

# *Portuguese go to the polls with no foreseeable end in sight*

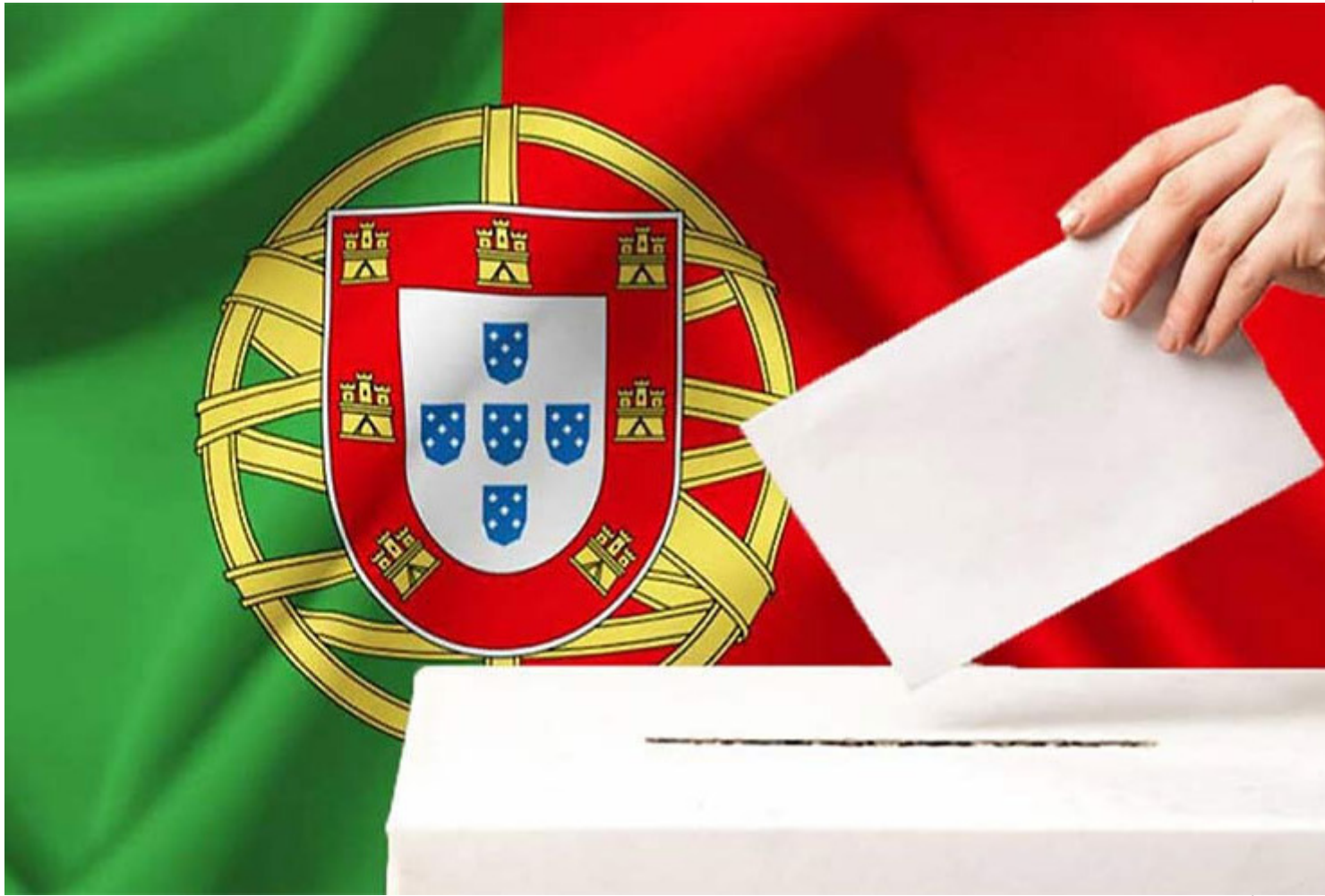


Photo taken from Prensa Latina

More than nine million Portuguese are called to the polls this Sunday, January 30, to choose the Assembly of the Republic (parliament), from which the prime minister, unpredictably of the left or the right, will be elected.

After months in which the Socialist Party of Prime Minister Antonio Costa seemed to be the favorite, although without the necessary majority in the 230-seat parliament, the latest polls showed a technical tie and gave hope to the battered Social Democrats with the veteran Rui Rio at the head.

There is even talk of a gentlemen's agreement between the Socialists, who carry Costa, and the Social Democrats (center-right) to seek governability if the expected left or right alliances are not formed.

Regardless of who wins the post, the chosen one will have to overcome the current wave of Covid-19, which has more than one million people confined after several days of reports of new sick people close to 65,000 people.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, more than 2.5 million people have been infected in the Iberian nation, and of these, almost 19,800 have died.

The electoral authorities urged people to vote, fearing a large abstention, estimated at 11 percent of the electoral roll.

President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa himself reiterated the peculiarities of these elections, as he had done since September last year when he assured that if the 2022 budget plan was not approved, he would dissolve the legislature.

"I know that pandemic, tiredness, conformism and other reasons of the intimate forum are, for many, arguments to choose not to elect. But in these very different elections, in such a different and demanding time, voting is also a way to say that we are alive," he said in a televised message on the eve of the election.

De Sousa urged to vote without fear in elections that will precede decisive years for the country, with the exit of the pandemic and the social and economic reconstruction, also marked by European challenges and international tension.

As required by law, the 21 candidates remained silent the day before during the day of reflection.

Several analysts fear that abstentionism will be the big winner of the day, remembering that in the previous appointment (2019) the figure was around 51 percent of the electorate.

A year ago, in January 2021, during the presidential election, it was 60 percent, but the country was confined and de Sousa was reelected without surprises.

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