European Societies
https://doi.org/10.1162/euso_a_00036

Party in the Movement: Backstage Partyisation in Austerity Portugal

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European Societies
https://doi.org/10.1162/euso_a_00036

ABSTRACT
In the last decade, research has increasingly highlighted the importance of political parties in protest arenas, yet has focused mainly on their visible roles in mobilisation. Analysing Portugal's anti-austerity protests (2010–2014), this paper proposes that we should also analyse how parties engage actively behind the scenes. Through a protest event analysis and interviews, the article proposes that parties are not mere supporters or sponsors, but are also important active players in protest arenas; leveraging their infrastructure and resources, they shape protest arenas via strategic backstage interactions, i.e., they do not only lend support but are also behind the scenes making and remaking protest arenas while keeping a low profile. These findings have broader implications for understanding the interplay between political parties and social movements. By highlighting hidden mechanisms of party influence, backstage partyisation challenges existing models that focus only on visible aspects of mobilisation and contributes to ongoing debates about the role of institutional players in social movements arenas. As such, this research emphasises the need to consider both public and backstage interactions to fully understand party movement relationships.

KEYWORDS
Social Movements, Political Parties, Backstage Partyisation, Anti-Austerity, Arena

1. Introduction

How do political parties mobilise and interact with social movement groups and platforms? How do they participate in cycles of protest? Do they keep a distance or take part in street-level mobilisation? Are they active in contentious arenas that emerge through these periods of "heightened conflict" (Tarrow, 2011) or are they only the result of institutionalisation processes? In this article, I aim to answer these questions while providing a new approach to studying the relationship between political parties and social movements through the analysis of the Portuguese anti-austerity cycle of protest that started in 2010.

Political parties and social movements tended to be thought of as divergent, yet complementary, arenas of political action (Goldstone, 2003, 2004; Schwartz, 2010; Piccio, 2019; Tarrow, 2021). If the former is linked with institutional political action and mostly with the party politics literature, the latter is mostly associated with street-level protest and social movement studies. In fact, Tarrow (2021) highlighted a 'curious lacuna', referring to a disciplinary division of labour where these two fields are not typically studied in conjunction (Piccio, 2019; Tarrow, 2021). Moreover, notwithstanding the recognition of the existing variety of parties and the variety of links between parties and society (Gunther and Diamond, 2003), the literature on party politics pointed out an increasing disengagement or differentiation from society (Borbáth and Hutter, 2021; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002; Katz and Mair, 1995), which seems to contribute even more to this distance between fields.

Authors often conceptualize the relationship between social movements and political parties in a unidirectional manner, focusing how the former influences the latter. Within social movements , which are regarded as extra-institutional players, the dynamic typically involves these movements channeling their grievances and exerting pressure on political parties (Kitschelt, 1993).

This relationship manifests in two distinct forms: firstly, social movements apply pressure, prompting political parties to incorporate and funnel the prevailing discontent from the streets into institutional channels. Consequently, over the course of protest cycles, conflict tends to diminish (Kitschelt, 1993; Koopmans, 2004; Tarrow, 1993). Secondly, an alternative pathway to institutionalisation can also develop. In this sce-

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https://doi.org/10.1162/euso_a_00036

nario, movements either influence the creation of new political parties or themselves transition into these entities, establishing interest groups with close ties to institutions (Staggenborg, 2022). This portrayal tends to cast institutional players as passive participants within the movements' arena. However, as this introduction will demonstrate, recent developments in the literature reveal that a more nuanced understanding of this relationship has emerged over the past decade.

At the beginning of the 21th century, Goldstone (2003) initiated a conversation on the relationship between the two types of players: rather than an alternative, these are complementary forms of action. Institutional and non-institutional actors are mutually dependent and deeply intertwined (Goldstone, 2003, 2004). As political parties became more visible in protest campaigns, research began to focus on their activities outside their 'traditional' domains (Hutter et al., 2018). Institutional players' adoption of movement discourses and repertoires blurred the lines that conceptualise parties as separate from protest (Carvalho, 2022). As new forms of action emerged, researchers developed conceptual tools to illuminate the various types of relationships between parties and movements. Hutter et al. (2018) identify three main trends: (1) the intersection between electoral and protest politics (McAdam and Tarrow, 2010); (2) the use of the cleavage concept in social movement studies (Hutter, 2014b); (3) and the hybrid players approach such as movement-parties or social movement partyism (Almeida and van Dyke, 2014; Della Porta et al., 2017; Kitschelt, 2019). A fourth approach can be introduced: the concept of the protest party, which directly addresses the involvement of political parties in protests (Borbath and Hutter, 2021; Somma, 2018). This approach primarily focuses on sponsorship, defined as active support or direct involvement by political parties in organising protest events. These perspectives not only emphasise the areas where actions overlap between the two but also depict parties as active participants rather than merely outcomes.

As I will point out, these perspectives still keep parties and movement as separate arenas, and focus only on the visible aspects of their action. I argue that contention should not be reduced to a simple story of insurgent-outsider social movements versus insider-established, institutional players. If the literature demonstrates that parties can actively engage in and sponsor protests, following an interactionist perspective, I argue that behind-the-scenes interactions are key to understanding the dynamics of protest cycles. Political parties, beyond sponsoring protests, can also be active players by leveraging their resources to shape protest arenas through strategic backstage interactions, and keep a low profile. As an alternative, I propose the concept of backstage partyisation to highlight the unseen presence of political parties in the reshaping of contentious arenas as a form of politics of occupation (Klein and Lee, 2019), whereby the autonomy of movements from parties weakens.

In this article, I analyse the role of political parties in shaping the Portuguese anti-austerity protest scene from 2010 to 2014. Drawing on protest event analysis (2009–2015) and 23 semi-structured interviews, the findings reveal that, in Portugal, parties were not merely supporters or sponsors but played an active role in shaping and reshaping the anti-austerity protest arena in the backstage. As will be demonstrated, despite the influence that the literature attributes to political parties in the country, their influence was not automatic, making this analysis even more relevant. These findings deepen our understanding of the interplay between political parties and social movements. By uncovering hidden mechanisms of party influence, this article challenges models that focus solely on visible mobilisation. It offers a fresh perspective on protest dynamics, emphasising the importance of considering both public and behind-the-scenes interactions to fully understand protest dynamics.

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After this introduction, in the literature review, I consider the entanglement between visibility and backstage in the party-movement interaction. Following the methodological section, I introduce the anti-austerity cycle of protest in Portugal to then consider the action of these players throughout the various stages of the protest cycle which vary between influence and occupation. Lastly, in the conclusions, I discuss the results and the implications for the literature.

2. From the Politics of Visibility to Backstage Partyisation: an interactionist approach

In this section, I introduce the concept of backstage partyisation as an alternative framework for examining the involvement of political parties in protest. This approach highlights a key distinction between the politics of visibility and backstage dynamics, which is commonly emphasised by interactionists. While most perspectives, as outlined in the introduction, concentrate on the visible aspects of party-movement relations,, building on Melucci, Goffman, and Jasper, I argue for the need to understand how unseen interactions play a role in the development of contentious cycles.

Consequently, I define backstage partyisation as the covert intervention of a political party in protest arenas. This concept denotes a subduing of non-institutional players to party preferences, masking their performances, and taking command, even if partially, of the arena without visibility. As will be seen, such a strategy is oriented towards occupation (Klein and Lee, 2019), wherein heteronomy (Riley and Fernandez, 2014) takes precedence: movements end up serving as a front for political parties. This concept will provide a better understanding of the dynamics between political parties, protest movements, and the strategies they employ, by highlighting overlooked behind-the-scenes sequences of interactions that play a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of protest arenas. The proposed concept builds on a classic debate, not only in social movement studies but also beyond, between visibility and latency spurred by Melucci (1994, 1996). This division can also be applied to interpreting the new wave of studies on the relationship between parties and movements discussed in the introduction. In particular, the protest party approach is theoretically, methodologically, and empirically grounded in what can be called the *politics of visibility*. The approach deals specifically with how parties participate in protest, defining protest party as "when leaders, activists, or sympathizers of political parties participate in protest events and identify themselves as such" (Somma, 2018: 65), or party-sponsorship "as co-organizing, taking part in and/or calling for participation in a protest event" (Borbath and Hutter, 2021: 897). Using quantitative methodologies, these studies identify the factors behind party participation in protest cycles, emphasising that their support tends to occur in larger, less radical events that revolve around cultural issues and systemic critiques (Borbáth and Hutter, 2021; Somma, 2018).

However, it is important to note two aspects of the *politics of visibility*. Firstly, these developments still "support the divide between the field of party politics, concerned with 'routine' political and electoral mobilization, and social movement studies, dealing with contentious activism and protest politics" (Peña, 2020, 639). Peña proposes that we should analyse "party and movement politics as co-evolving and overlapping fields of action susceptible of study on the basis of shared hypotheses and models" (Peña, 2020, 639). As such, rather than assuming institutional and non-institutional arenas as separate from the start, our research should be "more process-oriented, integrat[ing] long-term and short-term interaction dynamics, and focus[ing] on hybrid actors" (Peña,

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2020, 639). The nature of the relationship between these players is an open question for research that should consider the overall context, institutions and processes that materialise their actions.

Secondly, their measurements and concepts primarily address the overt aspects of party involvement in protests, while overlooking movement and party interactions throughout contentious episodes. While acknowledging parties in protest arenas, they primarily scrutinise their actions in the public domain, neglecting how backstage interactions might shape mobilisation efforts. Melucci points out that such approach "concentrates exclusively on the measurable features of collective action (...) while it neglects or undervalues all those aspects of the action of movements that consist in the production of cultural codes (...) when a movement publicly confronts the political apparatus on specific issues, it does so in the name of new cultural models created at a less noisy and less easily measurable level of hidden action." (Melucci, 1994, 107). His critique follows with an alternative proposal in which movements "ceaselessly oscillate" between visibility and latency (Melucci, 1996, 174). If visibility corresponds to the action performed during periods of intense public activity, with latency we should look at "[t]he submerged life of the [movements] networks (...) [that] provide the energy for short-term and intense public campaigns" (Melucci, 1994, 144). Therefore, we cannot understand the ebbs and flows of contentious action without analysing periods of quietening that reshape contentious and submerged networks (Accornero and Carvalho, 2025).

Building on Melucci's contribution, rather than distinguishing only between periods, we should also discern, inspired by Goffman (1990), between front and backstage in our understanding of the relations between institutional and non-institutional players. Front refers to the visible dimension of public protest, and backstage to the concealed dimension of interactions between players. I suggest that research on movements and party interactions should combine both (1) the seen forms of mobilisation present in public protest, which corresponds to the *politics of visibility* discussed above, with (2) an unseen dimension regarding interactions between players that are not visible in the public sphere. Although latency suggests backstage activity, my argument is that such activity is continuous and simultaneous with visible action, directly influencing the presentation of the front stage.

Backstage partyisation, as a process, is rooted in a players and arenas interactionist approach (Jasper, 2015). Three concepts stand out in this approach: arena, players, and strategic interaction. An arena is a "bundle of rules and resources" that "represents physical places where decisions are made, with something at stake, although it includes not only physical constraints and aids but any rules and customs usually applied" (Jasper, 2021, abstract). In this perspective, resources enable access to or departure from an arena and allow players to impose their objectives on others. As pointed out "players who control positions and resources can design new arenas to get what they want" (Jasper et al., 2022, 6) showing "how certain players can use their resources and positions to establish and change arenas in pursuit of their goals". (Jasper, 2015; McGarry et al., 2016; Jabola-Carolus et al., 2020, 644).

Players "consist of individuals or groups who have some shared identity, some common goals" (Jasper, 2021, 244) that cooperate, compete, and engage in strategic actions (Jasper, 2015; McGarry et al., 2016; Jabola-Carolus et al., 2020). Within an arena, players not only interact but also "monitor each others' actions, although that capacity is not always equally distributed" (Jasper, 2015, 15). Finally, strategic interaction corresponds to the players' situated attempts to influence other players. As such, if we consider the aforementioned role, resources play a crucial role in the interactions

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between players and in the making and re-making of the arena.

I propose reading the relations between players as an arena that carries complex chains of interactions (Piccio, 2016b,a), whereby there "are no clear lines separating the roles of challenger (protestors or social movement activists), incumbents (those engaged in routine acceptance and membership in the polity defined by a policy field), and governance units (agents or institutions of the state)" (Goldstone, 2015, 227). Protest arenas should not be reduced to a simple story of insurgent-outsider social movements versus insider-established, institutional players which allow to see political parties as active players in a given arena. By blurring the borders between players, this approach allows for a flexible and situated analysis that does not take players for granted but rather contextualises their actions (Duyvendak and Fillieule, 2015). Moreover, this approach is particularly useful to trace sequences of strategic interactions (akin to process tracing) (Jabola-Carolus et al., 2020), which recognises that arenas are in constant transformation.[1] This approach is set to carefully escape "structural traps" and explore the mobilisation dynamics in detail. In this interactionist approach, players, although somehow constrained, have autonomy and processes are open-ended and strategic.

Concerning strategies, the literature highlights that a party's relationship with movements is often linked to potential electoral gains (Borbath and Hutter, 2021; Piccio, 2019). However, this assertion provides limited insight into the broader context and underlying structures. Klein and Lee's (2019) *dynamic theory of civil society* is particularly relevant here, as their framework incorporates the politics of backward infiltration, in which there are "the conscious strategies on the part of incumbent actors embedded in state and economic field to mobilize and reshape civil society either to solidify the existing regime's legitimacy or to promote actors' political and economic agendas" with the purpose "to control and regulate civil society in order to achieve political and economic actors' agendas" (Klein and Lee, 2019, 76). Three modes prevail within the politics of backward infiltration: influence, substitution, and occupation. In a democratic context, it "refers to the creation of a variety of organizations that resemble civil society associations but are designed to blunt contentious politics" (Klein and Lee, 2019, 79), or, as will be seen in the Portuguese case, to push it forward even if controlling it. This definition can be adapted and integrated into the social movement studies literature to provide a clearer understanding of the issues addressed in this article. In particular, as Klein and Lee (2019) propose, the relationship between parties and movements should be considered within a contentious process. As such, it is important to assess not only the actors themselves, but also their interactions and how they shift over time (Goldstone, 2003). Taking into consideration this strategic action approach, backstage partyisation as a form of occupation is to be considered a heteronomous type of relationship in which "a particular organization or organizations within civil society, usually political party or parties, rises to a position of supremacy and is able to shape the agenda of other voluntary associations" (Riley and Fernandez, 2014, 440).

[1]It is important to notice that for Jaspers' "[b]ackstage interactions are sometimes less conflictual, but no player is ever completely unified and free of conflict. Subplayers vie for influence and positions. Backstage, people relax, talk, tell jokes, bond as players, and generate emotional energy, but they also squabble, calculate, deliberate, and prepare." (Jasper et al., 2022, 26)

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3. Empirical Strategy

3.1. Case Selection

This article adopts a case-oriented approach (Della Porta, 2008) that focuses on the role of political parties in Portugal's anti-austerity mobilisation arena. This research strategy not only aims to expand our understanding of how political parties function as active players in these arenas but also challenges dominant theoretical perspectives by introducing the concept of backstage partyisation. Portugal serves as a revelatory case (Yin, 2018), offering insights into the political party engagement with social movements. While existing literature on anti-austerity movements in Southern Europe has primarily investigated the emergence of protest movements and their evolution into political parties, the specific interactions between parties and movements within these mobilisations remain insufficiently studied.

Moreover, during this period, Portugal experienced an intense protest cycle, marked by the participation of a significant percentage of the population. However, it has received considerably less scholarly attention compared to its counterparts. Portugal, despite being one of the Southern European countries most significantly affected by austerity - initiated by a centre-left government and later continued by a centre-right coalition - has been relatively less studied compared to its Southern European counterparts. Between 2011 and 2013, Portugal experienced a wave of protests, with participation levels remaining consistently high over the years, as evidenced by data from the European Social Survey (Magalhães, 2022).

However, unlike Spain or Greece, where movement-parties like Podemos and Syriza emerged in response to austerity, Portugal did not see the rise of a similar political actor. Instead, it was the pre-existing left-wing parties - the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Left Bloc (BE) - that capitalised on the anti-austerity sentiment and benefited from the protest cycle. This resulted in electoral gains for these parties, allowing them to become part of governing coalitions, demonstrating a unique outcome compared to other Southern European cases.

The literature shows that in Portugal the interaction between political parties and social movements can be characterised by significant resource dependency and overlapping memberships, namely with the Left Bloc and the Communist Party (Carvalho, 2022; Lisi, 2013; Portos and Carvalho, 2022; Fishman, 2019). Given the overlap in membership and resources between movements and parties in Portugal, this distinguishes it it from other Southern European scenarios where movements like those in Spain and Greece have shown varying degrees of autonomy from institutional political forces (Carvalho, 2022; Flesher-Fominaya, 2020; Karyotis and Rüdig, 2018). Such a configuration makes the anti-austerity mobilisation in Portugal a revelatory case, enabling not only an exploration of the specific dynamics within this case to illuminate broader phenomena but also fostering the development of new theoretical insights applicable to other contexts (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Gerring, 2007; Vennesson, 2008).

3.2. Data collection

I distinguish between two complementary levels of data collection: a visible dimension of mobilisation present in public protest, which resulted in a protest event analysis (PEA hereafter) (Hutter, 2014a; Carvalho, 2024) comprising 1344 events between 2009

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and 2015 [2]; and an unseen dimension comprising of backstage interactions between players and the underlying structure of mobilisation, based on 23 semi-structured interviews with key members of political parties, trade unions, and social movements. This mixed-methods approach helps to reconstruct the different phases of the mobilisation process and, as such, to describe a "unified and rigorous "story-line"" (Everson and Fishman, 2024, 336). Furthermore, as suggested by interactionist authors, instead of examining long trends and chains of causality in social structures, the article focuses on deconstructing chains of interactions and their effects on political outcomes through an open-ended, relational and processual approach. In fact, Somma points out that "we could gain much from qualitative, in-depth studies of party protest in specific campaigns. These should focus on the motivations and calculations of party leaders, the dynamic interactions and negotiations between parties and movements (...) [s]uch studies will allow a more precise interpretation of the statistical results (...)" (Somma, 2018, 82).

The PEA compiles daily events data from the online edition of *Diário de Notícias*. The dataset and codebook include four main dimensions: time and space; organisers and supporters; claim-making; and modes of protest. Additionally, I have also built a chronology of the main large protests that marked the contentious cycle (see table 2). This timeline provides points of observation that allow for the identification of the main players and their alliances throughout the process.

While PEA enables the cataloguing of protests in the public sphere, it does not offer data on the unseen aspects of protest cycles, as it focuses solely on the active phases of contention (Flesher-Fominaya, 2015). As such, in the process of conducting my research, I interviewed key figures from left-wing political parties, social movements, and trade unions in Portugal. These interviews were conducted in Portuguese and were typically free-flowing discussions based on a set of predefined topics. The topics were flexible and adjusted based on the interviewee's position in the arena and insights I had gained from previous interviews. This approach ensured a comprehensive overview of the events and players, collecting diverse perspectives within and across groups. This method of gathering information allowed for the triangulation of various, and sometimes conflicting discourses, enhancing the reliability of the data through cross-checking. Each interview, lasting approximately one hour, focused on: past political trajectories; the key players along with their alliances and conflicts; the nature of claim-making, frames, and narratives; and the repertoires of actions and forms of movement culture and organisation. Many interviewees had affiliations across different groups and stages of the process which enriched the event reconstruction and provided deeper insights into the dynamics at play. The selection of participants was strategically purposive, relying on established networks and the creation of new ones, often facilitated by other scholars and informal contacts. The snowball method was particularly effective in identifying and engaging with the most influential political actors directly involved.

The objective of this approach is not to generate a sample representative of a larger population for generalisation, but rather to include key political actors who have actively participated in the events under study (Tansey, 2007). This method ensures that the sample accurately reflects the primary influences and dynamics within the political events being analysed, thereby providing a targeted and insightful examination of the political landscape.

[2]The replication package for reproducing all the analysis in SPSS 20 is available: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14718529

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Table 1.: Interviewees

Interviewee	Group(s)
1	Manifesto por Uma Esquerda Livre, Congresso Democrático das Alternativas, Livre, Tempo de Avançar
2	Congresso Democrático das Alternativas, Manifesto 3D, Fórum Manifesto, Tempo de Avançar
3	Bloco de Esquerda, Fórum Manifesto, Congresso Democrático das Alternativas, Tempo de Avançar
4	Bloco de Esquerda, Fórum Manifesto, Congresso Democrático das Alternativas, Tempo de Avançar
5	Bloco de Esquerda, Manifesto por Uma Esquerda Livre, Congresso Democrático das Alternativas, Livre, Tempo de Avançar
6	Bloco de Esquerda, Congresso Democrático das Alternativas
7	Congresso Democrático das Alternativas, Fórum Manifesto
8	Geração à Rasca, Congresso Democrático das Alternativas
9	Partido Comunista Português
10	Bloco de Esquerda, Congresso Democrático das Alternativas
11	Bloco de Esquerda, Precários Inflexíveis
12	Bloco de Esquerda, Autonomist Groups, Acampada, Geração à Rasca, Rios ao Carmo, 15 de Outubro
13	Autonomist Groups, Acampada, 15 de Outubro, Rios ao Carmo
14	Autonomist Groups, Acampada, 15 de Outubro
15	Bloco de Esquerda, Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses
16	Partido Comunista Português, Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses
17	CGTP, Partido Comunista Português
18	Partido Comunista Português, Que se Lixe a Troika, Juntos Podemos
19	Que se Lixe a Troika, Juntos Podemos, Agir
20	Que se Lixe a Troika
21	Que se Lixe a Troika, Bloco de Esquerda, Acampada, 15O
22	Autonomists, Police Violence
23	Partido Socialista

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4. The Portuguese Anti-austerity Arena and Party Protest

In this section, I introduce the players present in the anti-austerity protest arena and the level of party involvement in it. Following Jasper, to "understand how protest arises unfolds, and affects (or does not affect) the world around it, research needs to begin with catalogues of players involved (...) and include goals and many capabilities a player has at its disposal" which might "change over time, as do players themselves" (Jasper, 2015, 13). The contestation of austerity involved various players such as left-wing political parties, trade unions, and social movement platforms.

Street mobilisation against austerity involved three main factions, considered here as strategic alliances between key players. The trade union federation CGTP organised strikes around labour demands with close contact and support of the Communist Party (PCP). The satellite groups of the Left Bloc, in close coordination with the party, spearhead their action within broader groups as will be seen in the following sections. Within BE, Ruptura/FER, a minority group, organised outside BE's logic leaving the party in December of 2011. Finally, social movement events and platforms such as Geração à Rasca (GàR) (March 2011), Acampada (May 2011), 150 Platform (October 2011 onwards), and Que Se Lixe a Troika (QSLT) (September 2012 to June 2013) brought together a plethora of actors to the streets.

The anti-austerity protest cycle had five phases. In the first phase, from the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008 until 2011, we see initial mobilisation by anti-precarity groups, as well as general strikes that contested the implementation of the first austerity measures in 2010. In 2011, a turning point occurs with the GàR protest, which is the first social movement large protest. During this year, events such as the Rossio encampment (Acampada) and the October 15 demonstration can also be identified. Despite this activity, the first half of 2012 is marked by weak social movements activity (only with small-scale and sporadic events) in contrast to trade union protests. A fourth phase begins after the summer of that year, with the emergence of the QSLT and involves various strategic alliances between institutional and non-institutional players. In the last phase, demobilisation occurred parallel to various elections. In particular, the 2015 general election led to an unprecedented parliamentary pact between the Socialist Party and the parties to its left (De Giorgi and Santana-Pereira, 2016; Fernandes, 2016). Each of these phases corresponds, as it will be seen, to a different degree of party involvement.

Each phase can be perceived as having different degrees of protest intensity (figure 1): protest increases until September 2012 with the emergence of QSLT to then slowly decrease. The Portuguese anti-austerity cycle of protest displayed particular features when compared with other southern European countries. Large protests exhibited a stop-and-go pattern, with sporadic large events organised by social movement and continuous trade union action throughout the entire period (Accornero and Pinto, 2015; Accornero and Ramos Pinto, 2020; Carvalho and Ramos Pinto, 2019; Carvalho, 2022).

How visible were political parties in the protest arena, by either organising, participating, or lending support to trade unions and social movements during these years? In Table 1, they emerge as supporters, or sponsors, of large protest events organised by social movements and trade unions. Nonetheless, as will be seen in the following sections, backstage action varied corresponding to different sets of alliances and interactions, but also emerge as responses to tensions in the protest arena.

Between 2009 and 2015, political parties organised 2.1% of events and sponsored

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Table 2.: Main Protest Events (2009-2015) and Phases of the Cycle

Month	**Repertoire**	**Organizer + Supporter**
Initial Mobilisations		
March 2008	Protest	FENPROF (Teachers Unions) (CGTP, PCP, BE)
June 2008	Protest	CGTP (PCP, BE)
November 2008	Gen. Strike	CGTP (PCP, BE)
November 2008	Protest	FENPROF (CGTP, PCP, BE)
March 2009	Protest	CGTP (PCP, BE)
May 2010	Protest	Public sector unions (CGTP, UGT, PCP, BE)
November 2010	Gen. Strike	CGTP + UGT (PCP, BE)
From the Turning Point to Demobilisation - Support and Influence		
March 2011	Protest	Geração à Rasca (CGTP, PCP, BE)
May 2011	Protest	Acampada Rossio
May 2011	Protest	CGTP (PCP)
June 2011	Gen. Elections	
October 2011	Protest	CGTP (PCP)
October 2011	Protest	15O (BE, Ruptura/FER)
November 2011	Protest	F. Comum (CGTP) + F. S. Adm. Pública (UGT)
November 2011	Gen. Strike	CGTP + UGT (PCP, BE, 15O)
Movement Void - Beginning of Occupation Operations		
March 2012	Protest	CGTP (PCP, BE, 15O)
May 2012	Protest	Primavera Global + Autonomous actions
Movement Re-emergence - Backstage Partyisation and Active Involvement		
September 2012	Protest	QSLT (PCP, BE, CGTP, 15O)
September 2012	Protest	CGTP (PCP, BE, CGTP, 15O)
October 2012	Protest	QSLT (CGTP, PCP, BE)
November 2012	Gen. Strike	CGTP (PCP, BE, 15O, QSLT)
March 2013	Protest	QSLT (PCP, BE, 15O, CGTP)
June 2013	Protest	QSLT
June 2013	Gen. Strike	CGTP (PCP, BE, 15O, QSLT)
Demobilization and Focus on the Electoral Process		
September 2013	Local elections	
October 2013	Protest	QSLT
November 2013	Protest	CGTP (PCP, BE, QSLT, 15O)
April 2014	Protest	Rios ao Carmo
May 2014	EU Elections	
November 2014	Gen.Strike	CGTP (PCP, BE, QSLT, 15O)
October 2015	Gen. Elections	

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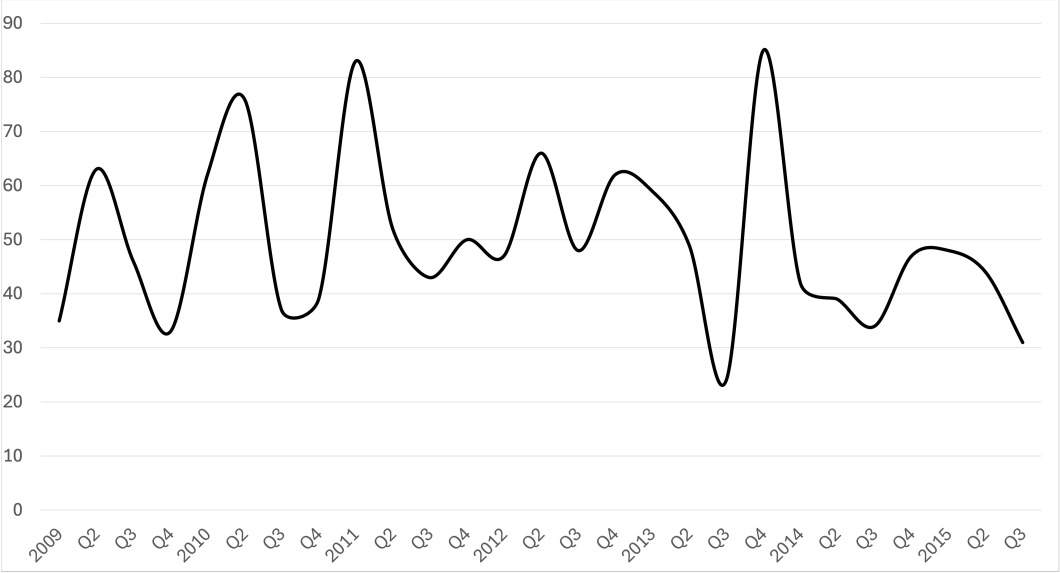
Figure 1.: Number of Protests (2009-2015): Quarterly Analysis



8%. When compared with Chile (Somma, 2018), these results show a higher level of participation in protest. However, these levels are in line with Borbath and Hutter (2021) who report that party sponsorship is "a little over 10% of all observed protest events" (Borbáth and Hutter, 2021, 901) in Southern Europe. As such, the action of the radical left political parties (BE and PCP) largely focused on supporting trade unions and social movements. Left-wing political parties publicly supported, as in sponsored, large protest events (Table 1). Moreover, as shown in Figure 2, party involvement was stable throughout the period under analysis.

Given this analysis, in the following sections, I will trace the process of backstage involvement and disclose strategic interaction sequences between the groups involved in anti-austerity protests.

5. From Party Support to Conflict

The analysis of specific episodes of contention may uncover the dynamics of political party actions within protest arenas. In the following two sections, I will analyse distinct phases of how parties not only interacted within the anti-austerity arena but also they reshaped it. As such, how do political parties engage in strategic actions with other players in a protest arena throughout a contentious cycle? As will be seen, the parties' action is not only about presence or sponsorship to ensure visibility, or electoral gains, but the players' interactions, either of cooperation, conflict, or competition, shape decisively their action in the backstage. That said, backstage partyisation did not occur immediately. Rather, it was the outcome of a mobilisation process that started in 2011 as various groups scrambled to position themselves against austerity. During this initial phase, the political parties acted by supporting through their satellite groups; notably, the BE mobilised its resources and personnel to secure influence within the platforms that were forming throughout 2011.

Following the general strike of November 2010, the year 2011 constituted a turning point in the Portuguese anti-austerity cycle of protest as social movement groups intro-

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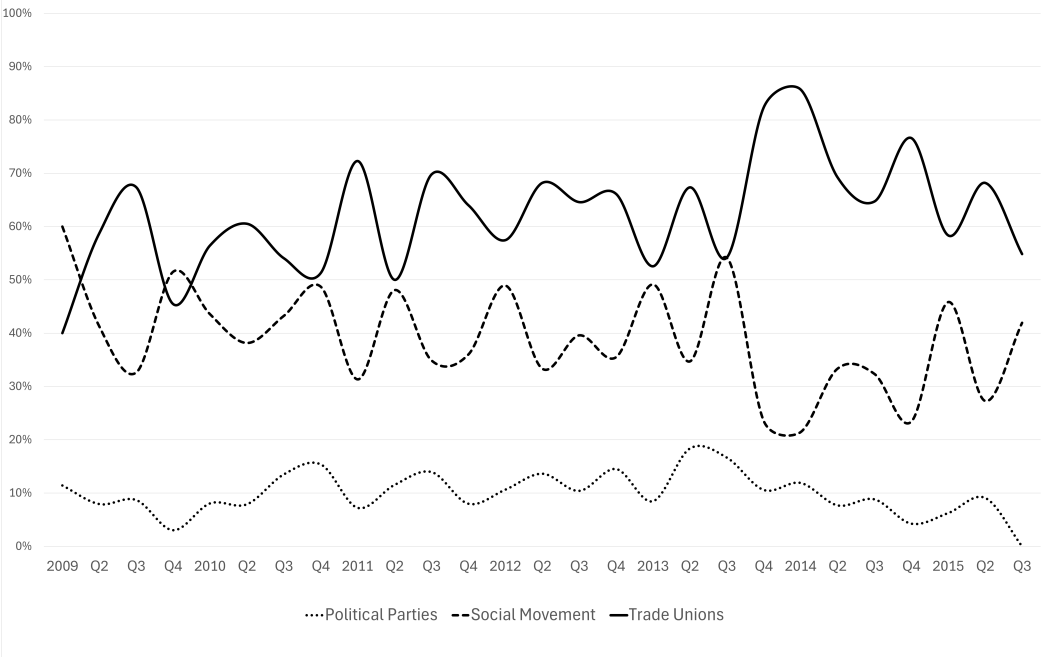
Figure 2.: Participation of Parties, Social Movements, and Trade Unions in Protests (2009-2015): Quarterly Analysis (%)



duced new repertoires, claims, and frames, but also adopted a horizontal approach seen globally across the "movement of the squares" (Baumgarten, 2013; Carvalho, 2022). Three interconnected events stand out: the GàR, the *Acampada* (which replicated the occupation of squares seen in other countries), and the October 15th demonstration, integrated into the Global Day of Action.

In March 2011, organised by a small clique of activists, the GàR brought about 300,000 people to the streets all over the country showing mobilisation capacity beyond institutional players. Soeiro (2014) documents the groups that joined the protest: from non-institutional groups such as feminists, LGBT, and anti-precarity, to the institutional left with the Left Bloc, and members of CGTP. In May, the *Acampada do Rossio* inaugurated a phase of "platforms and assemblies" (Baumgarten, 2016). The occupation of one of Lisbon´s central squares lasted three weeks, bringing together anarchists, libertarians, autonomists, anti-party groups, and members of the Left Bloc. Luhuna Carvalho (Fernández-Savater et al., 2017), who participated in the Acampada, reports that the occupation was a performance and reproduction of imported repertoires that did not build on previously existing networks, counterculture, or movements (which was almost non-existent at the time in Lisbon). Nonetheless, the Acampada led to a process of preparation for a demonstration in October as part of the Global Day of Action. Thirty-seven groups signed the manifesto in support of this demonstration, ranging from newly created occupy-type groups, anti-austerity, workers, anti-precarity, students and youth, environment, cultural, women and LGBT, pacifists, immigrants and anti-racists, free-software development, local and political newspapers, and finally small left-wing political groups with revolutionary tendencies (Soeiro, 2014).

Throughout these events, the actions of political parties evolved, shifting from an initial spirit of collaboration and discreet support to a clear attempt at exerting influence later in 2011. Given the almost spontaneous nature of GàR, party influence

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was scarce. Even if the members of GàR contacted parties and asked for support, they also asked them not to exhibit flags or any other symbols as the event was framed as non-partisan. Their participation was done in a spirit of collaboration and support without interference. However, while during the the GàR to the Acampada, the Left Bloc activist wing followed the ongoing mobilisation trends, this would change soon after. In particular, the Acampada served as a battleground for influence. One of my interviewees reports that members of Ruptura/FER (still part of the BE at the time) had the largest presence in the square, followed closely by core members and satellite groups of the BE:

> Ruptura/FER organised itself in advance to control the Acampada (...) They wanted to recruit there as they did within the BE.

Parties' behaviour, especially tendencies from the Left Bloc and associated groups, started changing. In the *Acampada* they tried to influence the movements that were forming through their second- and third-rank personnel involved in social movement groups. They closely followed the repertoire of action as a way to blend in and influence the group.

As referred to above, a wide coalition of groups came together to organise the Global Day of Action in Portugal after the *Acampada*. Baumgarten points out, based on her ethnography, that despite the lack of shared identity, the group had common strategic objectives (Baumgarten, 2016, 16). However, if parties were already active in the *Acampada*, party influence became even more clear in the formation of this platform. The strategy was to influence through parties' satellite organisations:

> Those who organised October 15th were already in previous organisations and the event already has a strong mobilisation of the BE apparatus (...) There are people inside the party who have a great understanding of the movement and who define how the party relates to them. They email highly influential people in some groups instructing them to mobilise for particular events and even propose a strategy if necessary.

It was in this platform where opposing groups within BE fought each other for influence and even control. My interviewees report that conflicts in the group emerged due to Ruptura/FER surreptitious manoeuvres to control it, which in turn led to power struggles between dominating institutional groups (Baumgarten, 2016).

After a successful demonstration in October, the conflict became even more manifest over the issue of continuity: should the group continue and if so, what name should it adopt? As a consequence of the internal conflict, Baumgarten reports "by the spring of 2012, it [the 15O, as it came to be known] had been transformed into a group of just a few activists who kept the name of the platform" (Baumgarten, 2016, 17). The conflict resulted from the unwillingness of institutionally-linked groups to give up the platform to continue with protest, as much as not wanting to give up their strategic positioning within the platform. However, as Ruptura/FER takes control of the platform, due to their high number, which was a conscious strategy, the movement wing of BE leaves:

> Ruptura/FER took over the 15O and assumed it as its front for the social movement; (...) the BE leaves and starts working [afterwards] towards the QSLT. Everyone tries to make these platforms permanent structures, making them the expression of that particular party on the left and no longer an open movement (...) Each group on the left sought the acronym to hide behind it to say that 'the social movement is this'.

As such, the anti-austerity movement at the beginning of 2012 was broken by the disputes of the groups close to the institutional left. The incapacity to constitute a movement in the wake of international mobilisations and growing austerity policies

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led to the movement's near disappearance in the following year (as will be shown in the following section). Emerging almost unexpectedly, and initially planned outside of institutional structures, these groups opened to the constitution of broad coalitions which in time would be bursting with conflict (Baumgarten, 2013; Carvalho, 2022). Throughout the following stage, the feeble resources of social movement platforms, as they were not able to replicate the Spanish model of ensuring large mobilisation, led them to a weak position and inability to ally with trade unions and political parties (Portos and Carvalho, 2022).

During this phase, a reshaping of alliances can be observed. Despite the willingness to collaborate with social movements, the conflicts shaped the strategies that political parties would follow in the next stage of the contentious cycle. As such, a strategy of influence and support was to be replaced in the following year by a strategy of occupation (Klein and Lee, 2019) as a result of the conflicting interactions throughout 2011, which shifted parties and their satellite groups' strategies and resources into closing their ranks.

6. Backstage Partyisation of the Anti-austerity Arena

As a result of the infighting within the 15O platform and the departure of multiple players, including those associated with the BE, the first half of 2012 saw a significant decrease in social movement protests. The reduced mobilisation capacity led to smaller, less visible events. As autonomous movements - those groups unaffiliated with political parties - entered a phase of dormancy due to a lack of resources and unity, members of the Left Bloc seized the opportunity to begin strategising behind the scenes to fill the public void.

In response to the prevailing conditions and the difficulty in establishing broader social movement alliances, the Left Bloc spearheaded the initiative to reinvigorate mobilisation, framing it as a non-institutional endeavour. This move can be viewed as a strategic manoeuvre (Jasper, 2021) geared towards backstage partyisation, which refers to a strategic shift towards party-centric organising behind the scenes. Backstage partyisation emphasises that parties' engagement in protest arenas should encompass more than just their overt presence and sponsorship. It underscores the importance of delving into the interactions that occur behind the scenes, which ultimately lead to reshaping the dynamics of the protest arena. Therefore, as noted in the theoretical section, backstage partyisation denotes a strategy to subdue non-institutional players to the parties' preferences. This process and transformation started in the early summer of 2012 with a shift in the political opportunity structures. During this period, the Constitutional Court overruled some austerity measures, while the Socialist Party (now in opposition) moved towards a critical position on austerity. In September, the prime minister announced the reduction of payroll tax, which led to a wide-open contestation (Carvalho, 2022). The measure was censured for its iniquity, as it would increase workers' tax contributions and decrease those of the employers. These institutional changes were also crucial to the restructuring of the anti-austerity contentious arena.

In fact, despite the movement's quietening, the anti-austerity arena reorganised in the backstage leading to the emergence of the QSLT in September 2012 (Baumgarten, 2016; Carvalho, 2022). Throughout this period, members of the Left Bloc acted as brokers to unite disparate groups under the same banner, while excluding those who, in their view, caused difficulties within 15O. At this stage, protests transitioned from near disappearance to strategic alliance-building, marking a new phase in the cycle

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that featured some of the largest demonstrations in Portuguese history (Accornero and Ramos Pinto, 2015; Portos and Carvalho, 2022).

The QSLT started to be assembled in the summer of 2012 as an informal group that was not "structured as a movement", but rather as a "manifesto signed by some people that decided to organise a demonstration" (interview) in September. Unexpectedly for its organisers, this was one of the largest protests in Portuguese history. At its formation, it followed a clear top-down approach:

> Around June, I was contacted to subscribe a manifesto of the QSLT and which was more or less drafted [...] We knew that the resources had to come from somewhere, but it is also true that no one went there to defend the position of a party or trade union [...] there was already a draft [...] and it was permeated by a political sensibility that we could associate with the BE, that in the sphere of the social movements translates to the *Precários Inflexíveis* [Inflexible Precarious workers].

> When moving into the creation of the QSLT, the BE had good intentions. It departs from an analysis that the 15O had destroyed the relations between the various collectives and the possibility of unitarian work.

The QSLT was meant to have a unitarian character while dealing with the disputes and critiques of previous mobilisations such as GàR and 15O: (1) demonstrations should be an expression of political grievances, not a mere plateau for citizen discontentment; (2) open organisational structures can lead to the opportunistic take over by small groupuscules, which destroys the possibility of collective work as in 15O. As a result, the QSLT deliberately decided to close itself off to exclude and avoid the possibility of infiltration strategies seen in 15O. New members could only join the group if approved by all the members. Therefore, their main objective was to mark the political agenda while excluding their 'opposition' and reanimating social movement protests. They aimed to have a cohesive structure that was not plagued by conflicts.

> When the QSLT appeared, there was a double criticism of the previous protests. The criticism of GàR is the following: it is not worth making a demonstration if it is not politicized [...] everyone goes and may have a skinhead or someone from the PSD who is dissatisfied [...] the 15O and its organisation was open, anyone could participate, but this meant that people were expelled or left because small groups end up controlling it. Therefore, we created a closed structure, because we did not intend to be democratic, we did not represent the people.

Between September 2012 and March 2013, the QSLT emerged as a prominent force in the social movement landscape. They orchestrated a diverse range of events, spanning from small-scale gatherings to large-scale demonstrations. Notable among these were the September demonstration, an event critiquing austerity measures in the cultural sectors in October, and a nationwide march involving one million participants in March 2013.

Up until this point, relations between movements and the CGTP had been somewhat tentative. A shift occurred with the rise of QSLT. Both the PCP and CGTP publicly endorsed the movement, and some of their members even joined the platform, working closely with BE representatives. The QSLT composition, including members from the two main left-wing parties, facilitated a more robust collaboration with the primary trade union federation, CGTP, as noted by my interviewees. This further substantiates the argument posited earlier that the movements had transitioned into institutionalised entities, and consequently, CGTP was able to extend their support.

The creation of the QSLT was remarkably different from previous groups. Based on previous mobilisation experiences, there was an attempt not to repeat what they saw

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as obstacles to effective protests. Even though led by the Left Bloc behind the scenes, through its satellite groups, the formation of this platform allowed a closer collaboration with members of the Communist Party and the support of the trade union federation CGTP. Simultaneously, this closure involved excluding the groups outside their sphere of influence. The closure stemmed from a strategic decision that resulted in a veiled alliance between institutional players. The configuration of players changed to enact strategic alliances between institutional and non-institutional players. Moreover, the platform introduced a more politicised frame that contested not only austerity and precarity but also the government and the Troika, making explicit reference to the foundational moment of democracy in Portugal.

The Left Bloc's resources and organisational skills were crucial in ensuring this process of mobilisation, especially through their satellite groups—affiliated groups that, despite not openly displaying their affiliation, are active in arenas that ensure their influence. For instance, *Precários Inflexíveis* was essential during the anti-austerity protests, not only shaping demands around precarious work but also providing significant logistical resources. Their headquarters, Mob, located in Bairro Alto—one of Lisbon's main nightlife venues—served as a vital hub for QSLT activities. Functioning as a social centre and bar where many militants met, it became the central space for organising protest actions, holding preparatory meetings, and producing materials for demonstrations. These multiple memberships among activists acted as valuable resources, creating network connections between groups and bringing in expertise that was mobilised during the protests. This pooling of resources can be seen as social capital employed to modulate the arena of activism. Additionally, regional and local militants were significant resources for expanding QSLT's reach across the country (as they organised their demonstrations in various cities across the country). In remote areas lacking available activists, party members took on mobilisation tasks, ensuring that the movement's influence extended nationwide. A third very important element was their access to the media. Among their ranks, there were not only seasoned militants but also journalists with access to the mass media who ensure greater visibility.

In this section, it becomes evident that backstage partyisation arises from an interactive process throughout the protest cycle in which resources play an important role in the making and remaking of the anti-austerity arena. This dynamic led institutional players, notably the Left Bloc, to adjust their strategies towards occupying the anti-austerity arena through affiliated groups.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Over the last decade, new light has been shed on the relationship between political parties and social movements. Building on this research, I employed an open-ended approach whereby political parties are constitutive agents of protest cycles and not just their outcomes. I argued for an additional analytical layer beyond party visibility and sponsoring of protests. If players reacted to a particular structure of opportunities, they also interacted strategically, shaping the next stage of protest without predetermining it. By scrutinising the Portuguese case under austerity, I demonstrate that delving into backstage politics is crucial for understanding the power dynamics within contentious arenas.

The protest event analysis for the period of 2009-2015 in Portugal shows that political parties on the left tend to participate or sponsor protest events. While in line with the literature, I have shown that it is only part of the story: political parties in protest

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arenas can go beyond mere support. As a result, I present backstage partyisation as an "invisible process" in which we need to reveal the ongoing relational processes in the making and remaking of the arenas and the strategic action involved. Moreover, the concept expands the possibilities for analysing the role of political parties in protest arenas. It highlights the overlooked behind-the-scenes interactions that play a crucial role in shaping the outcomes of protest arenas. This concept also sheds light on how political parties may strategically leverage movements to further their own interests while maintaining a low profile. Moreover, concerning the autonomy of movements from parties, I have shown that, rather than a fixed feature, it is a process whose intensity varies depending on the strength of the movement in relation to institutional players and the lack of conflict between parties.

In the Portuguese case, despite the proximity and influence that political parties, particularly the Left Bloc, may wield over social movements in Portugal (Lisi, 2013; Tsakatika and Lisi, 2013), my research demonstrates that the emergence of the QSLT was the outcome of prior conflicts and interactions during the anti-austerity protest cycle, resulting in backstage partyisation. The establishment of this platform aimed to "revitalise mobilisation" in response to the identified problems. It could be added that, regarding the usual outcomes of cycles of protest, Portugal under austerity adds a possible new path. Rather than leading to demobilisation through channelling or institutionalisation, as anticipated in the literature, political parties in Portugal played a pivotal role in restructuring the protest arena. As such, it is important to analyse protest cycles in an open-ended way, highlighting the specificity of each case. In the Portuguese context, parties played a crucial role; in response to low-level mobilisation, they revitalised it, albeit possibly at the expense of curtailing it.

If the politics of visibility approach provides an important understanding of the factors behind party participation in a protest, such as the size and visibility of the event, it misses the strategic analysis implemented in this study. An analysis of backstage politics in the Portuguese case under austerity points out that political parties are not mere supporters or sponsors of movements or unions, but rather they constitute active players in the protest arena. If their public front supports large protest events as a staging, in fact, they can be deeply enmeshed in the submerged networks that are preparing the event. They not only lend support but are also behind the scenes. This means that political parties may strategically leverage movements to further their own interests while maintaining a low profile. The Portuguese case, as discussed in this analysis, provides valuable insights for generating theories and developing new approaches to examine the role of political parties in protest arenas.

In comparison with the the literature, as a concept, backstage partyisation brings light to a processes that was not yet identified. Differently from the movement party, the nature of party interventions in the movement sphere is concealed rather than explicitly playing a double game. With such a concept, I show that there are "unseen" strategies behind closed doors that are not measurable by protest event analysis. In Portugal there was hardly the emergence of any movement-party as in other southern European countries, showing the more institutional nature of the process. In fact, that might have been the result of the strength that political parties exhibited in the protest sphere during the austerity period.

This intricate entanglement provides a fertile ground for exploring the dynamics of backstage partyisation and the politics of occupation, where political parties may not just influence but actively reshape contentious arenas. Contrasting with other European contexts where anti-austerity movements have often maintained a clearer distinction from political parties, the Portuguese experience shows a deeper integration, providing

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a productive case into how political parties can manoeuvrer within social movements. Despite the specific dynamics of the cycle of protest in Portugal and its outcomes, I would argue that the overall mechanism can be observable in other cases across Europe and other parts of the world, where parties play pivotal roles in movements. The fact that maybe such a mechanism is perhaps more pronounced in Portugal helps to observe and highlight it, and apply it in other contexts to explore variations into how political parties behave in the backstage, under what conditions, and for what purposes. As such, in the current context, we can go beyond left-wing parties and question in what ways populist radical right parties are employing similar strategies to disguise their action. The underlying dynamics of party involvement in social movements, often occurring behind the scenes, suggests that this approach could be applied across various cases, even those that differ in historical or socio-political context. This flexibility opens opportunities for comparative exploration of how established parties influence movements in different regions.

There are two issues that should be considered when discussing backstage partyisation: 1) to what extent resources are important when reconfiguring the protest arena; 2) why do radical left parties engage with social movements while concealing their presence? Such questions highlight both organisational aspects of the relation between parties and movements, as well as strategic and ideological issues of their action.

As discussed in the conceptual section, resources are crucial in the structuring of arenas, as a capacity to act and influence others, i.e., strategic action. If the Left Bloc entered the arena supporting the emergent movement, it quickly mobilised its second- and third-rank personnel to influence the formation of collective actors. Nonetheless, and from a relational reading, the weakness of social movement groups and the competition from other left-wing groups, led to the breakdown of the unstable alliance between these players. Following previously formulated arguments, as the movements did not generate momentum to build a strong network of groups and gather resources in Portugal, they ended up being surpassed by institutional players (Portos and Carvalho, 2022). As conflict arose, the BE moved from a strategy of influence to one of occupation, while bringing various resources to the constitution of a new collective agent. In line with Jaspers, the BE used its resources and position to make and remake the arena. The mobilisation of militants, logistics, media support and networks across the country was crucial in shaping the anti-austerity arena and in the QSLT throughout 2012 and 2013. As such, the mobilisation of these resources enabled the party to move as they pleased, to leave and re-enter the arena, and to re-arrange it.

Another important question then arises: why do parties adopt such a strategy of concealment? According to the literature, visible actions in the protest sphere are often aligned with strategic electoral incentives and objectives (Borbath and Hutter, 2021; Piccio, 2019). However, why would a party choose to participate without visibility? Several hypotheses can be considered. A proxy may ensure mass mobilisation without alienating voters and impart an aura of autonomy to the movement. Moreover, as demonstrated in the empirical section, controlling the message and preventing the spread of alternative narratives allows them to stave off competition from new parties. It is also noteworthy that the interviewees acknowledge the BE's efforts to create and sustain significant street mobilisation during a period of scant activity. Although this may seem puzzling, the explanation is deeply rooted in the party's history. Historically, the party has advocated for the creation of what it calls a "social majority" that unites a diverse array of social and political actors. By maintaining a semblance of autonomy, such broad mobilisation supports a large popular front against austerity, which manifests itself both on the streets and in parliament. Thus, their objectives are

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not solely electoral; they also seek social and political transformation.

As Palacios-Valladares points out "[s]ocial movement relations with parties are fraught with tension, leading to frequent shifts in movement attitudes toward parties" (Palacios-Valladares, 2016, 258). Political parties took over social movement repertoires during this cycle of protest. Despite the initial openness and collaboration in strategy associated with the politics of influence, tensions rose amongst multiple factions of the same party leading to their dismembering. In this sense, parties do not emerge solely as a sponsor (as in Borbath and Hutter, 2021), but they can actively shape mobilisation in the backstage. As such, we need to analyse and understand the role of agency, context, and interaction throughout cycles of protest. Put differently, this case study suggests that we need to analyse protest arenas beyond social movements. It is especially important to notice that political parties in the case under study were not simply riding the wave (Peña and Davies, 2017); instead, they were in many ways the wave. As such, we can only understand the protest cycle if we have a broader conception of the interactions among various players in the arena.

Further research should explore the role of political parties in protest arenas and social movements more broadly not only in phases of active contention but also throughout periods of quieting and latency. This suggestion implies a broad longitudinal study whereby one can study the development of historical configurations between actors, akin to Riley and Fernandez (2014). At a micro level, another possibility is to analyse the life stories of militants and activists not only to establish their trajectories like in the work of Fillieule and Neveu (2019), but also to analyse how networks evolved over time. Finally, it would be important to extend and apply the proposed conceptualisation beyond the case presented here, as movements can also play a role in political parties backstage (Butzlaff, 2024; Draege et al., 2017).

Acknowledgement(s)

This paper has benefited from the feedback of numerous people. I am particularly grateful to Tiago Moreira Ramalho, André Marinha, Peter Gardner, Vasco Ramos, Valentina Ausserladscheider, and Hugo Ferrinho Lopes for their insightful comments on earlier versions of the article. Preliminary versions of this work were presented at the SPARC seminar (ICS-ULisboa), the 28th International Conference of Europeanists, the 15th Conference of the European Sociological Association, and the Conference of the Research Group in Politics and Citizenship at Cies - Iscte. Finally, I extend my gratitude to Çetin Çelik, associate editor of European Societies, and the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable feedback, which greatly improved the article.

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