

24<sup>th</sup> April 2026  
ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN PORTUGAL  
1975-2026

## FROM 1975 TO 2026, ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN PORTUGAL HAS DECLINED SIGNIFICANTLY

From 1975 to 2026, there was a downward trend in electoral participation, despite the recovery seen in elections in recent years. When breaking down the types of elections held since 1975 – presidential, legislative, local and European – the average participation between 1975 and 2026 was highest in elections to the Assembly of the Republic (65.4%) and lowest in elections to the European Parliament (40.8%).

Considering all national elections in Portugal from 1975 to 2026, the average electoral participation rate for the population residing both in Portugal and abroad was 58.5%. This figure rises to 61.2% when considering only the registered and voting population residing in Portugal.

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### 1. PRESENTATION

To mark the 52<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the 25 April, Statistics Portugal is publishing a commemorative press release on electoral participation in Portugal between 1975 and 2026, measured by the number of voters in the main elections: presidential elections, elections to the Assembly of the Republic<sup>1</sup>, local elections<sup>2</sup> and European Parliament elections. The analysis considers aggregate figures for the country, NUTS 2 and 3 regions, and municipalities.

Since 25 April 1974, the Portuguese electoral process has seen 53 national elections: 11 presidential elections (two of which, in 1986 and 2026, with two rounds of voting), 19 parliamentary elections (including the Constituent Assembly in 1975), 14 elections for local government bodies (Municipal Councils, Municipal Assemblies, and Parish Assemblies) and 9 European elections (European Parliament).

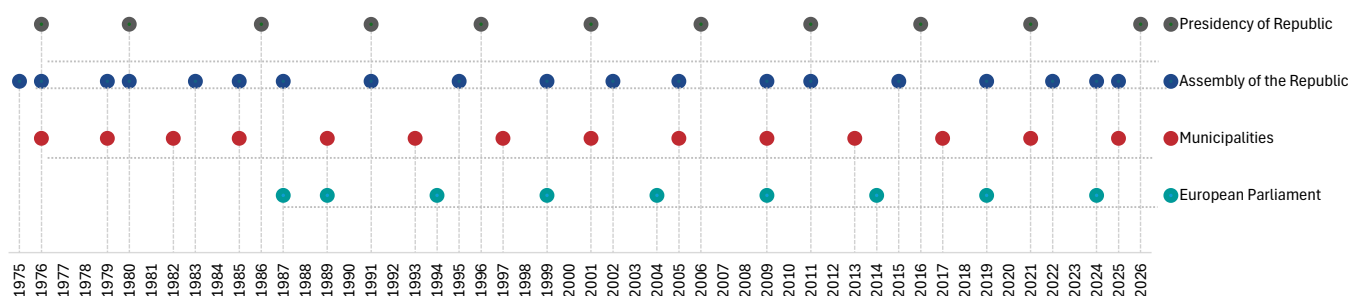
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<sup>1</sup> The analysis includes the 1975 election to the Constituent Assembly.

<sup>2</sup> The analysis includes elections for the presidencies of municipal councils and excludes elections for municipal assemblies and parish assemblies.

Figure 1

## TIMELINE OF ELECTORAL EVENTS BY TYPE OF ELECTION, PORTUGAL, 1975–2026



Source: CNE - National Electoral Commission and General Secretariat of Internal Administration - Electoral Administration.

## 2. ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Figure 2 shows the average number of people registered on the electoral roll and voters in each election year, from 1975 to the present<sup>3</sup>. The figures are presented based on two calculation criteria: 1) considering only the registered and voting population residing within the national territory (reference: residents in Portugal); and 2) also including the registered and voting population abroad (reference: total).

The data analysed show a general upward trend in the registered population, from just over 6 million in 1975 to more than 9 million in 2026, based on the population within the national territory, and to more than 11 million when the registered population residing abroad is included. In recent years, particularly since 2019, there has been an increase in the registered population residing abroad, which is partly due to procedural changes in the electoral register<sup>4</sup>.

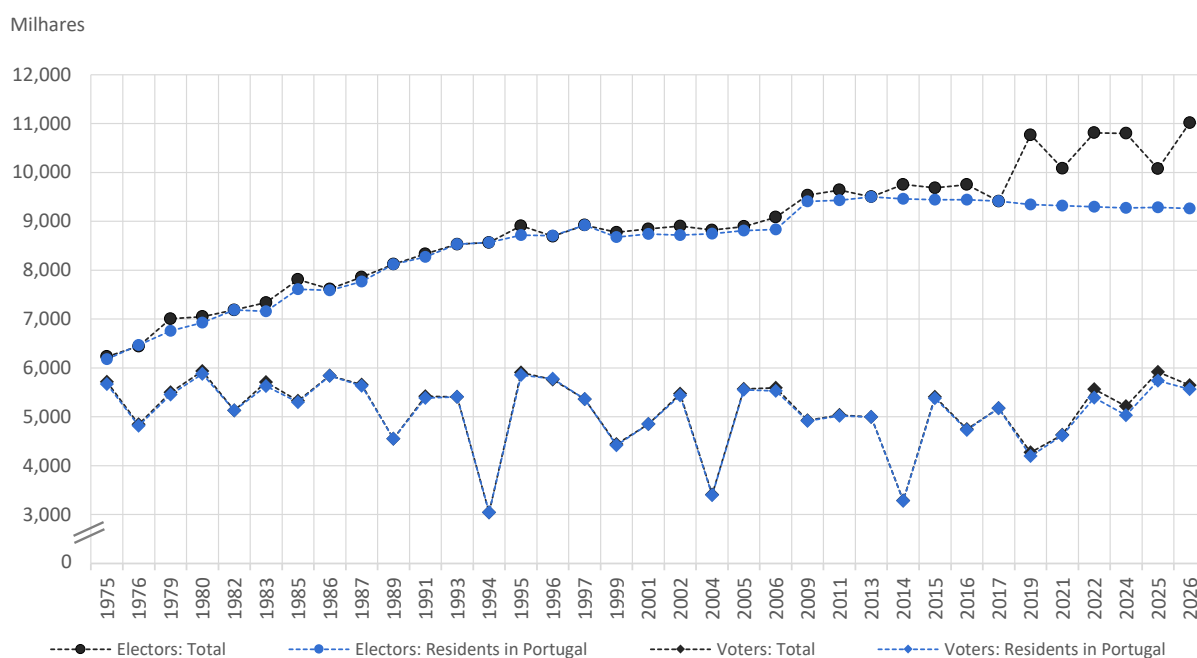
On the other hand, there has been a slight decline in the number of electors residing in the country in recent years. The trend in the number of voters over the same period does not follow the general trend in the registered population, remaining within a range that has generally fluctuated between 4 million and 6 million voters. The decreases in the number of voters in 1994, 2004 and 2014 are explained by the fact that these were years in which only elections to the European Parliament took place, an election that typically sees lower participation rates. The last five election years show some recovery in the national voting population, without the total voting population (which includes those residents abroad) having significantly diverged from the former, in the context of the upward trend in the total registered population.

<sup>3</sup> The average number of electors and voters is calculated as the ratio of the number of electors and voters in each calendar year in which national elections were held to the number of elections held in that year.

<sup>4</sup> Automatic registration on the electoral roll through the updating of the Citizen Card, from 2015 onwards.

Figure 2

## NUMBER OF ELECTORS AND VOTERS IN EACH ELECTION YEAR, PORTUGAL, 1975–2026



Source: CNE - National Electoral Commission and General Secretariat of Internal Administration - Electoral Administration.

Figure 3 illustrates the trend in political participation over the period from 1975 to 2026, measured by the ratio of voters to electors<sup>5</sup>, both in relation to voters residing in the country and to the total number of voters.

Overall, this indicator shows a downward trend in electoral participation. In the early years of the series, up to 1987, participation exceeded 70% on several occasions. In more recent years, since 2006, it has only reached the 60% mark in the last two election years – and only among voters residing in Portugal.

The average overall electoral participation (including residents in Portugal and abroad) stood at 58.5% between 1975 and 2026. Over the decades, the rate fell from 79.0% in the 1970s to 47.5% in the 2010s, having recovered slightly in the most recent decade to 51.0%.

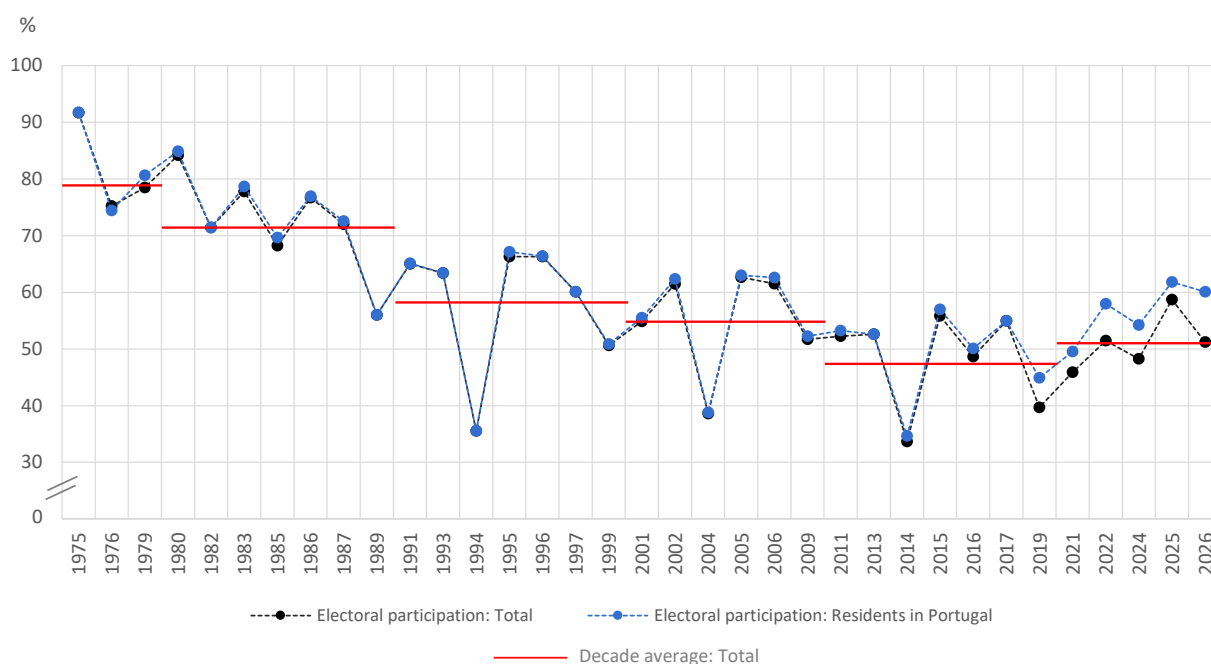
The divergence between electoral participation trends among residents in Portugal and the total number of voters (which includes voters residing abroad) over the last six election years confirms that the increase in the number of electors abroad has not led to a significant rise in overall electoral participation (which remains lower than that of residents in Portugal).

The years 1994, 2004 and 2014, which were election years for the European Parliament only, are those with the lowest electoral participation figures for the entire period under review.

<sup>5</sup> Electoral participation (%) = (Number of voters / Number of electors) × 100.

Figure 3

## ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION, PORTUGAL, 1975–2026



Source: CNE - National Electoral Commission and General Secretariat of Internal Administration - Electoral Administration.

Figure 4 shows the electoral participation rate by type of election, for the period from 1975 to 2026, for all voters registered on the electoral roll.

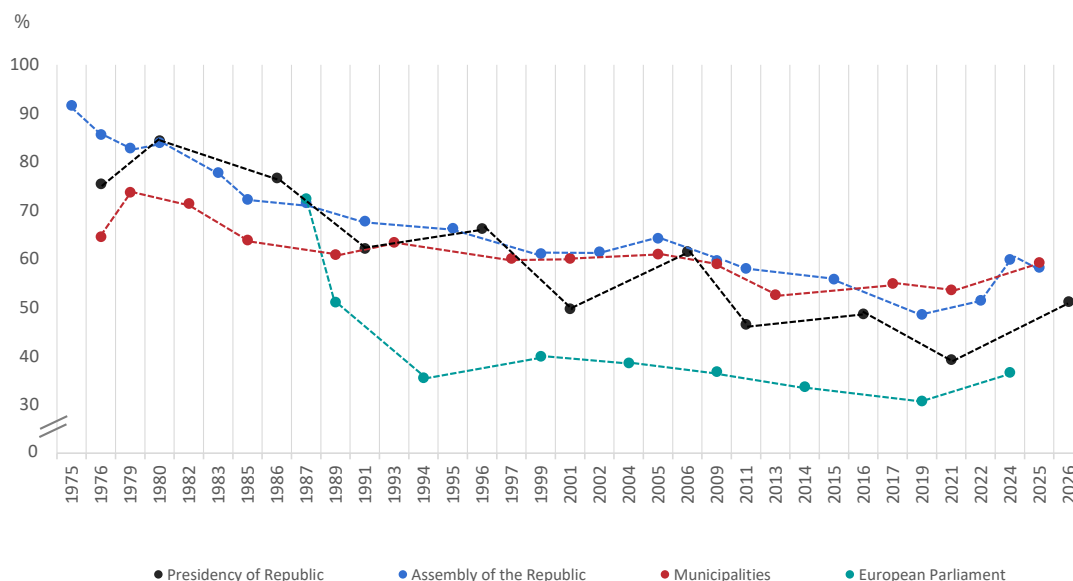
A downward trend in electoral participation in Portugal can be observed over the period in question, regardless of the type of election under consideration.

Analysing participation in the various elections, a convergence can be seen between voting behaviour in presidential elections and parliamentary elections. Regarding participation in local elections, the decline is less pronounced, with participation rates generally higher than those of other electoral events in recent years. As for participation in European elections, lower rates are observed, although these also show a downward trend.

On average, electoral participation in Portugal in all national elections between 1975 and 2026 stood at 58.5%. Elections to the Assembly of the Republic had an average participation of 65.4%, compared with 40.8% for the European Parliament, 58.8% in presidential elections and 60.7% in local elections. Of all national elections held in Portugal since 1975, the highest participation was recorded in the 1975 Constituent Assembly election (91.7%) and the lowest in the 2019 European Parliament election (30.7%).

Figure 4

## ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION BY TYPE OF ELECTION, TOTAL OF ELECTORS, 1975-2026



Source: CNE - National Electoral Commission and General Secretariat of Internal Administration - Electoral Administration.

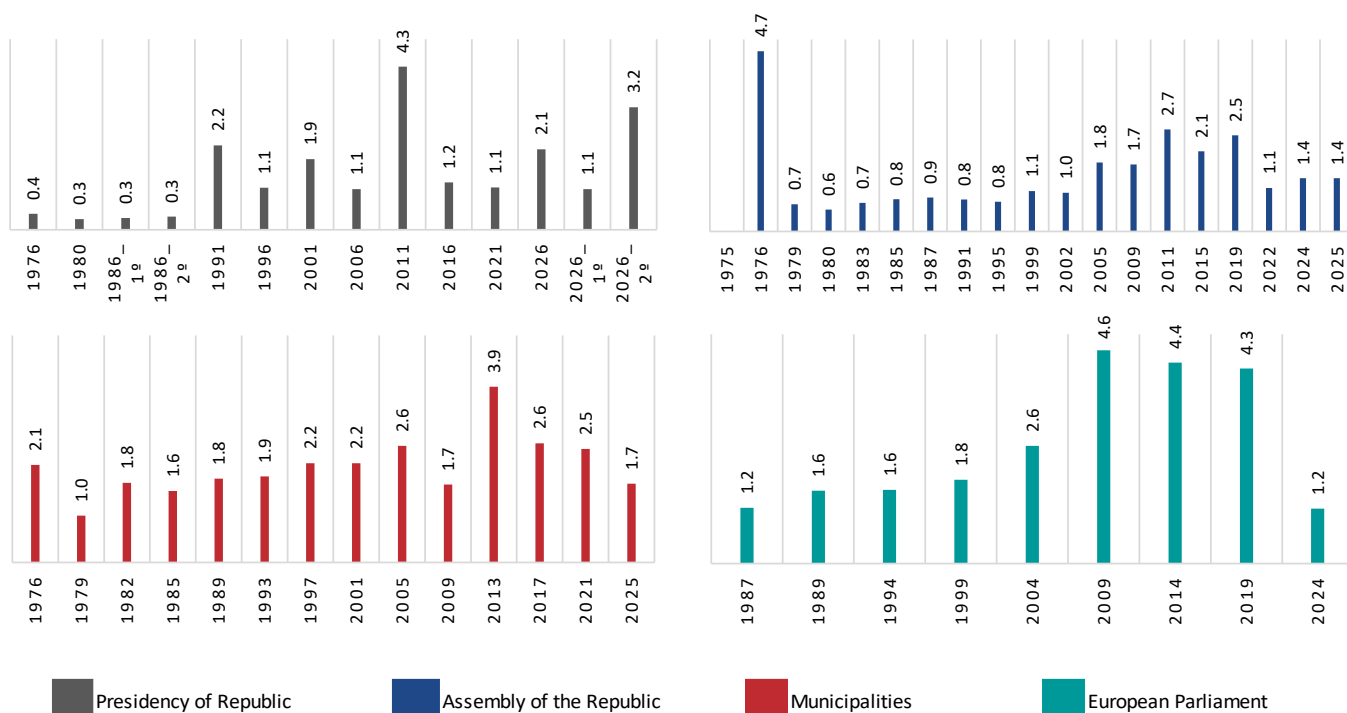
Figure 5 shows the distribution of the percentage of blank votes by type of election for the period from 1976 to 2026<sup>6</sup>. Generally speaking, higher rates of blank votes were observed in the 2010s. With the exception of the second round of the 2026 presidential elections, blank votes have tended to decline in recent years.

Elections to the European Parliament, in addition to being the least participated in almost the entire electoral history in Portugal, also have the highest average percentage of blank votes (2.5%), which compares with the lowest averages in elections for the Presidency of the Republic and the Assembly of the Republic (both at 1.4%).

<sup>6</sup> No information is available on the official results for blank votes in the 1975 Constituent Assembly election. Regarding the 1976 election to the Assembly of the Republic, the official information on blank votes also includes invalid votes.

Figure 5

## BLANK VOTES BY TYPE OF ELECTION (%), PORTUGAL, 1976-2026



Source: CNE - National Electoral Commission and General Secretariat of Internal Administration - Electoral Administration.

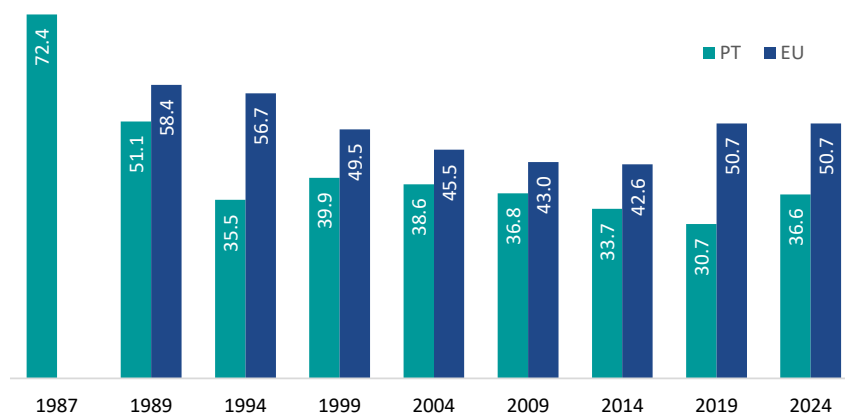
### 3. EUROPEAN ELECTIONS: PORTUGAL IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Figure 6 shows electoral participation in European Parliament elections in Portugal and across the countries of the then European Economic Community (until 1992) and the European Union (since 1993), from 1987 to 2024.

The overall trend is downward, both for Portugal and for the average across European countries, despite some recovery in recent years (in 2024 in Portugal, and in 2019 and 2024 in the European Union). Since the first European elections were held in Portugal in 1987, participation has remained below the European average.

Figure 6

ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS (%), PORTUGAL AND THE EU, 1987–2024



Source: CNE - National Electoral Commission and European Parliament

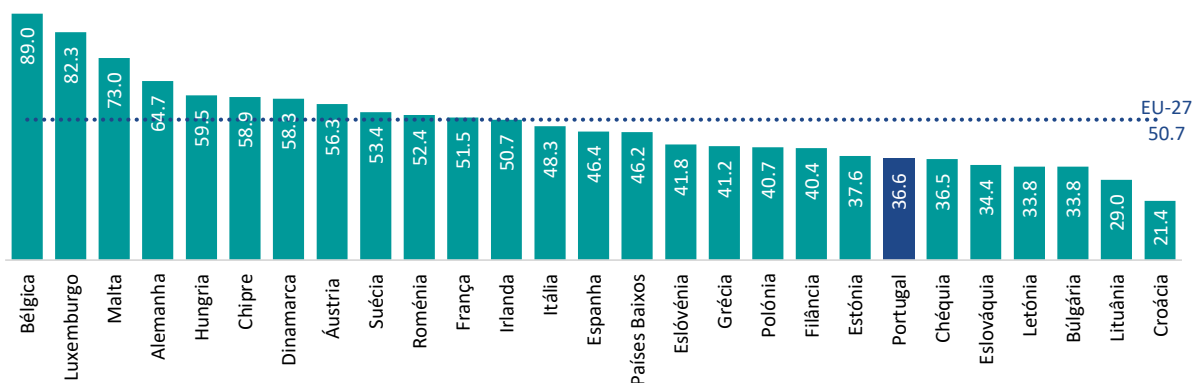
Figure 7 shows electoral participation in the 2024 European Parliament elections across the member states and the EU-27 average.

With an EU-27 average of 50.7%, Portugal was one of the countries with the lowest electoral participation (36.6%) in these elections, ranking 21st out of the 27 countries.

The countries with the highest electoral participation were Belgium and Luxembourg, with figures above 80%, followed by Malta and Germany, with figures above 60%. Six countries, predominantly in Eastern Europe, had lower electoral participation than Portugal: Croatia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Slovakia and Czechia. This situation, alongside that of Portugal, may come as a consequence of their more peripheral geographical location within the European context.

Figure 7

ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS IN 2024 (%), EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES



Source: CNE - National Electoral Commission and European Parliament

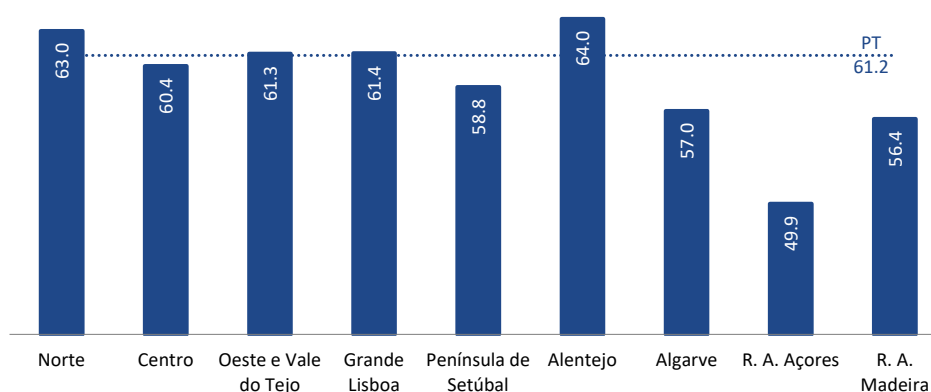
#### 4. ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION AT REGIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL

Figure 8 shows the average electoral participation rates in elections held in Portugal between 1975 and 2026, by NUTS 2 region.

The regions with the highest participation rates in national elections were the Alentejo, at 64.0%, and the Norte, at 63.0%. In addition to these, the regions of Grande Lisboa and the Oeste e Vale do Tejo recorded figures slightly above the national average (61.2%). At the other end of the scale, the autonomous regions of the Açores and Madeira and the Algarve had the lowest electoral participation figures.

Figure 8

ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION BY NUTS 2 REGION (%), PORTUGAL, 1975-2026



Source: General Secretariat of Internal Administration - Electoral Administration.

Figure 9 shows electoral participation in Portugal broken down by NUTS 3 regions and municipalities, combining the figures from all the elections under review for the period from 1975 to 2026.

At the regional level, there are 13 NUTS 3 regions with electoral participation rates above the national average (61.2%) and 13 NUTS 3 regions with rates below that average. Among the sub-regions with the highest participation, Cávado, Ave, and Alto Alentejo stand out, with rates above 65%, compared with the lowest figures in the autonomous regions of the Açores and Madeira, and the sub-regions of Alto Tâmega and Barroso, Terras de Trás-os-Montes, and the Algarve.

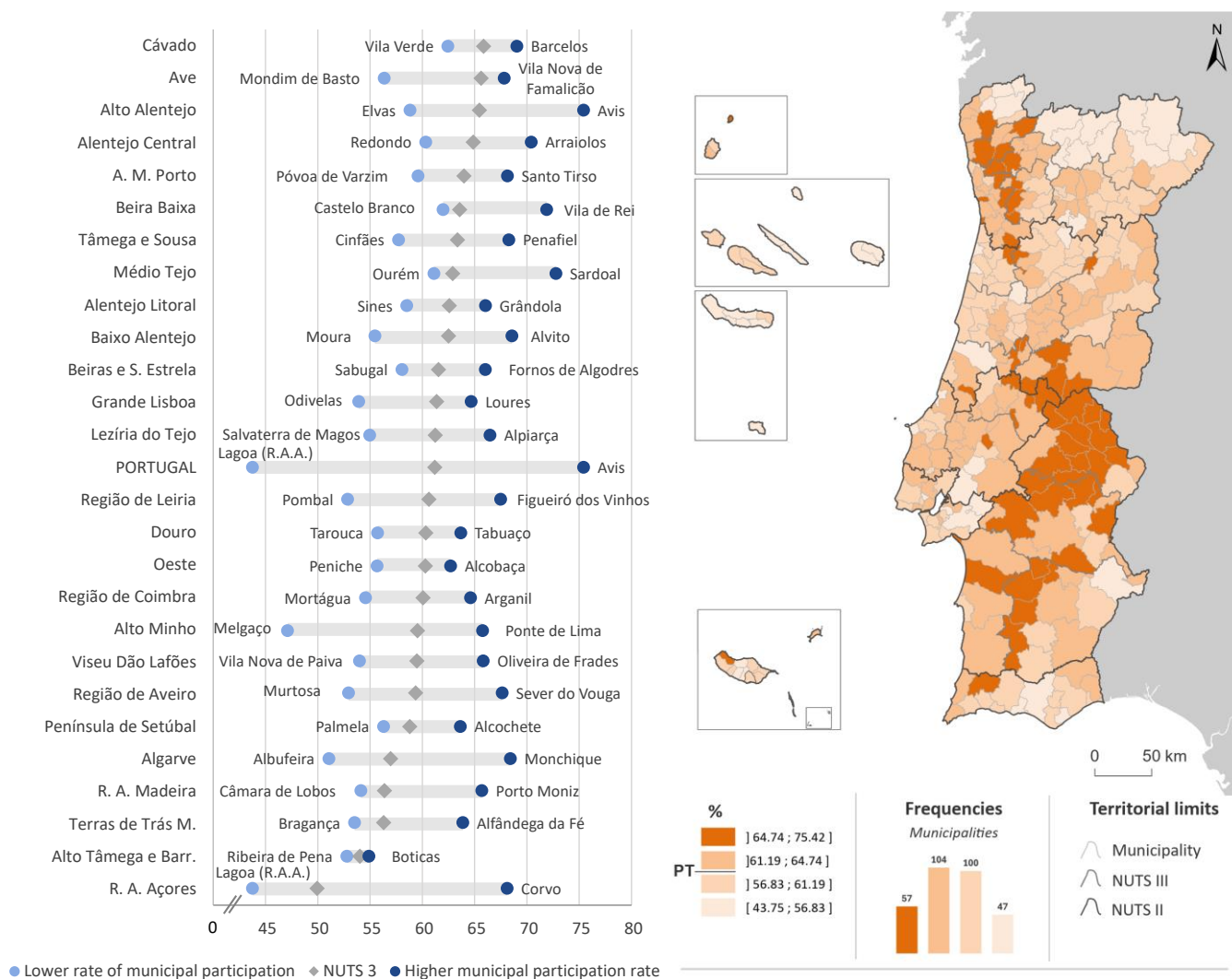
At the municipal level, there is a higher concentration of higher participation rates in municipalities in the Alentejo and Norte regions, in contrast to several municipalities located mainly in Alto Tâmega and Barroso, Trás-os-Montes and the Algarve, as well as in the autonomous regions of the Açores and Madeira.

Of the 20 municipalities with the highest electoral participation rates, seven are in the Alto Alentejo NUTS 3 region (Avis, Fronteira, Sousel, Crato, Alter do Chão, Castelo de Vide, and Nisa), three are in the Norte region (Barcelos, in the Cávado; Penafiel, in Tâmega e Sousa; and Santo Tirso, in the Área Metropolitana do Porto), two belong to the Médio Tejo region (Sardoal and Mação), two are in Beira Baixa (Vila de Rei and Vila Velha de Rodão), two are in Alentejo Central (Arraiolos and Montemor-o-Novo), two in Baixo Alentejo (Alvito and Cuba), one municipality in the Algarve (Monchique), and another in the Região Autónoma dos Açores (Corvo).

Of the 20 municipalities with the lowest electoral participation rates, eight are located in the Região Autónoma dos Açores (Lagoa, Ponta Delgada, Ribeira Grande, Vila do Porto, Vila Franca do Campo, Vila Praia da Vitória, Angra do Heroísmo, and Povoação), which in this specific case may be a more noticeable effect of geographical periphery. In addition to these, two municipalities belong to the Alto Minho sub-region (Melgaço and Arcos de Valdevez), two are part of the Algarve (Albufeira and Olhão), four are in Alto Tâmega e Barroso (Ribeira de Pena, Montalegre, Vila Pouca de Aguiar, and Valpaços), one in the Leiria region (Pombal), one in the Aveiro region (Murtosa), and two in Terras de Trás-os-Montes (Bragança and Vimioso).

Figure 9

## ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION BY NUTS 3 REGION AND MUNICIPALITY (%), PORTUGAL, 1975–2026



Source: General Secretariat of Internal Administration - Electoral Administration.

When the municipal distribution is broken down by election (Figure 10), the territorial pattern shows considerable similarities between the presidential elections and the parliamentary elections, with a large part of the municipalities already mentioned above for having the highest overall electoral participation rates standing out also for having higher voting rates in these two types of elections.

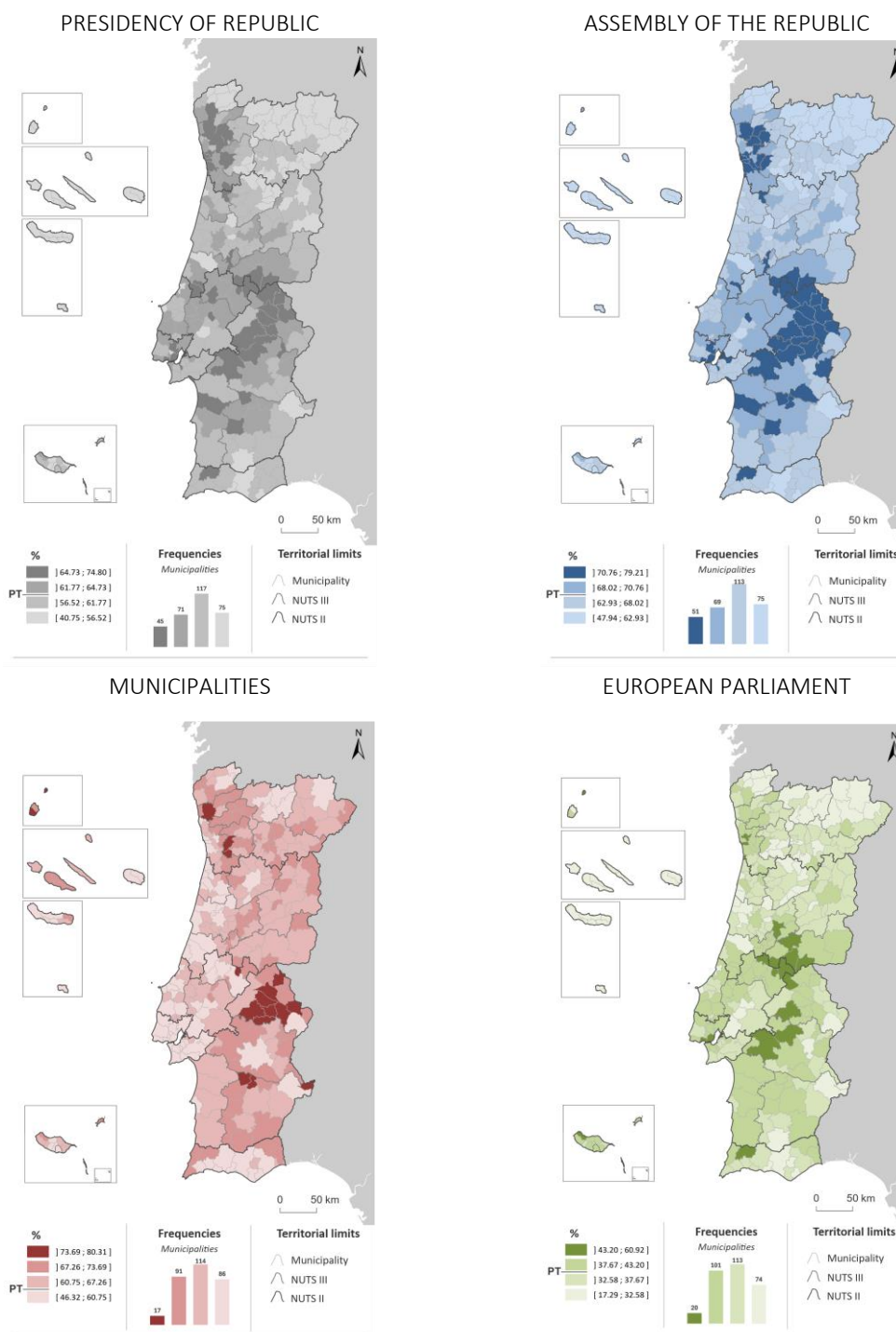
In the specific case of municipal elections, the distribution of municipal figures highlights a dichotomy between inland areas (generally more participatory) and coastal areas (tending to be less participatory).



The European Parliament elections show a greater uniformity in electoral participation across the mainland, although there are still some instances of higher participation in inland areas (notably in the Alentejo, Centro and Oeste e Vale do Tejo regions), as well as in Grande Lisboa, the Área Metropolitana do Porto and the Algarve. As for electoral participation rates in European elections, there is a difference in the municipal pattern between the two autonomous regions, with municipalities in Madeira generally showing higher participation than those in the Açores.

Figure 10

ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION BY MUNICIPALITY AND TYPE OF ELECTION (%), PORTUGAL, 1975–2026



Source: General Secretariat of Internal Administration - Electoral Administration.

## TECHNICAL NOTE

In the proposed analysis of electoral participation, electoral participation rate is defined as the participation of citizens in elections, calculated as:  $(\text{Number of voters} / \text{Number of electors}) \times 100$ .

Four national elections were considered: elections for the Presidency of the Republic, for the Assembly of the Republic (including the Constituent Assembly in 1975), for the Presidency of Municipal Councils and for the European Parliament. The analysis does not include regional legislative elections in the autonomous regions of the Açores and Madeira, local elections for Municipal Assemblies and Parish Assemblies, or the three national referendums held in Portugal (two on the decriminalisation of voluntary termination of pregnancy, and one on the establishment of administrative regions).

## Sources

The electoral participation data for Portugal include the registered and voting population residing in Portugal and abroad, with the distinctions noted throughout the text. For these data, including the elections for the Presidency of the Republic, the Assembly of the Republic, and the European Parliament, the official election results published in the Official Gazette (Diário da República) and available on the website of the National Electoral Commission (CNE) were used. For elections for the Presidency of Municipal Councils (exclusively the registered and voting population residing in Portugal), the provisional results were used, as published on the website of the General Secretariat for Internal Administration – Electoral Administration.

The electoral participation figures for the regional (NUTS 2 and NUTS 3) and municipal levels include the registered and voting population residing within the national territory. In these figures, which take into account all types of elections analysed, the provisional results published on the website of the General Secretariat for Internal Administration – Electoral Administration, were used.

Electoral participation data for European Parliament elections reported to the European Union and its Member States (excluding Portugal) were taken from the European Parliament's website: <https://elections.europa.eu/pt>

All figures included in this analysis were produced by Statistics Portugal, based on data from the sources cited.