

Voice, responsiveness, and alternative policy venues: An analysis of citizen complaints against the local government to the national Ombudsman

António F. Tavares¹  | Sara Moreno Pires² | Filipe Teles² 

¹Research Center in Political Science, School of Economics and Management, University of Minho & Operating Unit on Policy-Driven Electronic Governance, United Nations University, Guimarães, Portugal

²Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences (DCSPT), Research Unit on Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policies (GOVCOPP), University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal

Correspondence

António F. Tavares, Research Centre in Political Science, School of Economics and Management, University of Minho (Campus de Gualtar), 4710-057 Braga, Portugal.
Email: atavares@eeg.uminho.pt

Abstract

The Ombudsman is one of the most relevant and institutionalized tools to give voice to citizens, so they can express their dissatisfaction with local public services. The literature has yet to produce a systematic explanation for the variation in complaints to the national Ombudsman. This article uses classic literature from public administration and public policy to consider arguments of voice, responsiveness and alternative policy venues concerning the role of the Ombudsman in citizen complaints against local governments. Data on all 2139 citizen complaints submitted to the Ombudsman in Portugal (2012–2015) are analyzed using negative binomial regression models. Policy implications drawn from the results show not only that the presence of alternative voice venues reduces the number of complaints to the national Ombudsman but also that context matters. Local politics stimulates civic engagement and difficult local conditions, such as unemployment, crime, and aging populations, activate citizens to resort to the Ombudsman.

Funding Statement: This article is part of a research project financially supported by the Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos (FFMS), entitled “Qualidade da Governação Local.” Antonio Tavares acknowledges the Research Center in Political Science (UIDB/CPO/00758/2020), University of Minho/University of Évora supported by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) and the Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science through national funds. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos and the Portuguese Science and Technology Foundation.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The establishment of formal complaints mechanisms and a rapid increase in Ombudsman institutions are characteristics of a trend in administrative reforms in the 1980s and 1990s that sought to improve the delivery of public services (OECD 2001; Overman 2017; Schläpfer 2017; van de Walle 2018). The Ombudsman is one of the most relevant and institutionalized mechanisms to give voice to citizens. Voice is the process through which citizens (individually or collectively) express their dissatisfaction with public services through speaking out. According to van de Walle (2018), they can do so in different ways: by complaining directly to a service provider during the service interaction or afterwards, complaining through media and, nowadays, social media or by addressing the complaints to those delivering the service, those managing it, those politically responsible for the public service or higher authorities.

A burgeoning literature in public administration investigates the factors that affect citizen satisfaction at many levels (e.g., DeHoog et al. 1990; van de Walle 2018). The majority of the studies to date look at local complaints made directly to local public services or tend to study the use of surveys of individuals to assess satisfaction or dissatisfaction with service delivery (DeHoog et al. 1990). In many of these studies, satisfaction is assessed with either perception-based data or self-reported measures rather than objective measures such as complaints to an external body. Others extensively analyze the role of Ombudsman institutions in general (Hossu & Dragos 2013; Ladi 2011) or in managing complaints against all types of public services (Magruder et al. 2018; van Roosbroek & van de Walle 2008) and do not particularly address complaints against local governments. Interestingly, this literature has yet to produce a systematic explanation for the variation in complaints to the national Ombudsman. This article relies on classic arguments from public administration and public policy, including the exit-voice-loyalty (EVL) framework, to develop such an explanation and analyze the role of the national Ombudsman as a voice solution of last resort for citizen dissatisfaction with their local governments.

Complaints are the result of citizen experiences with “inappropriate or discourteous treatment, omissions, mistakes, faults, inconsistencies, misleading guidance, unclear procedures, or displayed bias or injustices” in public services (Brewer 2007, p. 550). Hence, the inability or unwillingness to respond to negative citizen perceptions are likely to result in complaints, starting at the local level of government and moving to other venues¹ if this level proves to be unresponsive. Following Schattschneider's claim, losers in one particular policy venue may seek to expand the scope of conflict in the hopes of winning at a different venue (Schattschneider 1960). The presence of additional venues of political representation provides alternative channels to accommodate citizen dissatisfaction with municipal governments. The national Ombudsman is one such alternative channel and the degree of variation in citizen complaints against their respective local governments to the Ombudsman is one avenue of research worth pursuing.

Ombudsman complaints can contribute to increase accountability in local government. Brewer (2007) argues that the opportunities to use complaints as administrative appeals outside the local sphere can serve to bolster the legitimacy of the political system (Aldons 2001), and may even provide some compensation for the absence of democratic legitimacy (Scott 2005) by bringing about an alternative policy venue. Complaints to the national Ombudsman become a mechanism, albeit limited, for balancing the power between the local state and the ordinary citizen and a means of accountability (Devereux & Weisbrod 2006).

In order to expand research and knowledge about the role of Ombudsman institutions, we collected data on all citizen complaints submitted to the national Ombudsman of Portugal between 2012 and 2015 filed against the municipal governments (2139 complaints in total). These data are part of a larger project designed to assess the quality of local government in Portugal. Data are analyzed using negative binomial regression models to test our hypotheses.

After this introduction, Section 2 explores the literature and prior research examining the determinants of citizen satisfaction with local public services. The subsequent section discusses how the concepts of EVL can be combined with ideas about responsiveness and alternative venues of political representation to provide an explanation of the

role of the Ombudsman in accommodating citizen dissatisfaction with local governments. Section 4 presents the hypotheses to be tested. Section 5 describes the data and methods employed in the empirical analysis. Section 6 discusses the findings and Section 7 concludes.

2 | PRIOR RESEARCH ON THE DETERMINANTS OF CITIZEN SATISFACTION

Satisfaction with public services has become a highly relevant field of study for public administration scholars (van de Walle 2018). When stated preferences are translated into revealed preferences, through formal mechanisms, they become critical behaviors to explain the performance of public services (van de Walle 2016). Many studies have tried to understand citizen complaints against local governments and explain the dissatisfaction with the provision of local public services (e.g., Kosecik & Sagbas 2004), particularly related to the environmental sector (e.g., Carvalho & Fidélis 2009; Zeng et al. 2019) or health care (e.g., Bloemen et al. 2015; Schlesinger et al. 2002).

The improvement of complaints procedures has also been analyzed, given its importance in building trust in and loyalty towards governments while reducing costs (e.g., Brewer 2007). In fact, in recent years, several governments have attempted to use technology-based complaints systems (Brewer 2007). These voice mechanisms are considered to be vital in improving accountability in the public services (Brewer 2007; Grossman et al. 2017).

The literature also points to critical factors that determine the territorial pattern of public complaints, particularly against municipalities and local services. Most factors are linked with the socio-economic characteristics of residents, including:

1. income (e.g., Bonaiuto et al. 1999, 2003, 2006; Izazola et al. 1998; Kosecik & Sagbas 2004), with citizen complaints generally higher in more economically developed areas (Zeng et al. 2019);
2. literacy rate (e.g., Carvalho & Fidélis 2009; Kosecik & Sagbas 2004), with lower educational levels associated with fewer complaints (Jilke & Van de Walle 2013);
3. individual features, such as age, sex, race, and occupation (e.g., Brown & Coulter 1983; Kosecik & Sagbas 2004) also related to different levels of public participation (e.g., an elderly population and higher unemployment rates usually correlate with higher numbers of complaints);
4. length of residence in the locality and housing tenure, with homeowners and people who have lived in the locality for a long time more inclined to complain about local government's services (e.g., Kosecik & Sagbas 2004).

Apart from these socioeconomic factors, there are also *individual-level* explanations for citizen satisfaction with public services (DeHoog et al. 1990). DeHoog et al. (1990) argued that these are related to an attitudinal perspective, linked to an array of political behaviors (e.g., protesting and rioting as proposed by Sears and McConahay (1973), exiting the jurisdiction as defended by Tiebout (1956) or Ostrom et al. (1961), or contacting behaviors as studied by Sharp (1984).

Other studies focus on the *jurisdiction level* highlighting the effects of different configurations of local governments in a region (DeHoog et al. 1990). Consolidation advocates argue that larger local governments are better equipped to respond to the complexities of urban life and present citizens with clearer lines of accountability (Lyons & Lowery 1989). In contrast, the enthusiasts of polycentrism stress that regions with multiple, smaller local governments provide plural exit options to citizens and tend to experience higher levels of service performance and accessibility as a result (Bish & Ostrom 1973). This debate is primarily interested in determining which configuration is capable of producing more “competent, responsive, and cost-effective local governance” (Carr & Tavares 2014, p. 270).

This multiplicity of arguments and perspectives on citizen satisfaction and dissatisfaction with local governments' actions and the diversity of explanations on how to understand complaints, still presents a challenge to

researchers. In this article, we focus on how the mechanisms of voice, responsiveness and alternative policy venues interact with contextual variables to account for the variation in the number of complaints against local governments brought by citizens to the national Ombudsman. The following sections detail these arguments and derive the hypotheses to be tested in the empirical section.

3 | EXIT, VOICE, AND ALTERNATIVE POLICY VENUES

Hirschman's (1970) exit-voice-loyalty (EVL) framework has proved to be a very useful way of categorizing behavioral reactions, and it is increasingly being tested in a public service context (Dowding & John 2012). Here, we extend the EVL framework by also including arguments related to local government responsiveness and alternative policy venues to explain the variation in complaints to the national Ombudsman. This extension must be able to accommodate two different and possibly competing reasons for the variation in complaints. On the one hand, it should explain the conditions likely to trigger citizen dissatisfaction. Adverse social contexts related to crime and unemployment, for example, may generate an increase in complaints to the Ombudsman if citizens perceive inaction or inability of local government to respond to these problems. On the other hand, the explanation should also account for the different types of policy venues at the disposal of citizens that may work as alternatives to the national Ombudsman. The reasoning is that citizens will complain to the Ombudsman only if there are not alternative venues at the local level at their disposal or if these venues, while present, are unresponsive.

Following Hirschman's classic work, voice has been primarily associated with politics, whereas exit is thought of as a market mechanism. Traditionally, if voice is seen as an active and constructive way to communicate an opinion, exit is regarded as a silent and destructive mechanism that can only be assessed after the fact (Peeters et al. 2020; Pierre & Røiseland 2016). Recent work, however, suggests that exit has a place in democratic theory and can be equally constructive for empowering citizens and institutionalizing choice in democratic systems (Warren 2011).

Complaints—the focus of our work—are considered as a form of voice as citizens express dissatisfaction with public service provision by using existing complaints systems to communicate their opinions (Pierre & Røiseland 2016). Voice is an active and constructive response, as it has the advantage of providing feedback to those responsible for service delivery, thus contributing to organizational responsiveness and possible improvements (Hirschman 1970; Peeters et al. 2020). Furthermore, in systems where residents face limited exit options, either due to the absence of institutionalized forms of exit or because individuals are not empowered to exercise exit options (Warren 2011), voice becomes an important mechanism to express discontent and citizens are more likely to get involved in local politics (DiPasquale & Glaeser 1999).

In contrast with voice, exit was traditionally regarded as a destructive mechanism, because it entails severing ties with a service provider (Dowding & John 2012; Peeters et al. 2020): internal exit (switching to another public provider), private exit (switching to a private provider) or geographical exit (moving to another local jurisdiction). Democracies institutionalize exit in many forms, including through interparty competition in electoral systems, horizontal competition between local governments, competing associational memberships, and (quasi-) market competition for local public goods (Warren 2011).

According to Hirschman's definition, loyalty drives citizens to remain in a situation, with “the expectation that *someone* will act or *something* will happen to improve matters” (p.78). In this sense, loyalty bears some traits in common with neglect, which entails “putting in less effort, not working at a relationship, and letting it fall apart” (Withey & Cooper 1989, p. 522; Golden 1992). However, in contrast with neglect, loyalty can be cultivated by organizations in order to prevent the exit of their most committed members, who are better able to promote reforms (Warren 2011).

Thus, citizen complaints against local governments to the national Ombudsman can be interpreted in light of the EVL framework. First, complaints are a form of voice, as they serve to communicate citizen dissatisfaction with the local government and “provide corrective feedback that can help to get faltering institutions back on track” (Sharp

1984a, p. 68). In the presence of an unresponsive local government, citizens are incentivized to search for alternative venues to express voice. The Ombudsman offers one such venue, particularly if those available at the local level fail (e.g., voting to replace an incumbent with a poor performance).

Second, beyond a voice role, the national Ombudsman can be seen as an institutionalized form of (quasi-)exit (Warren 2011). Individual decisions to complain to an external body (the Ombudsman) serve to elicit responsiveness from local governments, while avoiding the destructive effects of actual relocation to another municipality. In other words, citizens may complain to the Ombudsman not only to voice their dissatisfaction with an unresponsive local government, but also to signal an intention to exit if conditions fail to improve.

Third, Stoker (2011, p. 21) argues that “one of the most established functions of local governments is the expression of identity”, which is stronger in Southern European countries such as Italy and France. Citizens are connected to their local governments by a strong sense of identity and attachment to place. Identity claims provide a source of legitimacy (Stoker 2011) and of loyalty that serve as a mechanism to suppress exit and encourage voice (Dowding & John 2008). Furthermore, citizens expect local governments to be more effective than upper level governments so they begin by placing demands on lower levels of government before moving up. The corollary of this argument is that the Ombudsman is a venue of last resort, that is, citizens will complain to the Ombudsman when other local alternatives are unavailable or unresponsive and to avoid hard exit (relocating to another municipality).

Lastly, local citizens may also rely on other forms of institutionalized exit. Competitive party systems are one such form and “votes function as empowerments just to the extent that voters can exit one candidate or party in favor of another” (Warren 2011, p. 692). When geographical exit is difficult or unlikely, as in the case of those who are “socially excluded” (Dibben 2006), this form of institutionalized exit can be an effective way of communicating dissatisfaction with local services, particularly if combined with the alert mechanism described by Laver (1976). Increasing numbers of complaints may operate as an alert mechanism to the fact that the quality of local government services is declining, thus forcing local officials to act in order to prevent exit, in whichever form (Hirschman 1970; Laver 1976).

The loyalty mechanism combined with competitive party systems reduce the likelihood of geographical exit (Deng et al. 2007) and are likely to increase the use of voice and other institutionalized forms of exit, such as those described by Warren (2011). Our explanation extends the EVL logic by arguing that these mechanisms interact with the level of responsiveness and the number of alternative policy venues available at the local level to produce the variation in the number of complaints against local governments to the national Ombudsman. With this extension in mind, we now turn to the hypotheses of this study.

4 | HYPOTHESES

Citizen complaints to the national Ombudsman are the product of a local government's failure to address local problems experienced by citizens. Citizen dissatisfaction with local government service delivery may emerge from adverse local conditions such as high crime rates (Daniele & Marani 2011; Engel et al. 2012), low economic performance and persistent unemployment (Hickman & Piquero 2009; Worrall 2002), environmental degradation (Dong et al. 2011; Zeng et al. 2019), police abuse of power (Cao & Huang 2000; Hickman and Piquero, 2009) or inadequate government response in general (DeHoog et al. 1990; White & Trump 2018). Widespread problems such as these are likely to be associated with poor local government responsiveness and one reason for complaining to the national Ombudsman. In the absence of these negative circumstances, citizens will be less likely to complain and, even if they do, local governments will be in better shape to respond to their demands. In the EVL framework, complaints are a way of exercising voice when citizens experience poor responsiveness from local governments. Hence, we expect that:

- H1.** Adverse local conditions increase the number of citizen complaints against local governments directed to the national Ombudsman.

Pluralism, competitive elections, and high turnout are indicators of a vibrant civil society and active citizenship (Lowndes et al. 2002). They are the foundation of exit-based empowerment that manifests itself in the ability to vote for a non-incumbent to “exit one representative relationship in favor of another” (Warren 2011, p. 692). When combined with adverse local conditions, these institutionalized forms of exit are likely to generate higher levels of complaints. On the one hand, a more competitive and adversarial style of local politics means that problems are more likely to remain on the political agenda (Kelleher and Lowery, 2004) and discontent more likely to be confronted in multiple ways, including using alternative policy venues (Schattschneider 1960). Heightened competition should increase the number of complaints directed to the national level, with a more adversarial style of politics operating as a stimulus for local citizens to voice discontent. Political parties are especially willing to grant access to those citizens more capable to provide knowledge and expertise about specific issues (Chaqués-Boanfont & Muñoz 2016). This willingness can improve party mobilization efforts, enhance access to the policy making process, or even increase contributions to political campaigns (Baumgartner et al. 2009). The increase in interparty competition and political action “effectively multiplies the opportunities for exit, and thus the incentives for parties to respond to constituents” (Warren 2011, p. 692). As such,

H2. Higher levels of electoral competition at the local level are associated with a higher number of citizen complaints against local governments addressed to the national Ombudsman.

On the other hand, complaints can be understood as complementary ways to other, more common public participation mechanisms, such as voting in local elections (Vedlitz 1980). Hirschmann (1970) stated that those more likely to exit public services (from middle and upper classes) are also those most able to effectively vocalize their complaints. This means that their voice and votes are likely to be important within the democratic system to make visible their satisfaction/dissatisfaction (Dowding & John 2012). It is also expected that the refusal to participate in local elections might be associated with lower levels of complaints to express dissatisfaction. Contrariwise,

H3. Higher voter turnout at the local level is associated with a higher number of citizen complaints against local governments addressed to the national Ombudsman.

In contrast, when the local political scene is dominated by a political monopoly favoring the maintenance of a status quo, local governments are less likely to face dissent (Trounstone 2009). The reelection of incumbents is often associated with local political stability and lower levels of information and participation (Trounstone 2006, 2011) and fewer opportunities to express dissatisfaction locally. When dissatisfied citizens are unable to change the political monopoly, they may pursue a strategy of searching for alternative venues to express discontent, by complaining to the national Ombudsman. Conversely, incumbent reelection can also be as a sign of approval from the electorate (Krebs 1998), indicating better performance by the local government and lesser need for alternative venues outside the local community to express dissatisfaction. These arguments lead to alternative hypotheses:

H4a. (political monopoly hypothesis): Local governments where the incumbent is reelected will register a higher number of citizen complaints addressed to the national Ombudsman.

H4b. (responsiveness hypothesis): Local governments where the incumbent is reelected will register a lower number of citizen complaints addressed to the national Ombudsman.

Voting for a nonincumbent candidate in a multiparty competitive election is one form of institutionalized exit. However, multilevel governance offers additional opportunities for citizens to express discontent with local governments. Other subnational tiers of government above or below municipalities constitute alternative venues to voice discontent without resorting to Tiebout-type exit. In other words, multilevel governance institutionalizes different

combinations of voice and exit mechanisms as part of a democratic system to secure communication of dissatisfaction with service delivery and avoid silent exit (Warren 2011). On the one hand, in decentralized systems, supra-municipal levels of government such as regional or metropolitan governments may function as alternative policy venues capable of absorbing citizen discontent and respond to citizen demands (Demazière 2020). Therefore:

H5. The presence of an intermediate level of regional government decreases the number of citizen complaints against local governments directed to the national Ombudsman.

On the other hand, citizens may voice dissatisfaction to neighborhood or sub-municipal units of government (SMUs) that are geographically and psychologically closer to them. In municipalities with formal SMUs, citizens may pressure those to start a dialogue with the municipal administration (Tavares & Teles 2018). Citizens expect SMUs to lobby the municipal executive for a response to localized problems (Hlepas et al. 2018). Furthermore, SMUs can offer choices for citizens to relocate to a preferred neighborhood inside a municipality without incurring the costs of moving to a different jurisdiction. In other words, SMUs function as internal exit, a democratic form of empowerment that signals preferences to local officials while avoiding the destructive response associated with geographical exit to another municipality. Hence, we expect that:

H6. The higher the number of sub-municipal units of government in a municipality, the lower the number of citizen complaints against local governments directed at the national Ombudsman.

The following section describes the data and methods employed in the empirical analyses to test the hypotheses developed above.

5 | DATA AND METHODS

The national Ombudsman in Portugal is an independent body, supported by article 23 of the Portuguese Constitution and Law 9/91, April 9. The Ombudsman is appointed by a qualified majority of the members of the National Parliament. She/he is mandated to “receive complaints of all (natural or legal) persons who feel harmed by unfair or illegal act’s by public administration or when their fundamental rights are violated” (<http://ennhri.org/Portuguese-Ombudsman>). One of the primary targets of the complaints submitted to the Ombudsman in Portugal are local authorities, which also tend to be less forthcoming in responding to the Ombudsman’s requests in a timely manner (Ombudsman Annual Report to the Parliament, 2016).

As part of a larger project intended to assess the quality of local government in Portugal, we collected data on all citizen complaints filed against municipal governments to the national Ombudsman between 2012 and 2015. A total of 2139 complaints were filed during this period. Currently, the number of municipal Ombudsmen is negligible; only 11 out of 308 municipalities have a local Ombudsman. Of these, five have been in place since 2016, but the complaints figures in the analysis predate this recent increase.

Table 1 includes a list of all complaints by theme and sub-theme. One third of the complaints concern land use planning (33%), including primarily complaints about public infrastructure (21% of the total). Urbanism and housing (33%) represent another third, particularly building works (13%) and social housing and housing support (5%). The environment and natural resources represent the remaining part (31%) with a great percentage associated with noise problems (16%). The majority of complaints concern local public goods or services that cannot be “bought” elsewhere in the market.

The dependent variable is the total number of complaints to the national Ombudsman per municipality. The regression models control for the size of the municipality by including population as an independent variable. The dependent variable has the advantage of being an outcome variable rather than a perception-based variable, typically employed by earlier studies to assess satisfaction with service delivery (Overman 2017; Schläpfer 2017).

TABLE 1 List of complaints to the ombudsman (by theme)

Main theme	Sub-theme	#	%
Environment and natural resources	Water	48	2
Environment and natural resources	Fauna	2	0
Environment and natural resources	Forest	59	3
Environment and natural resources	Waste and effluent management	58	3
Environment and natural resources	Landscape and brightness	6	0
Environment and natural resources	Flammable, toxic or explosive products	15	1
Environment and natural resources	Air quality	57	3
Environment and natural resources	Radiations	5	0
Environment and natural resources	Noise	339	16
Environment and natural resources	Healthiness	70	3
Environment and natural resources	Soil and subsoil	6	0
	Total	665	31
Culture	Arts and shows	9	0
Culture	Copyright and related rights	2	0
Culture	Museums, archives and libraries	4	0
Culture	Architectural and archeological heritage	20	1
Culture	Patrimony and intangible Heritage	1	0
	Total	36	2
Leisure	Company animals	6	0
Leisure	Sports	7	0
Leisure	Entertainment	4	0
Leisure	Tourism	9	0
	Total	26	1
Land use planning	Evaluation of environmental impacts of public works	47	2
Land use planning. Public domain	Wastelands (<i>Baldios</i>)	3	0
Land use planning. Public domain	Cemeteries	3	0
Land use planning. Public domain	Public water domain and port infrastructure	13	1
Land use planning. Public domain	Expropriation for public utility	24	1
Land use planning. Public domain	Infrastructure	450	21
Land use planning. Public domain	Other instruments	9	0
Land use planning. Public domain	Administrative easements	11	1
Land use planning. Public domain	Public land under private ownership	2	0
Land use planning. Public domain	Green areas	50	2
Land use planning. public domain	Execution of public works	19	1
Land use planning. public domain	General	37	2
Land use planning. public domain	Special territorial regimes	35	2
	Total	703	33
Urbanism and housing	Urban areas of illegal nature	27	1
Urbanism and housing	Private urban rental	7	0
Urbanism and housing	Conservation and rehabilitation of buildings	89	4
Urbanism and housing	Social housing and housing support	108	5

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Main theme	Sub-theme	#	%
Urbanism and housing	Allotment and urbanization works	41	2
Urbanism and housing	Building works	266	13
Urbanism and housing	Specialty projects	57	3
Urbanism and housing	Horizontal property	11	1
Urbanism and housing	Professional qualifications	3	0
Urbanism and housing	Use of buildings	86	4
	Total	695	33
Other questions		2	0

Note: Bold values indicate higher values and proportions of complaints.

In order to test the first hypothesis concerning the effect of local adverse conditions on the number of complaints, we employ a series of “usual suspects” (e.g., Bonaiuto et al. 2006; Worrall 2002). Higher levels of crime, unemployment, and elderly citizens in the community are likely to place pressure on the responsiveness levels of local government and, all else equal, contribute to a higher number of complaints. Crime is measured as the rate of reported crimes per 1000 inhabitants, unemployment is the percentage of unemployed individuals in the active population in the municipality, and elderly population is assessed as the proportion of citizens 65 years-old or above. Communities that are less educated are also less likely to express dissatisfaction in multiple ways (Zeng et al. 2019), including complaints to the national Ombudsman. We employ the proportion of resident population with a bachelor degree as a measure of education levels. The level of financial autonomy is also included in the analyses to control for the capacity of local governments to address some of these pressures. It is measured as the proportion of own revenues collected by the municipality.

In order to test Hypotheses 2–6, we employ several variables. First, competitive party systems offer excellent opportunities for combining voice in the political process with alternatives for exiting one representation relationship for another. Three variables account for these mechanisms. The level of electoral competition is measured using the margin of victory as the average difference between the first place and runner up in the last three mayoral elections. Voter turnout is measured as the average proportion of citizens who voted in the previous three mayoral elections. Hypothesis 4 is tested using a dummy variable taking the value of “1” if the incumbent party remained in office.

Second, the combination of voice with institutionalized forms of exit can also occur in the context of multi-level governance. We employ two variables to account for the interactions between these mechanisms. On the one hand, the existence of regional governments in both the Azores and Madeira archipelagos is likely to operate as a buffer, reducing the number of complaints to the national Ombudsman. In contrast, since continental Portugal does not have regional governments, citizens do not have an intermediate level of government to whom to take their grievances against local governments. Given that the archipelagos are more distant (geographically and culturally) from the head of the national government, it is more likely that they will have fewer complaints to the National Ombudsman. Nevertheless, there are deconcentrated offices of the National Ombudsman in both the Madeira and Azores archipelagos, so distance is not a factor to explain potential differences in complaints in these regions. The reason for fewer complaints might be therefore the presence of additional venues of political representation, which provide alternative channels to accommodate citizen dissatisfaction with municipal governments. This argument receives further relevance in a highly centralized country as Portugal. A dummy variable is included for all island municipalities to test Hypothesis 5.

On the other hand, SMUs of government foster closer proximity between citizens and elected officials and can operate as lobbying institutions at the local government level (Tavares & Camões 2007). A higher number of SMUs per municipality offers additional opportunities for citizens to “vote with their feet” inside the municipality, leading to a lower number of citizen complaints to the Ombudsman. The number of Parishes (the SMUs in Portugal²) in a municipality is the variable chosen to capture this effect.

TABLE 2 Variables, indicators, sources and expected signs

Variable	Indicator	Source	Expected sign
Dependent			
Complaints	# Complaints	Office of the Ombudsman (2012–2015)	
Independent			
Population	Natural log # of inhabitants	INE	+
Elderly population	Proportion 65+	INE	+
Education	Proportion of population w/ Bachelor degree	PORDATA	+
Unemployment	Unemployment rate (percent)	INE	+
Crime	Crime rate per 1000 inhabitants	INE	+
Independents	Nonpartisan candidate (Dummy variable = 1 if yes) (2013)	CNE	–
Financial autonomy	Proportion of own revenues	PORDATA	–
Sub-municipal units	# sub-municipal units in a municipality	PORDATA	–
Island municipality	Dummy = 1 if yes	PORDATA	–
Margin of victory	Avg. difference in percentage points between 1st and 2nd place in last 3 mayoral elections (2005, 2009, 2013)	CNE	±
Incumbent	Incumbent in office (Dummy = 1 if yes) (2013)	CNE	+
Turnout	Avg. % turnout in last 3 mayoral elections (2005, 2009, 2013)	CNE	±

Note: All data are from 2011, except where indicated otherwise.

Lastly, a dummy variable is included for the presence of mayors elected in nonpartisan (independent) lists. Given the current trend in Portuguese local elections towards the election of nonpartisan mayors, this can capture some of the dissatisfaction with local partisan politics (Tavares et al. 2020).

Table 2 contains the variables, indicators, and sources of all the data employed in the analyses. It also includes the expected signs of the coefficients. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for all the variables included in the analyses.

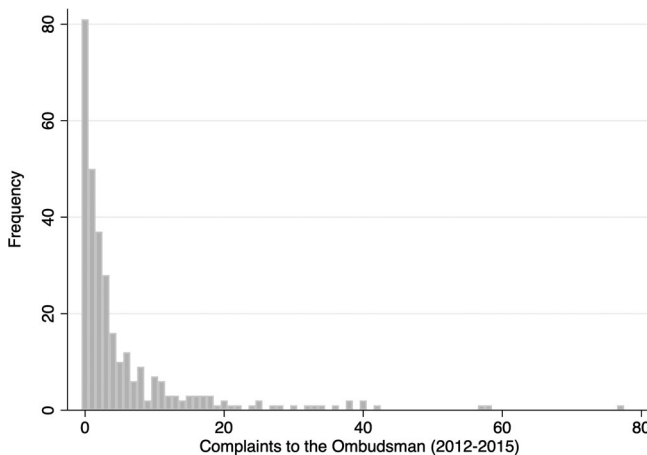
Data on the complaints to the Ombudsman are a count variable and follow a Poisson distribution. The Poisson distribution assumes that the mean and variance are the same (*equidispersion*). Unfortunately, our raw complaints data suffer from significant over-dispersion, as evidenced by a variance much larger than the mean (see Figure 1). Given the over-dispersion in our data, we employ negative binomial regression to estimate the models, as it is a more flexible solution than Poisson regression. Given the data structure, using Poisson regression in this case would result in biased standard errors. The negative binomial distribution has one parameter more than the Poisson regression that adjusts the variance independently from the mean (Long 1997).

6 | FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4 depicts the results of the negative binomial regression analyses of citizen complaints against the local government to the national Ombudsman. The first specification (1) includes the independent variables related to Hypotheses 2–6. The second specification (2) includes all the variables describing the local conditions that may lead citizens to place complaints to the national Ombudsman (Hypothesis 1). Column (3) contains the full model. In order to facilitate interpretation, column (4) displays incidence rate ratios (IRR) for the variables included in the full model.

TABLE 3 Descriptive statistics

Variables	(1) N	(2) Mean	(3) SD	(4) Min.	(5) Max.
Population	308	4.212	0.496	2.652	5.738
Elderly population	308	23.33	6.982	8.590	43.95
Education	308	9.97	4.64	2.81	33.6
Unemployment	308	12.4	2.95	5.09	22.9
Crime	308	27.04	9.257	10.70	82.80
Nonpartisan mayor	308	0.0422	0.201	0	1
Financial autonomy	308	0.392	0.180	0.0263	0.895
Parishes	308	10.04	8.506	1	61
Island municipality	308	0.0974	0.297	0	1
Margin of victory	308	0.183	0.134	0.000240	0.720
Incumbent mayor	308	0.698	0.460	0	1
Turnout	308	65.75	6.527	43.69	82.18
Total complaints	308	6.945	24.01	0	390

**FIGURE 1** Municipal complaints to the National Ombudsman, 2012–2015

Results are largely in line with the expectations. The variables selected to test the effects of local conditions perform according to Hypothesis 1. Crime, unemployment, and the proportion of elderly population are all positively associated with higher levels of complaints to the national Ombudsman and their coefficients are statistically significant at conventional levels. Additionally, education is also positive and significant, confirming prior empirical findings (Jilke & Van de Walle 2013; Zeng et al. 2019). Figure 2a–c, display 95% confidence intervals for the relationship between elderly population, education, and crime rate and the predicted number of complaints to the national Ombudsman. Figure 2d shows the combined effect of crime and unemployment on the predicted number of complaints. Clearly, both variables are associated with increases in the number of complaints, but their combined effect is linked to the highest number of complaints: the difference between the highest and lowest unemployment lines in the graph is smaller at the lower levels of crime rate and much larger at the highest levels. In practice, this means that municipalities experiencing a combined effect of high crime and unemployment rates are likely to face high

TABLE 4 Negative binomial regressions (Dep. Var: # complaints)

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4) IRR
Population	-	2.264*** (0.141)	2.306*** (0.171)	10.033*** (1.714)
Elderly population	-	0.0529*** (0.0117)	0.0382*** (0.0114)	1.039*** (0.012)
Education	-	0.00767 (0.011)	0.024** (0.011)	1.015** (1.021)
Unemployment	-	0.060*** (0.019)	0.049*** (0.018)	1.329*** (2.332)
Crime	-	0.00577 (0.00508)	0.0107** (0.00469)	1.011** (0.005)
Nonpartisan mayor	-	-0.638*** (0.244)	-0.522** (0.227)	0.593** (0.135)
Financial Autonomy	-	1.536*** (0.411)	1.153*** (0.389)	3.169*** (1.231)
Margin of victory	-1.198 (0.788)	-	-0.856** (0.414)	0.425** (0.176)
Turnout	-0.119*** (0.0155)	-	0.0288*** (0.00904)	1.029*** (0.009)
Incumbent mayor	-0.0890 (0.166)	-	0.214** (0.0879)	1.239** (0.109)
Island municipality	-4.152*** (0.712)	-	-2.771*** (0.370)	0.063*** (0.023)
Parishes	0.0555*** (0.0106)	-	-0.00841 (0.00558)	0.992 (0.006)
lnalpha	0.158 (0.115)	-1.278*** (0.261)	-1.944*** (0.292)	-1.944*** (0.292)
Constant	9.140*** (0.983)	-11.34*** (0.754)	-12.93*** (1.227)	0.000*** (0.000)
Wald	87.68	975.8	1182.41	1182.41
Prob > χ^2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pseudo R ²	0.116	0.233	0.280	0.280
Log pseudolik	-762.35	-662.02	-621.49	-621.49
Observations	308	308	308	308

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

discontent. Unsurprisingly, the findings provide strong support to H1: local conditions are positively associated with the number of complaints to the national Ombudsman.

The level of financial autonomy of Portuguese municipalities is positively associated with the number of complaints to the national Ombudsman. This is a puzzling result, as we expected that increased autonomy would result in more capacity to address citizen concerns. Instead, our models may be capturing citizen dissatisfaction with the level of fiscal effort required by the local governments to maintain higher levels of financial autonomy.

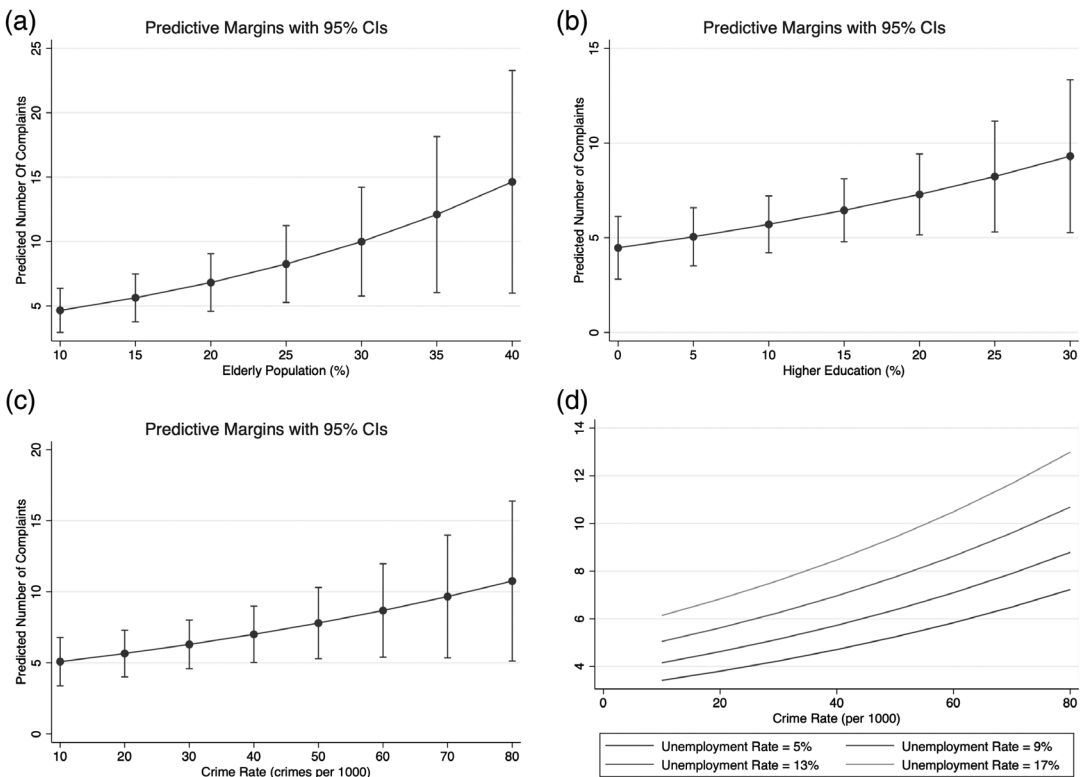


FIGURE 2 Predicted number of complaints for different levels of socioeconomic variables. (a) Elderly population; (b) education; (c) crime rate; and (d) crime and unemployment rates

Margin of victory is negatively associated with the number of complaints to the national Ombudsman, thus providing support for the second hypothesis. It indicates that increased political competition at the local level translates into higher numbers of complaints to the national level. Similarly, turnout rate displays a positive and statistically significant coefficient. In municipalities where turnout rates are higher, complaints to the Ombudsman tend to be higher as well. This result is quite robust and backs Hypothesis 3. Both findings suggest that citizens may regard voting and political competition as complementary ways to complaints to express dissatisfaction with their local government through different forms of institutionalized exit. Figure 3a provides visual support for this idea, showing higher numbers of complaints in municipalities with more competitive elections and higher turnout rates.

The presence of an incumbent mayor is positively associated with the number of complaints to the national Ombudsman. This result fails to support our expectation in H4b that incumbency is a form of reward for good responsiveness levels. Instead, it supports H4a (political monopoly hypothesis) suggesting that when citizens are unable to oust the incumbent party, they search for other venues to voice discontent. Losers at the local venue seem to resort to the national Ombudsman as an alternative venue. The positive effect of the incumbent variable is supported regardless of turnout levels and the margin of victory of the mayor (Figure 3b,c).

One of the most robust results of the analysis is the coefficient for island municipalities (H5), which is negative and statistically significant across the board. Clearly, municipalities in the Azores and Madeira archipelagos display a much lower number of complaints than the municipalities in continental Portugal. The presence of an intermediate level of government is likely to be acting as a cushion for the complaints presented to the national level, providing an alternative institutional venue for citizens to express their views on policy and public services. The difference between island municipalities where citizens have access to a regional level of government (as well as to regional

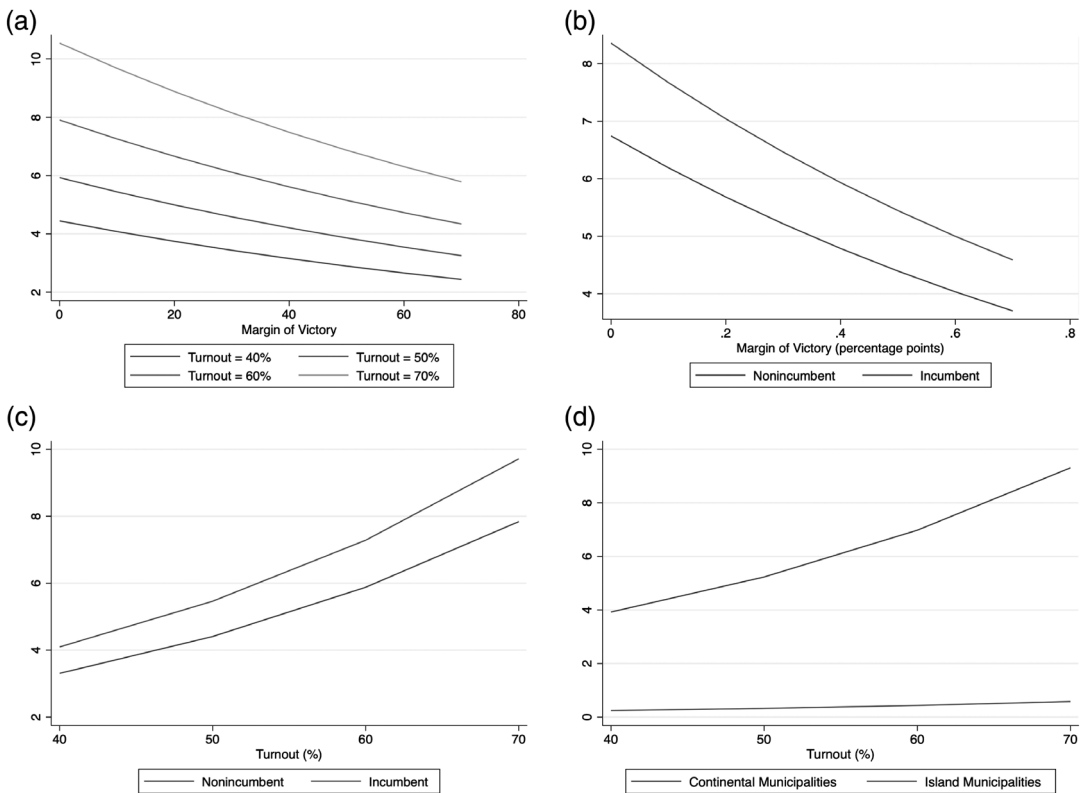


FIGURE 3 Predicted number of complaints for different levels of political variables. (a) Voter turnout and margins of victory; (b) margins of victory and incumbency; (c) voter turnout and incumbency; and (d) voter turnout and location of municipalities

delegations of the National Ombudsman) and continental municipalities where they do not have this option is staggering, as witnessed in Figure 3d. This can be seen as evidence of the benefits of having this intermediate level of government in a centralized country like Portugal, enabling alternative policy venues capable of responding to citizen demands. This evidence is still tentative and it will require additional fieldwork to reach a more definitive conclusion.

The argument of proximity in political representation fails to receive support from the SMU variable. Having more SMUs is not associated with lower numbers of complaints, suggesting that SMUs are not being used to connect citizens to their local government. The presence of an independent mayor displays a negative and statistically significant coefficient. As the number of nonpartisan mayors is growing across the country, Portuguese citizens are complaining more in municipalities run by partisan mayors.

The coefficients in column (3) are not very informative, as they report the difference between the log of expected counts. Column 4 contains the incidence rate ratios (IRR) for our full model, obtained by exponentiating the negative binomial regression coefficients. The IRR allow us to report the percent change in the number of complaints per a 1-unit change in a given independent variable.

In substantive terms, local conditions play an important role in increasing the number of complaints to the national Ombudsman. The percent change in the IRR of the number of complaints is a 32.9% increase for every unit increase in the unemployment rate, a 1.5% increase for every unit increase in education and a 3.9% increase for every unit increase in elderly population. Similarly, if the crime rate in a municipality increases by 1-unit, its IRR for the number of complaints to the Ombudsman is expected to increase by a factor 1.011, while holding all other variables in the model constant. Taking into account the differences in measurement units, this result confirms the

substantive impact of crime and unemployment as driving factors of citizen dissatisfaction and therefore the higher number of complaints.

The stronger finding regarding the political variables is the overwhelming impact of the “islands” dichotomous variable. As an illustration of this effect, the IRR for island municipalities is 0.063 times the IRR for continental municipalities, while holding the other variables constant in the model. All the remaining effects are smaller than this, but some are quite substantial and worth reporting. For example, the percent change in the incident rate of the number of complaints is a 0.57% decrease for a 1-percentage point increase in the margin of victory and a 2.9% increase for every unit increase in the turnout rate. Both effects are statistically significant and display a substantial impact on the number of complaints to the Ombudsman, but their effects are smaller when compared to being a municipality under a regional tier of government.

7 | CONCLUSIONS

This article investigated the determinants of citizen complaints against local governments placed to the national Ombudsman in Portugal. Prior works have employed perception-based surveys to highlight individual factors affecting citizen satisfaction levels with local governments. While recognizing the importance of these earlier efforts, here we focused primarily on political factors influencing varying levels of citizen complaints. These factors interact with contextual variables to account for the complaints against local governments brought by citizens to the national Ombudsman and feed the debate regarding the institutional configurations capable of fostering more responsive and effective local governance.

Three policy implications can be drawn from the results. *First*, we find that the presence of alternative voice venues reduces the number of complaints to the national Ombudsman. This underlines the importance of providing additional venues at sub-national levels which are able to absorb and solve most of the grievances experienced by local citizens. On the one hand, initiatives to implement these additional venues are likely to be more effective in addressing the complaints, given the proximity to the citizens experiencing dissatisfaction. On the other hand, these sub-national venues will also reduce the pressure placed on the national Ombudsman, freeing institutional capacity to tackle national level complaints.

Second, it is commonplace to argue that context matters. In this particular case, context is relevant in two ways. Local politics affect the likelihood that complaints will have a national impact. A more active involvement in politics, either through stronger interparty competition or higher electoral participation, is associated with a higher number of complaints to the national Ombudsman. Additionally, if the incumbent wins the local election, the likelihood that the conflict expands to the national level also increases, as shown by the higher number of complaints in municipalities where the incumbent has won. Moreover, if local politics stimulates civic engagement in a variety of ways, an intermediate level of government may function as another level to exhort this stimulus, as suggested by the findings, reaffirming other calls in the country for a more decentralized model of government towards a stronger multi-level governance system.

Third, the importance of context is also visible in the effect of the “usual suspects” upon the number of complaints to the national Ombudsman. Difficult conditions experienced at the local level—unemployment, crime, and aging populations—generate more complaints. While this is not a surprising result, it suggests that citizens resort to an upper level government when their municipal executive is unresponsive to their concerns regarding these adverse contexts. Local autonomy and institutional capacity at the local level should be addressed as tools to empower local authorities to address these wicked problems.

Despite these implications, the research is not without limitations. The major limitation stems from the absence of individual level data, which is protected due to privacy laws. Ideally, we would be able to estimate a multi-level model with both individual level and institutional level predictors to assess their relative effects in explaining the variation in the number of complaints to the national Ombudsman. A second limitation originates from the limited

availability of complaints data for a longer time series. The earliest year for which data is available is 2012 and data for more recent years (starting in 2016) involve some limitations for comparison purposes due to the adoption of local Ombudsman offices in many municipalities. As a result of these issues, the analysis was limited to the 2012–2015 period. Data on the existence, functioning, and resource capacity of these local offices are not readily available and need to be collected on a case-by-case basis. As an additional limitation, we were also unable to determine whether these complaints were submitted by citizens at the local government level before moving to the national Ombudsman. Both limitations prevent our analyses from assessing the responsiveness of local governments at earlier stages, that is, before citizens move their complaints to higher offices. In order to overcome these limitations, future work should expand this period by collecting data on the use and expansion of local Ombudsman offices.

One last limitation worth mentioning is that this article does not tackle geographical exit in a Tiebout sense or middle-class exit in the manner employed by Hirschman. We treat complaints to an external body (the Ombudsman) as a form of institutionalized exit, but are unable to test hypotheses related to “voting with one's feet.” In other words, by not including longitudinal data, our empirical models are unable to discern if citizens simply move to another service provider as a reaction to a lack of responsiveness by their local government. Only micro-level or survey-based data might be able to address this aspect of the EVL framework.

The findings also suggest additional lines of inquiry. Future work should explore the effect of voting for incumbents on the number of national complaints, attempting to disentangle reward and dissatisfaction motivations. While reelection signals the rewarding of incumbents for good performance, the increased number of complaints associated with incumbency is likely to be the result of those dissatisfied being unable to “exit” the relationship with their elected representatives. Both effects seem to coexist, but a more decisive answer requires additional research. Other issues related to the relationship between local autonomy, fiscal effort and citizen satisfaction also deserve further exploration, as the evidence seems to contradict our initial expectations. Extended work could also be directed to specific contextual issues to investigate complaints in a multi-tier government system. This implies the need for comparative research to understand, compare and extend arguments of voice, exit and loyalty to other international contexts. The degree of variation of citizen complaints in other national contexts can be further explained using the innovative approach applied here combining the EVL framework with responsiveness and alternative policy venues.

Finally, this study contributes to theoretical research in two different ways. First, it brings the role of alternative policy venues to the forefront of studies addressing citizen (dis)satisfaction with public service delivery. By considering how these alternative venues for expressing dissatisfaction may preempt complaints to the national Ombudsman, we stress the need to include them as part of theoretical models in citizen satisfaction research. Second, emphasizing institutionalized forms of exit can have constructive properties, as they can be exercised within democratic systems in many forms, and operate as a stimulus for local citizens to voice dissatisfaction, including through competitive party systems and increased participation in local elections. This suggests that theories designed to explain the variation in citizen satisfaction should take into account how institutionalized forms of exit can accommodate dissatisfaction while preventing other, more destructive forms of exit, such as geographical exit and/or changing service providers. Both theoretical contributions follow the footsteps of others in helping to produce a more elaborate version of Hirschman's classic EVL framework.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An earlier version of this article was presented at the 2019 European Consortium of Political Research meeting in Wroclaw, Poland. The authors would like to thank our colleagues Cristina Stanus, Bas Denters, Gissur Erlingsson, and Pawel Swianiewicz for providing useful comments to this earlier version of this manuscript and our colleague Nuno Ferreira da Cruz for the initial contact at the National Ombudsman Office.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

ORCID

António F. Tavares  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4888-5285>

Filipe Teles  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5059-368X>

ENDNOTES

- ¹ According to Webster, venue is “a place where events of a specific type are held.” The use of the expressions “policy venue” and “institutional venue” is well-established in the public policy literature. Baumgartner and Jones (1993, 2002) define policy venues as “institutions or groups in society [with] the authority to make decisions concerning an issue” (Baumgartner & Jones 1993, p. 31).
- ² Local governments in Portugal operate under a dual system. Both types of local governments—municipalities (municípios) and parishes (freguesias)—operate with elected executives and deliberative bodies and possess financial and administrative autonomy (Tavares & Camões 2021). Parishes are SMUs of self-government composed of an elected assembly (deliberative body) and an executive body. Each parish is contained within municipal boundaries. The chief of the parish executive is directly elected, whereas the remaining members of the executive require approval by the parish assembly. Each municipality is divided into several parishes, resembling a form of neighborhood governments similar to others found in Germany, Greece, Norway, Poland, and Spain (Hlepas et al. 2018).

REFERENCES

- Aldons, M. (2001) Responsible, representative and accountable government. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 60(1), 34–42.
- Baumgartner, F.R., Berry, J.M., Hojnacki, M., Kimball, D.C. & Leech, B.L. (2009) Lobbying and policy change. In: *Who wins, who loses, and why*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Baumgartner, F.R. & Jones, B.D. (1993) *Agendas and instability in American politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Baumgartner, F.R. & Jones, B.D. (2002) *Policy Dynamics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bish, R.L. & Ostrom, V. (1973) *Understanding Urban Government*, Vol. 59. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.
- Bloemen, E.M., Rosen, T., Clark, S., Nash, D. & Mielenz, T.J. (2015) Trends in reporting of abuse and neglect to long term care ombudsmen: data from the National Ombudsman Reporting System from 2006 to 2013. *Geriatric Nursing*, 36(4), 281–283.
- Bonaiuto, M., Aiello, A., Perugini, M., Bonnes, M. & Ercolani, A.P. (1999) Multidimensional perception of residential environment quality and neighbourhood attachment in the urban environment. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 19(4), 331–352.
- Bonaiuto, M., Fornara, F. & Bonnes, M. (2003) Indexes of perceived residential environment quality and neighbourhood attachment in urban environments: a confirmation study on the city of Rome. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 65(1–2), 41–52.
- Bonaiuto, M., Fornara, F. & Bonnes, M. (2006) Perceived residential environment quality in middle-and low-extension Italian cities. *Revue Européenne de Psychologie Appliquée/European Review of Applied Psychology*, 56(1), 23–34.
- Brewer, B. (2007) Citizen or customer? Complaints handling in the public sector. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 73(4), 549–556.
- Brown, K. & Coulter, P.B. (1983) Subjective and objective measures of police service delivery. *Public Administration Review*, 43(1), 50–58.
- Cao, L. & Huang, B. (2000) Determinants of citizen complaints against police abuse of power. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 28(3), 203–213.
- Carr, J.B. & Tavares, A. (2014) City size and political participation in local government: reassessing the contingent effects of residential location decisions within urban regions. *Urban Affairs Review*, 50(2), 269–302.
- Carvalho, D.S. & Fidélis, T. (2009) The perception of environmental quality in Aveiro, Portugal: a study of complaints on environmental issues submitted to the City Council. *Local Environment*, 14(10), 939–961.
- Chaqués-Boanfont, L. and Muñoz, L. (2016). Venue Shopping Strategies in Multilevel Systems of Governance. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2907987>
- Daniele, V. & Marani, U. (2011) Organized crime, the quality of local institutions and FDI in Italy: a panel data analysis. *European Journal of Political Economy*, 27(1), 132–142.

- DeHoog, R.H., Lowery, D. & Lyons, W.E. (1990) Citizen satisfaction with local government services: a test of individual, jurisdictional, and City specific explanations. *Journal of Politics*, 52, 807–837.
- Demazière, C. (2020) The multiple agencies of metropolitan institutions: is there convergence? In: Zimmermann, K., Galland, D. & Harrison, J. (Eds.) *Metropolitan regions, planning and governance*. Cham: Springer, pp. 41–57.
- Deng, F.F., Gordon, P. & Richardson, H.W. (2007) Private communities, market institutions and planning. In: Verma, N. (Ed.) *Institutions and planning: current research in urban and regional studies*. Amsterdam: Elsevier, pp. 187–205.
- Devereux, P.J. & Weisbrod, B.A. (2006) Does “satisfaction” with local public services affect complaints (voice) and geographic mobility (exit)? *Public Finance Review*, 34(2), 123–147.
- Dibben, P. (2006) The ‘socially excluded’ and local transport decision making: voice and responsiveness in a Marketized environment. *Public Administration*, 84(3), 655–672.
- DiPasquale, D. & Glaeser, E.L. (1999) Incentives and social capital: are homeowners better citizens. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 45, 354–384.
- Dong, Y., Ishikawa, M., Liu, X. & Hamori, S. (2011) The determinants of citizen complaints on environmental pollution: an empirical study from China. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 19(12), 1306–1314.
- Dowding, K. & John, P. (2008) The three exit, three voice and loyalty framework: a test with survey data on local services. *Political Studies*, 56(2), 288–311.
- Dowding, K. & John, P. (2012) *Exits, voices and social investment: Citizens' reaction to public services*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Engel, R.S., Smith, M.R. & Cullen, F.T. (2012) Race, place, and drug enforcement: reconsidering the impact of citizen complaints and crime rates on drug arrests. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 11, 603–635.
- Golden, M.M. (1992) Exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect: bureaucratic responses to presidential control during the Reagan administration. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 2(1), 29–62.
- Grossman, G., Michelitch, K. & Santamaria, M. (2017) Texting complaints to politicians: name personalization and politicians' encouragement in citizen mobilization. *Comparative Political Studies*, 50(10), 1325–1357.
- Hickman, M.J. & Piquero, A.R. (2009) Organizational, administrative, and environmental correlates of complaints about police use of force: does minority representation matter? *Crime & Delinquency*, 55(1), 3–27.
- Hirschmann, A.O. (1970) *Exit, voice, and loyalty: responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hlepas, N.-K., Kerstig, N., Kuhlmann, S., Swianiewicz, P. & Teles, F. (Eds.). (2018) *Sub-municipal governance in Europe: decentralization beyond the municipal tier*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.
- Hossu, L.A. & Dragos, D.C. (2013) Decentralization of the ombudsman institution in Romania: how effective is it? *Romanian Journal of European Affairs*, 13(4), 66–80.
- Izazola, H., Martínez, C. & Marquette, C. (1998) Environmental perceptions, social class and demographic change in Mexico City: a comparative approach. *Environment and Urbanization*, 10(1), 107–118.
- Jilke, S. & Van de Walle, S. (2013) Two track public services? Citizens' voice behaviour towards liberalized services in the EU15. *Public Management Review*, 15(4), 465–476.
- Kelleher, C., & Lowery, D. (2004). Political participation and metropolitan institutional contexts. *Urban Affairs Review*, 39(6), 720–757. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087404264219>
- Kosecik, M. & Sagbas, I. (2004) Public attitudes to local government in Turkey: research on knowledge, satisfaction and complaints. *Local Government Studies*, 30(3), 360–383.
- Krebs, T.B. (1998) The determinants of Candidates' vote share and the advantages of incumbency in City Council elections. *American Journal of Political Science*, 42(3), 921–935.
- Ladi, S. (2011) Policy change and soft Europeanization: the transfer of the ombudsman institution to Greece, Cyprus and Malta. *Public Administration*, 89(4), 1643–1663.
- Laver, M. (1976) ‘Exit, voice and loyalty’ revisited: the strategic production and consumption of public and private goods. *British Journal of Political Science*, 6(4), 463–482.
- Long, S. (1997) *Regression models for categorical and limited dependent variables*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lowndes, V., Pratchett, L. & Stoker, G. (2002) Trends in public participation: part 1—local government perspectives. *Public Administration*, 79(1), 205–222.
- Lyons, W. & Lowery, D. (1989) Citizen responses to dissatisfaction in urban communities: a partial test of a general model. *Journal of Politics*, 51(4), 841–868.
- Magruder, K.J., Fields, N.L. & Xu, L. (2018) Sizing up assisted living: an examination of long-term care ombudsman complaint data. *Home Health Care Services Quarterly*, 37(3), 158–176.
- OECD. (2001) *Citizens as partners: OECD handbook on information, consultation and public participation in policy-making*. Paris: OECD.
- Ostrom, V., Tiebout, C.M. & Warren, R. (1961) The organization of government in metropolitan areas: a theoretical inquiry. *American Political Science Review*, 55(4), 831–842.

- Overman, S. (2017) Autonomous agencies, happy citizens? Challenging the satisfaction claim. *Governance*, 30(2), 211–227.
- Peeters, R., Gofen, A. & Meza, O. (2020) Gaming the system: responses to dissatisfaction with public services beyond exit and voice. *Public Administration*, 98, 1–16.
- Pierre, J. & Røiseland, A. (2016) Exit and voice in local government reconsidered: a ‘choice revolution? *Public Administration*, 94(3), 738–753.
- Schattschneider, E.E. (1960) *The Semisovereign people: a Realist's view of democracy in America*. Holt: Rinehart and Winston.
- Schläpfer, F. (2017) Stated preferences for public services: a classification and survey of approaches. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 31(1), 258–280.
- Schlesinger, M., Mitchell, S. & Elbel, B. (2002) Voices unheard: barriers to expressing dissatisfaction to health plans. *The Milbank Quarterly*, 80(4), 709–755.
- Scott, I. (2005) *Public Administration in Hong Kong: regime change and its impact on the public sector*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International.
- Sears, D.O. & McConahay, J.B. (1973) *The politics of violence*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Sharp, E.B. (1984) Citizen demand-making in the urban context. *American Journal of Political Science*, 28(4), 654–670.
- Sharp, E.B. (1984a) “Exit, voice, and loyalty” in the context of local government problems. *Western Political Quarterly*, 37(1), 67–83.
- Stoker, G. (2011) Was local governance such a good idea? A global comparative, perspective. *Public Administration*, 89(1), 15–31.
- Tavares, A. and Camões, P. (2021). Portugal: elections and voting in a dual-tier local government system. In A. Gendźwiłł, K. Steyvers & U. Kjaer. *Handbook of local elections and voting*. London: Routledge. (forthcoming)
- Tavares, A.F. & Camões, P.J. (2007) Local service delivery choices in Portugal: a political transaction costs framework. *Local Government Studies*, 33(4), 535–553.
- Tavares, A.F., Raudla, R. & Silva, T. (2020) Best of both worlds? Independent lists and voter turnout in local elections. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 42(7), 955–974.
- Tavares, A.F. & Teles, F. (2018) Deeply rooted but still striving for a role: the Portuguese Freguesias under reform. In: Hlepas, N.-K., Kerstig, N., Kuhlmann, S., Swianiewicz, P. & Teles, F. (Eds.) *Sub-municipal governance in Europe: decentralization beyond the municipal tier*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.
- The Ombudsman' Office. (2016) *Portuguese National Human Rights Institution Report to the parliament 2016*. Lisbon: The Ombudsman' Office.
- Tiebout, C. (1956) A pure theory of local expenditures. *Journal of Political Economy*, 64(5), 416–424.
- Trounstine, J. (2006) Dominant regimes and the demise of urban democracy. *The Journal of Politics*, 68(4), 879–893.
- Trounstine, J. (2009) *Political monopolies in American cities: the rise and fall of bosses and reformers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Trounstine, J. (2011) Evidence of a local incumbency advantage. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 36(2), 255–280.
- van de Walle, S. (2016) When public services fail: a research agenda on public service failure. *Journal of Service Management*, 27(5), 831–846.
- van de Walle, S. (2018) Explaining citizen satisfaction and dissatisfaction with public services. In: Ongaro, E. & Van Thiel, S. (Eds.) *The Palgrave handbook of public administration and Management in Europe*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 227–241.
- van Roosbroek, S. & van de Walle, S. (2008) The relationship between ombudsman, government, and citizens: a survey analysis. *Negotiation Journal*, 24(3), 287–302.
- Vedlitz, A. (1980) Voting and contacting: two forms of political participation in a suburban community. *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, 16(1), 31–48.
- Warren, M. (2011) Voting with your feet: exit-based empowerment in democratic theory. *American Political Science Review*, 105(4), 683–701.
- White, A. & Trump, K.S. (2018) The promises and pitfalls of 311 data. *Urban Affairs Review*, 54(4), 794–823.
- Withey, M.J. & Cooper, W.H. (1989) Predicting exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 34, 521–539.
- Worrall, J. (2002) If you build it, they will come: consequences of improved citizen complaint review procedures. *Crime & Delinquency*, 48(3), 355–379.
- Zeng, J., Yuan, M. & Feiock, R. (2019) What drives people to complain about environmental issues? An analysis based on panel data crossing provinces of China. *Sustainability*, 11, 1147. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11041147>

How to cite this article: Tavares, A. F., Pires, S. M., & Teles, F. (2022). Voice, responsiveness, and alternative policy venues: An analysis of citizen complaints against the local government to the national Ombudsman. *Public Administration*, 100(4), 1054–1072. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12787>