meaning of mandatory voting for non-voters and voters.

	Non-Voters	Voters
Q03. Since voting is a right, in your opinion, does it make sense to make voting compulsory?	The debate about making voting compulsory is complex and involves different perspectives. Some argue that voting is a civic duty and that electoral participation should be compulsory, as there is a large public investment in elections and those who don't vote can harm the lives of other citizens. Others argue that voting should remain a right, not an obligation, as forcing people to vote can lead to half-hearted votes and a lack of genuine engagement. There is also concern that making voting compulsory could increase white or null votes. Some suggest that instead of making voting compulsory, it is better to invest in civic education so that people understand the importance of voting and exercise this right of their own free will. There is also the question of ensuring adequate conditions so that everyone can vote, regardless of their location. Overall, there is no consensus, with arguments for and against making voting compulsory.	The interviewees have differing opinions on making voting compulsory. Some believe that everyone should exercise their right to vote and that accessibility to voting should be guaranteed, while others argue that forcing people to vote goes against individual freedom. Some suggest that political parties should motivate people to vote, while others advocate the creation of television programs that inform and encourage people to vote. Some respondents suggest that compulsory voting may be appropriate for young people, while others argue that this is not necessary and that raising people's awareness and education are more important. In general, the interviewees agree that it is important to combat abstention and encourage civic participation.

References

- Alvarez, R. Michael, D. Roderick Kiewiet, and Lucas Núñez. 2018. A taxonomy of protest voting. *Annual Review of Political Science* 21: 135–54. [CrossRef]
- Amnå, Erik, and Joakim Ekman. 2014. Standby citizens: Diverse faces of political passivity. *European Political Science Review* 6: 261–81. [CrossRef]
- Andrews, Molly. 2008. Never the Last Word: Revisiting Data. In *Doing Narrative Research*. Edited by Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire and Maria Tamboukou. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 87–101.
- Antunes, Rui. 2008. Identificação Partidária e Comportamento Eleitoral—Fatores Estruturais, Atitudes e Mudanças no Sentido de Voto. Ph.D. thesis, Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação-Universidade de Coimbra-FPCEUC, Coimbra, Portugal.
- Bagozzi, Benjamin E., and Kathleen Marchetti. 2017. Distinguishing occasional abstention from routine indifference in models of vote Choice. *Political Science Research and Methods* 5: 277–94. [CrossRef]
- Bardin, Laurence. 2011. *Análise de Conteúdo*. Amadora: Edições 70.
- Cancela, João, and Marta Vicente. 2019. *Abstenção e Participação Eleitoral em Portugal: Diagnóstico e Hipóteses de Reforma*. Cascais: Câmara Municipal de Cascais. Available online: https://research.unl.pt/ws/portalfiles/portal/16817196/Estudo_Portugal_Talks_Absten_o_e_Participa_o_Eleitoral_em_Portugal_2019_1.pdf (accessed on 2 October 2025).
- Costa, Bruno. 2010. *A abstenção nas eleições para o Parlamento Europeu*. Portela: Chiado Editora.
- Cramer Walsh, Katherine. 2004. *Talking about Politics: Informal Groups and Social Identity in American Life*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Dassonneville, Ruth, and Marc Hooghe. 2017. Voter Turnout Decline and Stratification: Quasi-Experimental and Comparative Evidence of a Growing Educational GAP. *Politics* 37: 184–200. [CrossRef]
- Della Porta, Donatella. 2011. Communication in movement. *Information, Communication & Society* 14: 800–19. [CrossRef]
- Deschamps, Jean-Claude, Robert Vicente Joule, and Christel Gumy. 2005. La communication engageante au service de la réduction de l'abstentionnisme électoral: Une application en milieu universitaire. *Revue Européenne de Psychologie Appliquée* 55: 21–27. [CrossRef]
- De Sousa, Marcílio, Marcelo Tavares de Melo, and Maria Santiago. 2010. A análise de conteúdo como forma de tratamento dos dados numa pesquisa qualitativa em Educação Física escolar. *Movimento* 16: 31–49. [CrossRef]
- Doppelt, Jack, and Ellen Shearer. 1999. *Nonvoters: America's No-Shows*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Duchesne, Sophie. 2017. Using Focus Groups to Study the Process of (de)Politicization. In *A New Era of Focus Group Research*. Edited by Rosaline S. Barbour and David L. Morgan. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 365–88.
- Duchesne, Sophie, and Florence Haegel. 2004. La Politisation des discussions, au croisement des logiques de spécialisation et de conflictualisation'. *Revue Française de Science Politique* 54: 877–909. [CrossRef]

- Duchesne, Sophie, and Florence Haegel. 2010. What Political Discussion Means and How Do the French and (French Speaking) Belgians Deal with It. In *Political Discussion in Modern Democracies in a Comparative Perspective*. Edited by Wolf Michael, Morales, Laula and Ikeda Ken'ichi. London: Routledge, pp. 44–61.
- Ehin, Piret, Mihkel Solvak, Jan Willemson, and Priit Vinkel. 2022. Internet voting in Estonia 2005–2019: Evidence from eleven elections. *Government Information Quarterly* 39: 101718. [CrossRef]
- Eliasoph, Nina. 1998. *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eysenbach, Gunther, and Jeremy Wyatt. 2002. Using the Internet for surveys and health research. *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 4: 13. [CrossRef]
- Freire, André, and Pedro Magalhães. 2002. *A abstenção eleitoral em Portugal*. Lisboa: ICS.
- Gaxie, Daniel. 1978. *Le Cens Caché: Inégalités Culturelles et Ségrégation Politique*. Paris: Le Seuil.
- Gray, Mark, and Miki Caul. 2000. Declining voter turnout in advance industrial democracies, 1950 to 1997: The effects of declining group mobilization. *Comparative Political Studies* 33: 1091–122. [CrossRef]
- Hamidi, Camille. 2010. *La Société Civile Dans les Cités: Engagement Associatif et Politization Dans des Associations de Quartier*. Paris: Economica.
- Hastie, Trevor, and Robert Tibshirani. 1990. *Generalized Additive Models*. Boca Raton: Chapman & Hall/CRC Press.
- Hooghe, Marc, Sofie Marien, and Teun Pauwels. 2011. Where do distrusting voters turn if there is no viable exit or voice option? The impact of political trust on electoral behaviour in the Belgian regional elections of June 2009. *Government and Opposition* 46: 245–73. [CrossRef]
- Im, Eun-OK, Wonshik Chee, and Hyun-Ju Lim. 2007. Focus group methodology: Rationale and implementation in nursing research. *Western Journal of Nursing Research* 29: 602–16.
- Kamberelis, George, and Greg Dimitriadis. 2014. Focus Group Research: Retrospect and Prospect' in Patricia Leavy. In *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 16.
- Kitzinger, Jenny, and Rosaline Barbour. 1999. Introduction: The challenge and promise of focus groups. In *Developing Focus Group Research: Politics, Theory, and Practice*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 1–20. [CrossRef]
- Lane, Jan-Erik, and Svante Ersson. 1999. *Politics and Society in Western Europe*. London: Sage.
- Lima, Fernanda, Mayra Alonço, and Olga Ritter. 2021. A análise de conteúdo como metodologia dos periódicos Qualis-CAPES A1 no Ensino de Ciências. *Research, Society and Development* 10: 1–10. [CrossRef]
- Magalhães, Pedro. 2019. A Participação Política da Juventude em Portugal. Um retrato comparativo e longitudinal, 2002–2019, #01. Gukbenjian Studies—Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian. Available online: https://cdn.gulbenkian.pt/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Relato%CC%81rio-01-final_red.pdf (accessed on 3 August 2025).
- Martins, Luís. 2023. *Como Perder Uma Eleição*. Pune: Zigurate.
- Microsoft Corporation. 2018. Microsoft Excel. Available online: <https://office.microsoft.com/excel> (accessed on 3 August 2025).
- Minayo, Maria. 1998. *O Desafio do Conhecimento: Pesquisa Qualitativa em Saúde*, 5th ed. São Paulo: Hucitec-Abrasco.
- Moraes, Roque. 1999. Análise de Conteúdo. *Revista Educação* 22: 7–32.
- Morgan, David. 1996. *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Onwuegbuzie, Anthony, Wendy Dickinson, Nancy Leech, and Annmarie Zoran. 2009. A Qualitative Framework for Collecting and Analyzing Data in Focus Group Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8: 1–21. [CrossRef]
- Perea, Eva, and Rui Cabral. 2003. Características individuais, incentivos institucionais e abstenção eleitoral na Europa ocidental. *Análise Social* 38: 339–60.
- Prats, Mariana, Sina Smid, and Monica Ferrin. 2024. Lack of trust in institutions and political engagement: An analysis based on the 2021 OECD Trust Survey. In *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*. Paris: OECD Publishing, No. 75. [CrossRef]
- R Core Team. 2022. *R: A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing*. Vienna: R Foundation for Statistical Computing. Available online: <https://www.R-project.org/> (accessed on 29 August 2024).
- Santos, Fernanda. 2011. Análise de Conteúdo: Visão de Laurence Bardin. *Revista Eletrônica de Educação* 6: 383–87.
- Stewart, David, Prem Shamdasani, and Dennis Rook. 2014. *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Tilly, Charles. 2003. Political Identities in Changing Polities. *Social Research* 70: 605–20. [CrossRef]
- Van Biezen, Ingrid, Peter Mair, and Thomas Poguntke. 2012. Going, going, . . . gone? The decline of party membership in contemporary Europe. *European Journal of Political Research* 51: 24–56. [CrossRef]
- VERBI Software. 2019. MAXQDA 2024 [Computer Software]. Berlin, Germany: VERBI Software. Available online: <https://www.maxqda.com/> (accessed on 3 August 2025).
- Zürn, Michael. 2016. Opening up Europe: Next Steps in Politicisation Research. *West European Politics* 39: 164–82. [CrossRef]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.