

# Portuguese Presidential Elections Explained: Context, Trends, Impact

February 2026

## Context

Presidential elections were held in Portugal on January 18. As no candidate secured an absolute majority in the first round, the country headed to a second round [February 8] between André Ventura, leader of populist-right party Chega, and António José Seguro, a former leader of the Socialist Party [PS]. The stakes were high with many framing the runoff as a contest between democracy and authoritarianism.

**António José Seguro emerged as the clear winner, securing a landslide victory with 66.8% of the vote, compared with 33.2% for André Ventura.** Six consulates [worldwide votes] and 20 parishes remain to be counted, the latter after voting was postponed due to a series of storms affecting the country. These outstanding results are not expected to alter the final election outcome. The new president will now take office on 9 March.

## Portugal's Presidential Election 2026

### Election First Round

Portuguese voters went to the polls on January 18 to elect their new President. With 11 candidates running for office, this was the most competitive presidential election in Portugal's democratic history [since 1974], underscoring an increasingly polarised political environment.

For the first time in four decades, no candidate secured an outright majority, forcing a second round between centre-left Socialist candidate António José Seguro and populist-right Chega's leader André Ventura, who finished first and second respectively.

#### Run-off Overview

Seguro led with roughly 31.1% of the vote, outperforming pre-election polling and signalling a political comeback for the former Socialist Party leader.

Ventura secured around 23%, confirming Chega's continued ascent as a dominant force in Portugal's political landscape, after its outstanding result in the May 2025 legislative election, which positioned the party as the main opposition force in Parliament. A stark contrast to the party's 2019 debut as a fringe actor in Portuguese politics.

The liberal, pro-market candidate João Cotrim de Figueiredo [JCF] finished third with 16%, consolidating Portugal's growing centrist-liberal electorate. While not progressing to the second round, this nonetheless represents a highly positive political outcome for JCF.

Luís Marques Mendes, backed by the governing centre-right Social Democratic Party [PSD], suffered a disappointing night, finishing with just around 11% - a result analysts see as a rebuke to Prime Minister Luís Montenegro's choices.

Left-leaning candidates, backed by the Communist Party [PCP], the Left Bloc [BE] and Livre [L], all received less than 2.1%.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Round Results: breakdown by party & and political positioning

Candidate	Political Party backing	Political Positioning	Result [%]
António José Seguro	Independent /not officialy backed by PS	Centre-left	31.1
André Ventura	Chega	Right/populist-right	23.5
João Cotrim de Figueiredo	Liberal Initiative [IL]	Liberals/centre-right	16.0
Henrique Gouveia e Melo	Independent	Centre-left	12.3
Luís Marques Mendes	Social Democrats [PSD]	Centre-right	11.3
Catarina Martins	Left Bloc	Left/populist-left	2.1
António Filipe	Comunist Party [PCP]	Left	1.6
Manuel João Vieira	Independent	—	1.1
Jorge Pinto	Livre	Centre-left	0.7
André Pestana da Silva	STOP	Left	0.2
Humberto Correia	Independent	—	0.1

### Analysis

#### A fragmented Right

The first round exposed a fractured Portuguese right. While Ventura consolidated the far-right vote, the centre-right PSD and the liberal party split the remainder, weakening any single contender's chance of advancing. This is a major loss for the Government parties [PSD+CDS] whose candidate came in 5<sup>th</sup> place - an unthinkable result for the PSD, historically one of Portugal's two dominant political parties, alongside the PS, which chose not to present an official party candidate. Also noteworthy, the remaining left parties [BE, PCP, L] nearly disappeared with around 4% in total.

#### A much-needed boost for the Left

In his election-night remarks, Seguro framed his first-place finish as a call for unity. He appealed to *“progressives, democrats and humanists”* to rally behind him in the second round, casting the upcoming contest as a choice between democratic continuity and extremism. In this same line of reasoning, many observers are framing the upcoming electoral round as a choice between democracy and authoritarianism, rather than between the Left and the Right.

#### The self-proclaimed voice of the Right

On the other side, Ventura declared himself as the leader of the Right, fighting against socialism and corruption. Given the results achieved by IL and PSD-CDS-backed candidates, especially the former, Ventura has positioned himself as the standard-bearer of the right-wing political spectrum in Portugal — a space that has traditionally been occupied and led by the Social Democrats [PSD].

#### Second-round positioning

The political predicament arising from the 1<sup>st</sup> round did not favour the ruling coalition, particularly the PSD. Endorsing the socialist would have significantly weakened the party's standing, while endorsing Chega was not a viable option — not only because of ideological constraints but also due to prior commitments to reject any form of political cooperation with the party. This left the ruling PSD in a strategically precarious position as it sought to navigate

the following electoral phase without alienating its core base or compromising its long-term identity. PM Montenegro hence quickly declared that the PSD would not endorse either candidate in the runoff - further complicating Ventura’s path forward.

Nonetheless, a manifesto emerged from self-declared non-socialists, including previous PSD leader and President, Cavaco Silva, the PSD vice-president Leonor Belez, and historic centre-right leaders from the coalition parties, PSD and CDS, such as Paulo Portas, the Mayor of Lisbon and former commissioner Carlos Moedas. This move appeared to prevent André Ventura from claiming leadership of the right while simultaneously hindering Seguro from emerging as a fully backed Socialist candidate. With the exception of the Liberal candidate João Cotrim Figueiredo – who nevertheless stated he would not vote for André Ventura – all remaining first-round candidates officially endorsed Seguro as the sole democratic choice.

## Election Second Round

The runoff was scheduled for February 8, after a series of extreme weather events that left several counties without energy and communications. For that reason, 20 parishes had to postpone the vote for a week, and these events dominated the last week of the campaign.

For this reason, a much higher level of abstention was feared; however, it ultimately proved only slightly higher than in the first round [49.9% vs 47.7%]

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Round Results: breakdown by political backing

Candidate	Political Party backing	Result [%]	Result [n° votes]
António José Seguro	Socialist Party, Independents, Left-Block, Livre, Communist, self-declared non-socialists	66.82	3.483.470
André Ventura	Chega (populist-right)	33.18	1.729.471

In his first speech as President-elect, António José Seguro described the election result as a positive sign of trust from the Portuguese people, praising their remarkable civic engagement and dedication to democracy, particularly in the face of the country’s recent extreme weather challenges.

Seguro said his goal is to serve the country with a focus on the future, presenting himself as a demanding yet cooperative president who will work constructively with the government rather than act as a counter-power. Seguro emphasised the voters’ sense of responsibility and reaffirmed his commitment to upholding democratic values while providing stable and moderate leadership.

### The Government’s reaction

Prime Minister Luís Montenegro formally acknowledged the presidential election outcome, confirming António José Seguro’s victory in the runoff. Addressing journalists in Porto, he emphasised that, despite his party’s significant defeat, the minority government would continue to carry out its mandate. Montenegro further stressed that the Portuguese electorate “wants stability,” signalling his commitment to maintaining institutional continuity in the wake of the election results.

## Analysis

### Chega

The results were in line with prevailing expectations regarding Seguro's victory, while projections of a stronger performance by Ventura did not materialise. Nevertheless, Chega's result surpassed the party's performance in the last legislative elections [by around 291,500 votes] enabling him to present this as Chega's best-ever outcome – an achievement he will leverage in his political narrative, although falling short of the campaign's main goal: securing more votes than the current Executive (missing the mark by a few hundred thousand), which would undisputably strengthen the party's position in the overall national political landscape.

André Ventura is now expected to refocus his strategy on Chega's parliamentary activity. Drawing on his political profile, he will likely transform the presidential defeat into a demonstration of strength, pushing the party to assert its influence more visibly and forcefully. As Ventura himself has stated, *"We [Chega] lead the right-wing space in Portugal – and we will soon govern this country"*, signalling the party's ambition to expand its role beyond opposition.

This will likely translate into a more refined political narrative and a stronger push for some of the party's core priorities, notably nationality, immigration, and security. Regardless of specific political topics, Chega is set to exert increasing pressure on the Government, its policies and legislative initiatives, doubling down on its role as the largest opposition force in Parliament and setting the stage for the next legislative elections.

### Socialist Party

Elected with a record number of votes, Seguro becomes the first President from the socialist camp in 20 years, returning to the premier position in national politics after a decade away from the political scene.

In the run-up to the second round, Seguro secured backing from a broad range of political figures across the political spectrum, including some he had previously defeated in the first round, renowned names of the arts and culture, influential public figures and overall voter alignment. This cross-border support reflected, however, a strategic alignment less in endorsement of Seguro himself and more as a unified response against Ventura and the growing influence of Chega.

On the socialist side, this was not merely the election of a President, but the possibility of reconstruction of a winning political narrative for the party. Although the PS did not officially endorse Seguro from the outset – it is worth noting that António Costa, current President of the European Council and former Portuguese Prime Minister, has long been an internal rival of Seguro within the Socialist Party – it did not hesitate to capitalize on his presidential victory, which is likely to prove instrumental in reaffirming the Socialist Party, with multiple effects:

- The beginning of a socialist restructuring and reconstruction after traumatic legislative setbacks [legislative election, May 2025]
- Reinforce the PS brand in major urban centres and among moderate voters
- Reposition the party as a bulwark against extremism
- Overall increased political momentum and legitimacy