

# The Political System in Portugal: People's Demand versus Political Agendas

- Political Reputation Can Be Fixed -

by

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**CGSD Working Paper<sup>3</sup>**

## 1. Introduction to Part Two

This document is the second chapter of an effort to understand certain dynamics of institutional demand-supply in Portugal and to provide directions for institutional development. Overall, this study aims at contributing to a better understanding of the (mis)alignment of perceptions, priorities and expectations between the people and legislators. In doing so, this study will be able to achieve two goals. First, it will be able to offer specific ideas and proposals for a collective agenda of change, advancement and modernization of the political system in Portugal based on the statistical analysis of the survey data. Second, it will contribute to the development of dialogue and collaborative trust-building platforms between (i) citizens and elected officials and (ii) political parties among themselves. It is urgent to develop a strong political reconciliatory ethics to change the institutional factors most hindering the possibility of sustainable development, which are nowadays more visible than ever.

[Part one of this study](#) focused on the demand side: people's preferences for institutional reforms/configurations, categorization of their preferences in clusters, degrees of consensus among people's demands, and their trust in political actors. Part two now focuses on the supply side: political reputation, political agendas and strategies.

## 2. Non-Parametric Modeling

The study survey included a question (Q8) on the reputation of institutions and level of trust in the President, Ministers and Parliamentarians, for which correlations with the sentiment regarding all other institutional aspects analyzed were explored.

The term "correlation" in this study is used in a broader sense of "association" between parameters that have been measured through methodologies that do not necessarily use

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<sup>3</sup> We are very grateful for the multiple and valuable contributions offered by Professor Luís Valadares Tavares, Professor Ricardo Reis and Alexandra Carreira to this research.

the Spearman correlation equations. The non-parametric model building followed two steps. First, univariate correlation F-tests between each dependent variable and all independent variables were ran to select the most significant explanatory variables. F-tests were calculated using the ratio category variance to within category variance for intervals of the independent/predictor variables depending on their nature (continuous vs. categorical). While for continuous predictors the range of values was divided into 10 intervals, for categorical predictors no transformation has been introduced.

Secondly, variables whose statistical tests showed a level of confidence of 99% were selected and the final tree-models for each dependent variable ran (N=671). The next sections explore the results for each one of the dependent variables considered for this study.

### 2.1 Political Reputation, Strategies and Agendas: President, Ministers and Parliamentarians

While section 2.3 in part one ranked different socio-political actors/groups according to their aggregated reputation among the participants in this study, this section 2.1 focuses on (i) assessing the reputation of each political actor considered, (ii) identifying the key institutional variables associated with political reputation, (iii) suggesting political strategies and agendas to improve political reputation, and (iv) assessing how strategies may differ between different political actors and how this differentiation impacts overall reputation. Participants were asked in question number eight to score separately (1: minimum; 10: maximum) the level of trust in the President (mean=3.34, sd.=2.31), Ministers (mean=2.82, sd.=1.84) and Parliamentarians (mean=2.50, sd.=1.63).

Figures 1a to 1c: Political Reputation (trust level)

Fig. 1a: Parliamentarians

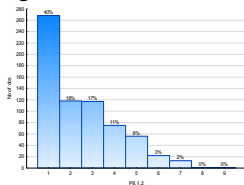


Fig. 1b: Ministers

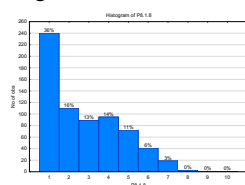
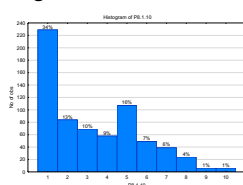


Fig. 1c: President



Figures 1a-1c describe in more detail what both mean results and Table 4 had already indicated: political reputation of politicians is very low. This result is not particularly surprising for several reasons. First, Portugal is facing a deep crises caused by poor political decisions throughout the years, among other external factors. Second, the current system of democratic representation has throughout the years deepening the distance between citizens and elected officials. Third, as the levels of education improve and new forms of community organization are created, citizens seem to rely less on politicians to solve their common problems.

The degree of trust in the parliamentarians shows a clear positive skewed shape with 86% of the sample trusting less than 4 out of 10 (see Figure 1a). Parliamentarians are the political actors people trust the least. The positive skewed shape is slightly smoother for

Ministers (65% of the sample has a trust level below 4 out of 10: see Figure 1b) and even more for the President (57% of the sample has a trust level below 4 out of 10: see Figure 1c). The President is the political actor with the highest reputation among the three studied.

How can political reputation be improved? What types of strategies could be put in place to recover political reputation? How can individual political actors' agendas and collective citizen's aspirations be reconciled? The remaining of this section is dedicated to describe and discuss three specific types of political strategies that each one of the political actors studied can follow to improve their political reputation.

### 2.1.1 Strategy 1: Individual Max Impact Factor

Table 1: F-values for selection of most relevant variables (level of significance 99%)

Institutional Configuration/Predictors	F-value Parlia.	F-value Minist.	F-value Presid.
Q27. Political parties' funding system.	21,8	15,8	4,8
Q24.5. Parliamentarians and their salary policy.	21,3	17,1	
Q22. Size of the parliament.	20,7	6,7	
Q17. Government's autonomy/restrictions and levels of public deficit.	18,4	18,8	
Q21. Parties' list voting system; i.e., representative system.	16,2	8,4	5,6
Q20.2. Organizations of the current political parties.	14,8	8,0	
Q20.7. Penalties for bad political decisions.	14,4	25,6	
Q23. Parliamentarians and accumulation of their political functions with other private careers.	11,8	8,7	
Q19. Degree of independency of regulatory authorities.	10,9	12,7	20,1
Q29. Introduction of competition between political parties and other organizations for funding.	8,5	6,4	
Q14. Power balance between the legislative authority and the judicial system.	7,3	24,0	15,3
Q24.7 Parliamentarians and applicable labor laws.	7,0	12,8	8,2
Q24.1. Parliamentarians and their own salary policy.	5,7	4,6	
Q26. Direct democracy (i.e., inclusion in the ballot of specific policies for direct decision by voters).	5,7		
Q9. Presidential powers.	5,4	7,1	7,8
Q13. Conditions for single-party majority governments.		12,1	16,6
Q33. Educacional level		7,2	
Q10. Power balance between the Parliament and the Government.		5,4	
Q25. Nominations by the Parliament such as, <i>Procurador Geral da República</i> (General Attorney) and judges of the <i>Tribunal Constitucional</i> (Supreme Court), publicized and better covered by the media in order to make candidates' profiles, beliefs and skills better known.			5,7

**Notes:** grey=top 5 correlations for each actor/group, level of significance 99%, cells in blank=no significant correlation

This type of strategy is based on the idea that actors can build and prioritize their political agendas based on the differentiated impact of alternative institutional configurations in their reputation. F-values in Table 1 indicate the impact factor of each institutional configuration in the levels of reputation of each political actor: the higher the F-value the higher the impact (negative or positive).

Table 1 displays the institutional configurations (predictors) on the left and the statistical F-test for significance of correlations with the reputation of each political actor/group on the right (by decreasing order for the parliamentarians group). "Predictor" of reputation in this context refers to the correlation between the level of trust in each one of three actors/groups considered and citizens' preference for certain types of institutional configurations.

Given his/her ideology, each political actor can look at this table as a decision-making tool to design his/her political agenda in ways that increase his/her political reputation or, otherwise, understand which factors may be affecting perception over its entire political group.

F-values were also used to select the subset of the most important variables (significance  $\geq 99\%$ ) for the non-parametric (tree) modeling, as described at the onset of section 2. Tree modeling is the basis for the second type of political strategy to improve reputation, which will be discussed next.

### **2.1.2 Strategy 2: Aggregated Max-Min Impact Factor**

While the F-values used above in Table 1 quantified the strength of association between two variables only (i.e., the level of trust in each political actor vs individual institutional configurations), tree-modeling represents the combined/aggregated effect of preferences for certain institutional configurations (i.e., branches of the model tree) that maximizes/minimizes reputation of each political actor/group. According to this type of strategy political actors develop their political agendas based on the cumulative effect of a set of institutional configurations or reforms. This type of strategy can be very useful for politicians who have to articulate different institutional reforms in one single agenda; and/or for politicians with scarce resources in need to prioritize the size of their campaign and communication strategy; and/or for politicians who are trying to understand the demographics, size and preferences of their current and potential support base.

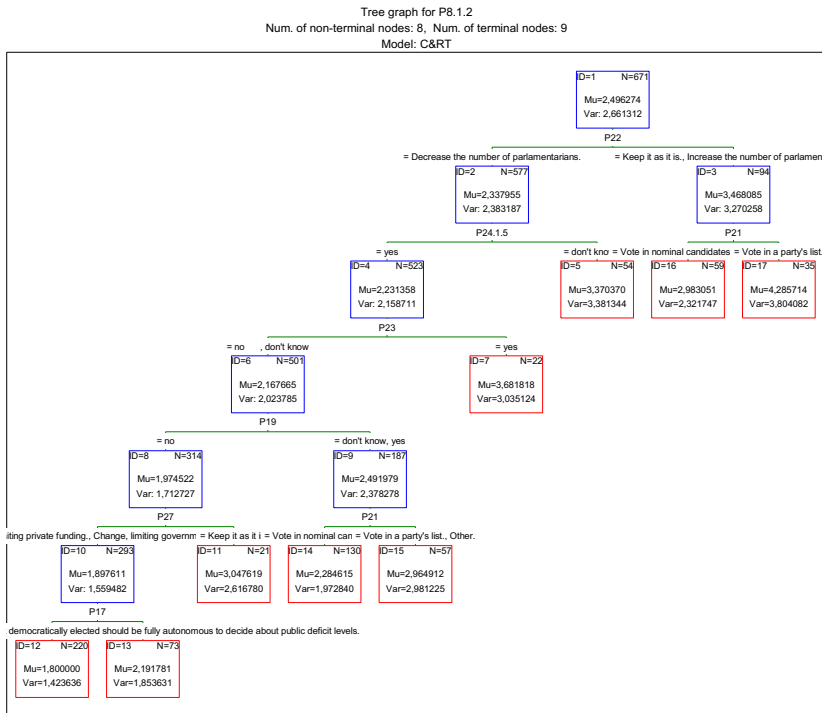
The minimum levels of current trust in parliamentarians are associated with participants who prefer the following combination of institutional configurations (see Figure 2):

- . Reduce the size of the Parliament (i.e., reduce the number of parliamentarians);
- . Do not allow parliamentarians to decide/vote about their own salary raise;
- . Do not allow parliamentarians to accumulate public functions with private professional activities, such as law firms and other companies;
- . Make regulatory authorities more independent;
- . Allow for both public and private funding of political parties;
- . Establish in the Portuguese Constitution a maximum for public deficit.

Even though the overall degree of trust is low, the highest levels of current trust in parliamentarians are associated with participants who prefer the following combination of institutional configurations:

- . Keep or enlarge the size of the Parliament (i.e., maintain or increase the number of parliamentarians);
- . Keep the voting system on party lists as it is.

**Fig. 2: Tree-Modeling for the Trust Level in Parliamentarians**



Not surprisingly, while higher trust levels are associated with “keeps” of the current political system, lower trust levels are associated with the desire to change the status quo. Obviously, this is where the space of opportunities for parliamentarians to increase their reputation opens up. Moreover, since the analysis shows that max-min combinations are not mutually exclusive, parliamentarians can introduce reforms that simultaneously affect, positively, their reputation in the eyes of those who are asking for changes without negatively affecting perceptions of those who are happy with certain current institutional configurations.

Consistent with the overall mistrust in political actors showed by the results, low reputation of ministers is positively associated with the opposition to the creation of better institutional conditions for the formation of parliamentary majorities.

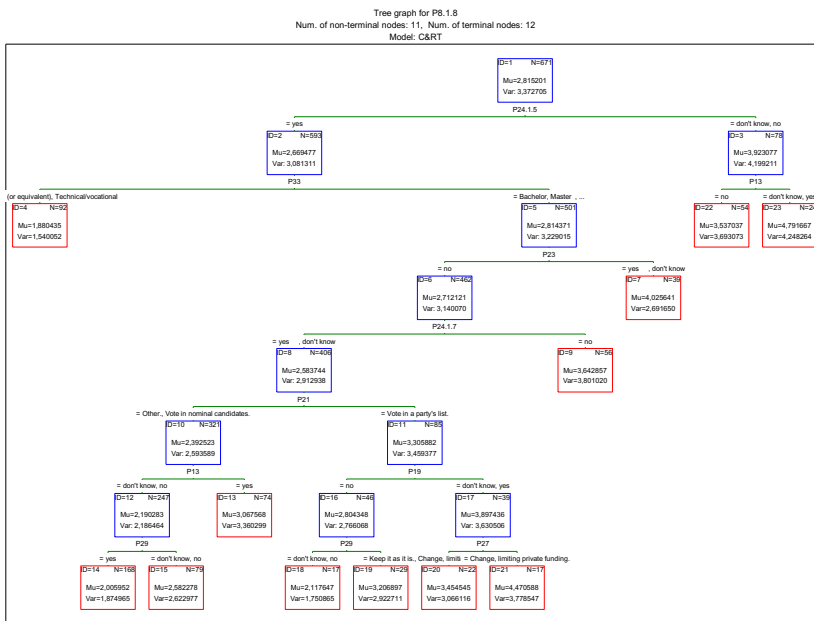
One combination of preferences for institutional configurations associated with minimum levels of trust in ministers includes (see Fig. 3):

- . Not allowing parliamentarians to decide/vote about their own salary raise;
- . Lower educational levels.

Another combination of preferences for institutional configurations associated with low reputation of ministers includes:

- . Not allowing parliamentarians to decide/vote about their own salary raise;
- . Higher educational levels;
- . Being against the cumulative functions of parliamentarians and lawyer or any other professional of the services sector;
- . Supporting (or indifference to) greater penalties for bad political decisions;
- . Supporting a voting system based on nominal candidates;
- . Not supporting (or indifference to) the creation of institutional conditions for the formation of parliament majorities;
- . Supporting the possibility of civil organizations and political parties competing for public funds.

**Fig. 3: Tree-Modeling for the Trust Level in Ministers**



Low trust and reputation is generalized across different educational backgrounds. However, for higher educational levels, low reputation of ministers is associated with a more complex and interconnected set of institutional preferences and demands, being all of them associated with structural and functional aspect of the country governance and the political decisions that support it.

The maximum levels of current trust in ministers are associated with participants who prefer the following combination of institutional configurations (see Fig. 3):

- . Supporting (or indifference to) parliamentarians voting on their own salary raise;
- . Supporting (or indifference to) the creation of institutional conditions for the formation of parliament majorities.

Another combination of preferences for institutional configurations associated with high reputation includes:

- . Not supporting parliamentarians voting on their own salary raise;
- . Higher educational levels;
- . Being against the cumulative functions of parliamentarians and lawyer or any other professional of the services sector;
- . Supporting (or indifference to) greater penalties for bad political decisions;
- . Supporting a voting system based on parties lists;
- . Supporting (or revealing lack of knowledge about) the current degree of independency of the regulatory authorities in Portugal;
- . Supporting the limiting of the political parties' funding by private sources.

Once again, the discussion around the type of voting/representative system (nominal vs. party list) plays a critical role, and fragmentary, role in citizens' preferences and demands and, consequently, on political reputation.

Similarly to what happened with the parliamentarians these results have two main implications for strategies to improve the political reputation of ministers. First, to improve reputation ministers need to promote meaningful institutional reform around very specific combinations of institutional configurations. Second, max-min combinations are not mutual exclusive. Ministers can introduce substantive reforms that positively affect their reputation in the eyes of those who currently trust them the least without negatively affecting their current support base.

**Comment [A1]:** Acho que esta formulação não é muito clara. Não percebo no que é que na prática isto resulta.

The minimum levels of current trust in the president are associated with participants who prefer the following combination of institutional configurations (see Fig. 4):

- . Supporting larger autonomy for the regulatory authorities in Portugal;
- . Not supporting the creation of institutional conditions for the formation of parliament majorities;
- . Having a clear position on whether to support the media coverage of nominations by the Parliament;
- . Supporting a representative system other than the nominal candidates or parties' lists.

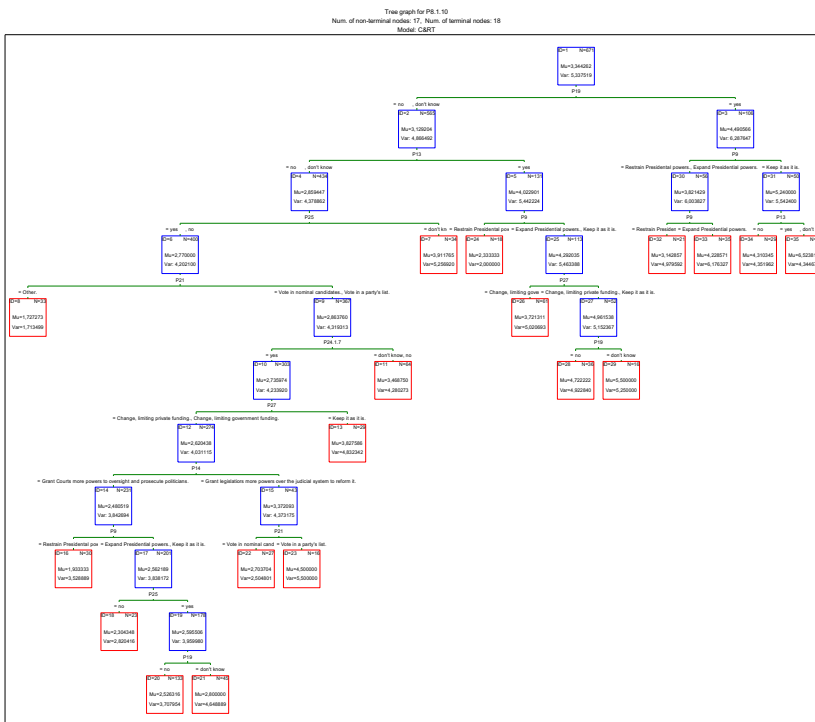
**Comment [A2]:** O que é que isto quer dizer?

Another combination of preferences for institutional configurations associated with low reputation of the President includes:

- . Supporting larger autonomy for the regulatory authorities in Portugal;
- . Not supporting the creation of institutional conditions for the formation of parliament majorities;
- . Having a clear position on whether to support the media coverage of nominations by the Parliament;
- . Having a clear position on which type of representative system should be in place: either supporting nominal candidates or parties' lists;

- . Supporting parliamentarians being subjected to the same labor laws applicable to public servants in general;
- . Parties' funding, either public or private, should be limited;
- . Granting Courts more powers to oversight and prosecute politicians;
- . Presidential powers should be restrained.

**Fig. 4: Tree-Modeling for the Trust Level in the President**



The maximum levels of current trust in the president are associated with participants who prefer the following combination of institutional configurations:

- . Supporting the current degree of independency of the regulatory authorities in Portugal;
- . Keeping the presidential powers;
- . Being in favor (or indifferent) to the creation of institutional conditions for the formation of parliament majorities.

Similarly to the two political groups analyzed previously there is a range of institutional reforms that the President can consider to improve his reputation. What is unique in the results obtained for the President is that his reputation is associated with a much wider range of institutional configurations and combinations compared to the other two political

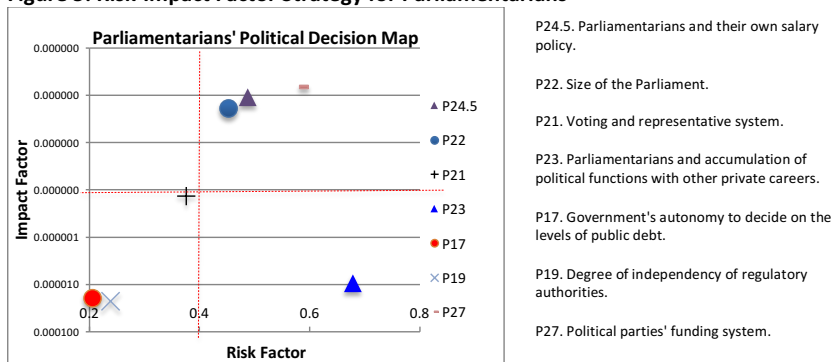


groups. This result not only suggests that the President has higher degrees of freedom, and legitimacy to intervene broadly, but also that there is a range of institutional reforms around which different political groups/actors could cooperate for the benefit of all without undermining their current support base. This is to say that the range of possibilities between different political actors is not mutually exclusive and that new collaborative platforms between different types of political actors could be established to advance institutional reform and development.

### 2.1.3 Strategy 3: Risk-Impact Factor

This type of strategy factors in a decision variable that none of the other two strategies factored in: the political risk of disenfranchising citizens that do not support certain political options. As illustrated by the division of Figure 5 in four quadrants, Parliamentarians’ decision map groups alternative institutional reforms in four groups: high impact-high risk, medium impact-medium risk, low impact-low risk and low impact-high risk. By determining which combinations impact-risk best suits their political aspirations, Parliamentarians can use this decision map to influence their prestige, prioritize reforms, design political agendas and strategize accordingly.

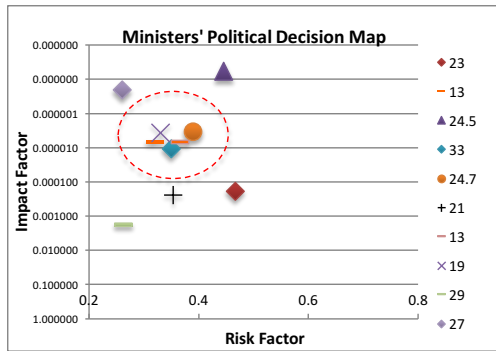
**Figure 5: Risk-Impact Factor Strategy for Parliamentarians**



Ministers’ political decision map displays a rather different impact-risk pattern of political options when compared with Parliamentarians (see Figure 6). The most noticeable feature relies on the much less linear relationship between political impact and political risk. The key institutional reforms for Ministers vis-à-vis their political prestige are also different from those of the Parliamentarians. Compared with Parliamentarians, the impact-risk “cloud” seems to contract around a core of political reforms with a medium impact-risk factor (see dashed area).

Outside of this center, and similar to Parliamentarians, Ministers also have the possibility of incorporating in their political agendas and strategies institutional reforms with different impact-risk combinations.

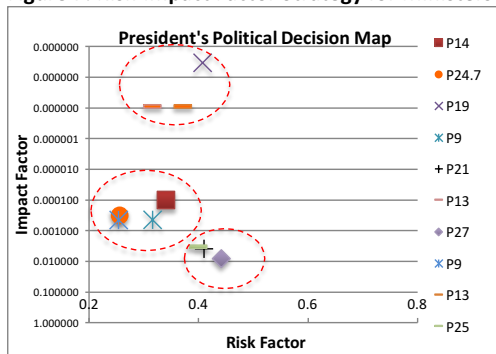
**Figure 6: Risk-Impact Factor Strategy for Ministers**



- P23. Parliamentarians and accumulation of political functions with other private careers.
- P13. Conditions for single-party majority governments.
- P24.5. Parliamentarians and their own salary policy.
- P33. Educacional level.
- P24.7 Parliamentarians and applicable labor laws.
- P21. Voting and representative system.
- P19. Degree of independency of regulatory authorities.
- P29. Introduction of competition between political parties and other organizations for funding.
- P27. Political parties' funding system.

President's political decision map is more expanded than for Ministers at two levels (see Figure 7). First, instead of a core center around which medium impact-risk decisions can be made, President's political decision map clusters around three very distinct groups of institutions (see dashed areas). Second, President's political decision map includes a more diversified set of possible institutional reforms.

**Figure 7: Risk-Impact Factor Strategy for Ministers**



- P14. Power balance between the legislative authority and the judicial system.
- P24.7 Parliamentarians and applicable labor laws.
- P19. Degree of independency of regulatory authorities.
- P9. Presidential powers.
- P21. Voting and representative system.
- P13. Conditions for single-party majority governments.
- P27 Political parties' funding system.
- P25. Media coverage of nominations by the Parliament.

**3. Conclusion**

In [part one of this study](#) the authors described and quantified two main ideas. First, the main institutional developments demanded by Portuguese citizens and participants in this study - 1073 Portuguese living in 59 different countries - were grouped by levels of consensus. Naturally, people have diferente aspirations on how their individual lives should, and should not, be affected by the socio-economic and political systems they live and operate in. Second, the prestige of political decision makers (Parliamentarians, Ministers and the President) was assessed vis-a-vis people's aspirations. The political reputation of all political actors studied is very low.

What part two of this study did was to model, design and propose a series of political strategies that can shed light on how political actors can design their political agendas and strategies and simultaneously improve their prestige.

There are at least five important corollaries that result from part two of this work. First, political actors should expand the boundaries of their traditional, rather limited and limiting, support bases. Second, the expansion of these boundaries should not be based on pre-conceived ideology but rather on problem-solving approaches driving both people's satisfaction and political prestige. Political actors need to use data-driven science to better assess the cost-benefits of their political priorities and agendas. Third, the very low credibility of the political system and politicians can be fixed. Part two of this study outlined three different types of strategies to fix it. Fourth, two of the key aspect of these strategies are: meaningful institutional reform and cooperation between different political actors. Fifth, raising politicians' prestige through the strategies this research outlines may have a dragging positive effect over the credibility of other political institutions due to the strong association between the two.