

Protest cycles and Democracy in Portugal, 2000-2019¹

Tiago Fernandes

(University Institute of Lisbon, Iscte)

Claudia Araújo

(University of Barcelona)

1

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Introduction

Since the global protest wave of the 1960s-1970s, the sphere of collective action became a common subsystem of modern democratic regimes, alongside conventional representative institutions, such as elections, parliaments or bodies of state-interest group consultation (e.g., pluralist or corporatist) (Dolenec, 2017; Dolenec et al. 2020; Ekiert and Kubik, 2001; Schmitter, 1981; Schmitter 1999). Democratic regimes have since come to accept practices such as demonstrations and strikes as legitimate and even desirable, and, although at varying levels, even to tolerate disruptive protest repertoires such as occupations. Furthermore, it has been recognized by both scholars and political actors that participation in street politics through protest is often aligned with conventional political participation, such as voting. Not only do participants in popular mobilisation tend to vote more frequently, but elections also function as an opportunity for social movements to draw attention to their claims. Both arenas have become mutually reinforcing, thus contributing to increasing citizens' civic competences and the legitimacy of democratic regimes (Tarrow, 2011; della Porta, 2013, pp. 57-59).

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Protest cycles can be considered forms of democratic practice, as they constitute moments when ordinary citizens influence governments' decisions, bring new issues and claims to the political forum, and create civic ties between citizens. Analysing protest patterns and cultures, and especially the extent to which they become institutionalized as a regular arena for citizens' political action, is thus a privileged way of assessing the consolidation and quality of democratic regimes (Ekiert and Kubik, 2001; Dolenec et al. 2020; Tarrow, 1990, 1995 and 2011). And if it is true that not all protest cycles deepen democracy, especially when they are characterized by the generalization of violence or carried out by ethnic, nationalist or fundamentalist movements, it is also difficult to conceive of a democratic regime without protest.

Protest and dissent have been an intrinsic part of Portuguese democracy since its inception, the Carnations Revolution of 1974. Transgressive and revolutionary forms of collective action during the transition were crucial in shaping democratic institutions and political culture, but its' legacy has been subject to varying interpretations. Some consider that Portugal became a low-quality democracy, where the euphoria of the revolution left no significant long-run impact and gave way to a disengaged citizenry and a weak civil society, mainly based on service provision (Hamman and Manuel 1999, Ferreira 2014, Prata 2017, Ramos Pinto 2013). Others consider that, in the long run, the revolution produced a highly inclusive and pro-egalitarian modern democratic system and political culture, rooted on a strong civil society (Fishman 2011 and 2019, Fernandes 2015, Fernandes and Branco 2017, Melo 2016 and 2017).

In this chapter, we contribute to this debate, through a comparative analysis of protest cycles in Portugal between 2000 and 2019 (on protest cycles, see McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, 2004, pp. 64-66). The period under analysis corresponds to what is traditionally called the neoliberal era (Hall and Lamont, 2013), whose most severe episode, the Great Recession (2010-2014), had a profound impact in the countries on the semi-periphery of the European economy (Portugal, Greece and Spain), generating huge waves of popular protest. But, contrary to existing studies, which analysed mainly the years of the recession itself (Carvalho 2018), this chapter looks at the Great Recession comparatively, both with the period immediately preceding it (2000-2009) and the subsequent years (2015-2019). This allows for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the nature and implications of the protest arena in twenty-first century Portugal.

This research was developed following the methodology of Protest Event Analysis (Hutter 2014) and is based on the database of the Disobedient Democracy project, which gathered quantitative information on protest cycles in four countries of the European semi-periphery (Portugal, Spain, Serbia and Croatia) for the years between 2000-2017 (<https://disdem.org/>; Dolenec 2017; Dolenec et al. 2019 and 2020; Romanos and Sádaba 2021). Further data collection was then conducted for the case of Portugal for the years 2018 and 2019. The data were taken from an analysis of all editions of the two main Portuguese daily newspapers, *Público* and *Diário de Notícias*². This database includes a significantly high number of protest events (12941, plus 197 occurrences in Portugal between 2018-2019). By applying this methodology and relying on such a comprehensive dataset, which allows for long-run longitudinal analysis, one can thus develop a far more rigorous and detailed study of Portuguese cycles of protest.

Protest patterns and their temporal variations were compared according to three major conceptual dimensions. The first refers to the magnitude and organisational complexity of popular mobilisation. Here, the number of protest events, volume of participants, type of organisers and alliance dynamics were analysed. These aspects allowed us to assess the extent to which protest has become a way of making politics that is widespread and commonly accepted by the population. Further, it also permits us to gauge the complexity and organisational development of the movements that support it. Secondly, we studied the cultural aspects of protest. Protest culture includes not only the types of claims and values being made in the public sphere, but also the repertoires of collective action, which are of particular importance, as they constitute implicit cultural conventions on admissible and imaginable protest behaviours. Societies vary widely in this dimension, which can, too, be considered as well an indicator of the quality of democracy, especially when protest is predominantly peaceful, even within the scope of disruptive actions such as occupations. Finally, we study the relationship between protest movements and the State and institutions in general, looking at aspects such as the preferred targets of popular mobilisation, police control and the extent to which negotiations between authorities and protest movements have taken place. This allowed us to assess the level of openness of the institutional system to protest, and, thus, reflect on the level of inclusion of the Portuguese democratic regime (Banaszak, 1996: 34-36;

² As of July 2019, *Diário de Notícias* became a weekly newspaper.

della Porta et al., 2018; Fishman, 2004, 2011 and 2019; Tarrow, 1995: 90-9; Tarrow, 2011; Tilly, 1986: 4-12).

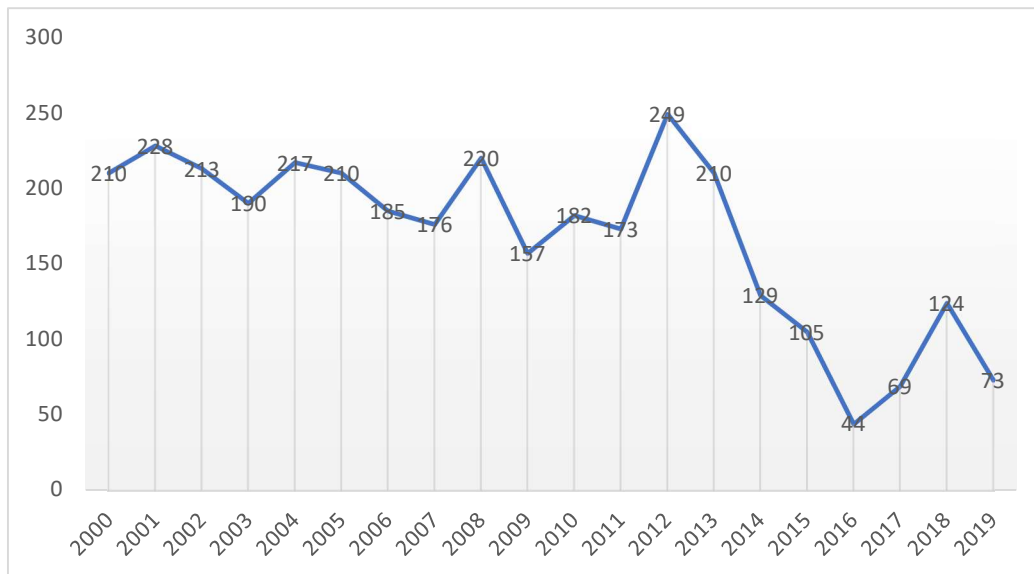
The dimension of protest: number of events and participants

4

An analysis of the number of protest events occurring per year (figure 1) shows that there have been three protest cycles between 2000 and 2019. The first cycle, between 2000 and 2009, is characterised by a stable average of 205.4 protest events per year, albeit exhibiting a slight decreasing tendency overall. The highest number of protest events was recorded in 2001 and 2008. 2001 recorded the second highest number of protest events in the 20 years analysed, resulting from the high mobilisation of high school and university students against reforms in the public education system, namely the significant increases in tuition fees at public universities, and of workers against the privatisation of public services and changes in the retirement age. In 2008, already on the eve of the Great Recession, the high number of occurrences recorded can be attributed to widespread contestation to government measures aiming at the consolidation of public finances in line with the European Union policies.

The second cycle corresponds to the anti-austerity mobilisation (2010-2014), with protest events reaching the peak for the whole 2000-2019 period in 2012 (249 occurrences), although recording a lower average of events (188.7 occurrences per year). Starting already in 2014, there was an unparalleled decline in popular mobilisation, which continued until 2016. A third cycle of widespread demobilisation started in 2015, showing an accentuated fall in protest events (averaging at 83 occurrences per year), despite a slight growth in 2018, when the highest number of occurrences of the cycle was recorded, mainly due to the mobilisation of professionals of state-run sectors like nurses and teachers.

Figure 1: Protest events per year

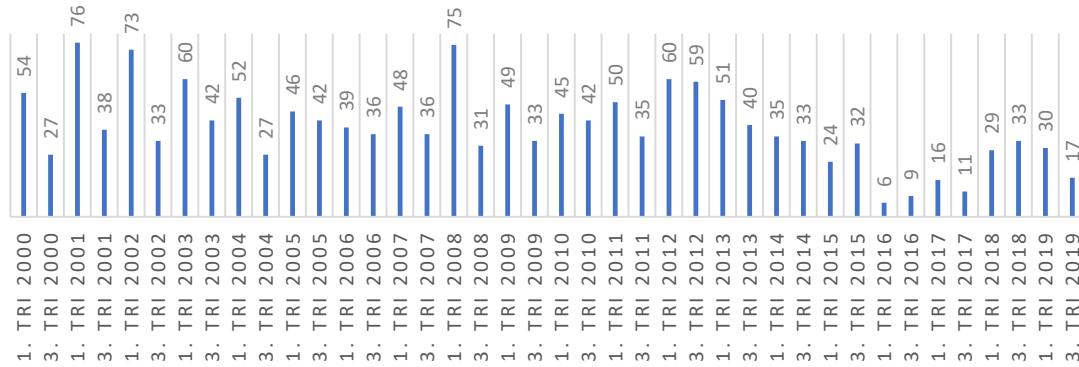


(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

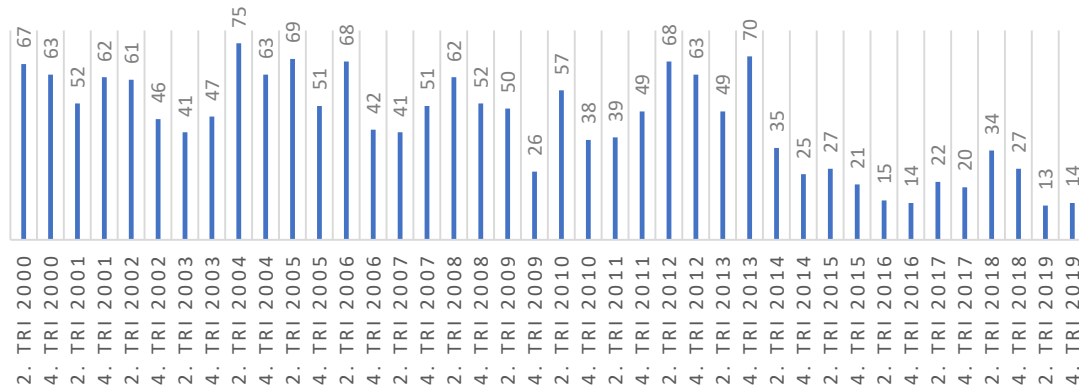
Figure 2 allows for a more detailed analysis as it looks at protest events distribution by trimesters. In the first protest cycle, mobilisation starts declining already in the second half of 2008, but it was in the last semester of 2009 that the lowest number of protest events was recorded. During this first cycle, there are several protest peaks. The first was in early 2001, marked by the mobilisation of students, parents and teachers (30% of all protest events); in early 2002, private companies' employees demonstrated for labour rights and against dismissals and unemployment (35% of all protest events); in the second trimester of 2004 there was an upsurge in mobilisation by public servants and public transportation workers; and finally, early 2008 was a period of rising popular resistance to governmental measures that had led to the closing of small local hospitals and emergency rooms throughout the country and to the reform of the public educational system (52%).

Figure 2. Protest events per trimester

PROTEST EVENTS I-III TRIMESTERS 2000-2019



PROTEST EVENTS II-IV TRIMESTERS 2000-2019



(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

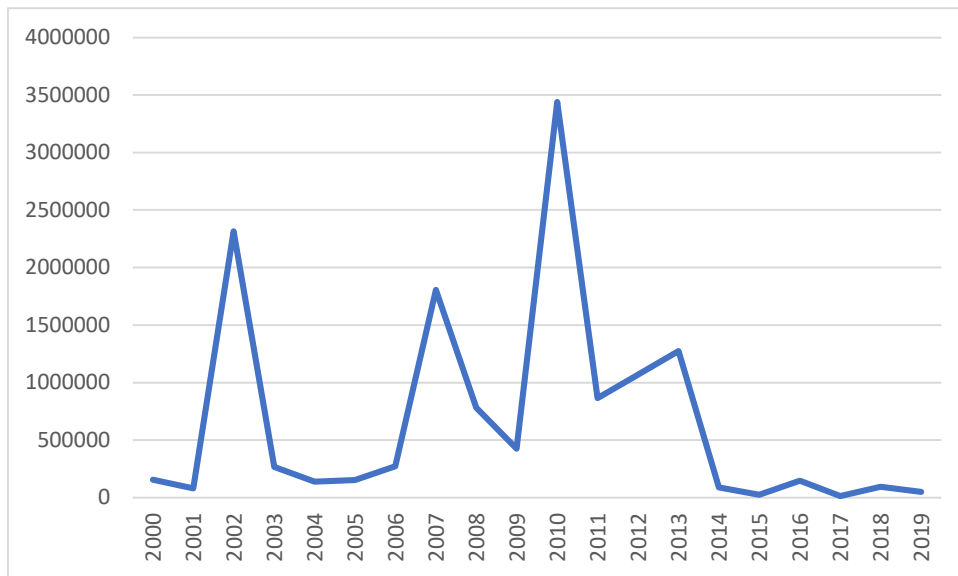
As mentioned above, the anti-austerity protest cycle (mid-2009 – first half of 2014), reached its highest mobilisation during the years of 2012 and 2013, when labour unions and citizens initiatives took to the streets, often in alliance with left wing political parties, to repeatedly protest against austerity measures and demand the government's resignation. An accentuated declining tendency is clear from 2014 onwards, with its lowest points in the first and third trimester of 2016. There is, however, some growth in mobilisation in 2018 and during the first semester of 2019, mainly because of the rise of mobilisation concerning labour rights, but also some civil rights related protest (women's, anti-racism and migrants'), which represent about 30% of all protest events.

A more nuanced picture can be drawn when considering the number of participants in protest events between 2000-2019 (figure 3). In the first protest cycle there are two clear peaks, 2002 and 2007. These year's record the second and third highest

popular participation in popular dissent, and are only surpassed by 2010, already during the anti-austerity mobilisation. 2002 saw extensive mobilisation against planned cuts in labour and education, bringing together workers, public servants, students and activists, and culminating in a general strike in December with reported 1.7 million participants. In 2007, workers already started mobilising against precarity – 1.4 million people in a general strike in late May – and citizens came together to demonstrate under the slogan “*For a Social Europe*” on two occasions (totalling 220.000 participants), marking the Portuguese presidency of the Council of the European Union. Noteworthy is the fact that, in terms of popular participation in protest events, the highest number was in 2010, still before the implementation of the austerity package negotiated by the Portuguese authorities and the troika of lenders, which would take place only in the second semester of 2011. The data, thus, clearly shows that strong resistance to austerity began before the troika memorandum, still in the last phase of the socialist government led by PM José Sócrates.

2012 and 2013 were also years of high popular participation in protest events, occurring during the implementation of the austerity memorandum and under the new right-wing governmental coalition of PSD-CDS, led by PM Pedro Passos Coelho. Still, participation was significantly lower than in 2007 and 2010. After 2014, participation in protest event declines significantly, reaching the lowest levels of the whole 2000-2019 series. In 2015, in the immediate aftermath of the anti-austerity protest cycle, less than 25000 people engaged in protest, and 2017 exhibits the lowest participation recorded, with less than 15000 people reported to have participated in protest events. While the peaks in 2002 and 2007 are connected to the high mobilisation events described above, popular participation in anti-austerity mobilisation will be addressed in more detail in the following sections.

Figure 3: Number of participants



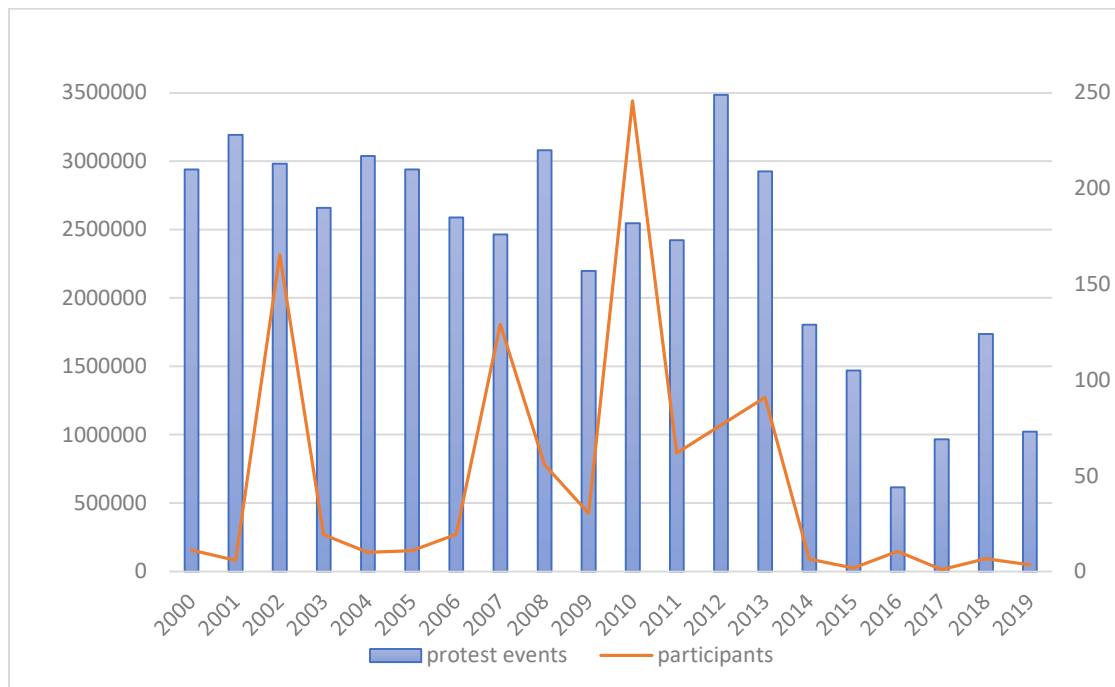
(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

Combining number of events and number of participants (figure 4), one arrives at a more nuanced picture of the intensity of protest in Portugal for the period 2000-2019. In the first cycle of protest (2000-2009), the number of occurrences is consistently high and remains relatively constant, with two clear peaks in participation in 2002 and 2007, and the lowest participation level recorded in 2001, a year marked by very low worker mobilisation. In fact, it was pupils demonstrating against curriculum reform (15200 participants) and war veterans demanding early retirement (15000 participants) who engaged in the two biggest protest events in that year.

During the anti-austerity protest cycle, we observe the highest peak for the whole period both in number of participants (2010) and in number of events (2012). We can then say that the Great Recession constitutes a milestone in popular mobilisation, not only due to the highest number of protest events recorded in 2012, but also because the average number of participants per year was the highest during this cycle (1347695 people per year between 2010-2014, against 710428 in the first protest cycle, and a much lower figure – 65671 – between 2015-2019). Nonetheless, after 2013, participation declines substantially, even as the number of events rises. This can be attributed to the organisational capacity of citizens initiatives which had been fundamental in mobilising against austerity already from 2011 onwards, notably *Geração à Rasca* (GaR) and, from 2012, *Que Se Lixe a Troika* (QSLT). This type of organisations was responsible for 22% to 37% of protest events in the years 2010-2013. In particular, QSLT was at the forefront of the mobilisation resisting the government proposal to increase workers contribution to

social security (TSU, the *single social tax*), which the Prime Minister, Pedro Passos Coelho, announced in September 2012, on the eve of a QSLT national demonstration. This announcement is likely to have brought more people to the streets and, the fact that the government reversed the decision and suspended the measure became one of the most victories of anti-austerity mobilisation, bringing further media attention to QSLT, that celebrated it as a victory of street politics. Nonetheless, these organisations start demobilising already at the end of 2013, with QSLT being present in only one protest event in 2014.

Figure 4. Number of protest events and participants



(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

As of 2014, there is a significant decrease both in popular participation and in protest events, which continues during the last protest cycle (2015-2019). This period shows a strong departure from the patterns of protest established since 2000, when medium to high participation levels and number of events tend to combine. Still, although there seems to be a slight recovery in number of protest events in the years 2018 and 2019, the number of participants remains conspicuously low.

One can also correlate the cycles of protest with the type of government. Up until 2014, both high and low peaks in popular mobilisation and in number of protest events

have occurred equally during centre-right and centre-left governments. Mobilisation cycles in the country, then, appear to be independent of the type of government, which could point to the existence of a civil society that is disconnected from the main parties of the right (PSD) and of the left (PS), and highlights continuities in policy-making between governments of both parties, which tend to generate tension and antagonism with civil society in a similar fashion. In fact, for the period analysed here, a significant part of mobilisation can be linked to the parties further to the left of the political spectrum, particularly the PCP's (the Portuguese Communist Party) influence over the main labour union, the CGTP, and the Left Bloc (BE)'s connection with New Social Movements. The fact that there is an unprecedented decline in protest since the 2015 elections, in which both the Communist Party and the Left Bloc acquired significant influence over the minority socialist government's policies, appears to confirm this fact.

Main demands in protest

Labour rights stand clearly as the most important demand uttered in protest events in Portugal between 2000 and 2019 (figure 5). In a majority of years (2000 to 2005, 2009-2010, and from 2015 onwards), labour rights related demands were present in over 30% of protest events, thereby showing the important role of labour unions in the Portuguese public and political sphere. In fact, the last few years of the series exhibit a sharp rise in this type of demands, as labour related issues were expressed in 51% of all protest events in 2018 and in 50% in 2019. This rise can be explained by more open institutional opportunities, as the new socialist minority government (known as "*Geringonça*", or Contraption), formed in 2015, established a parliamentary alliance with the PCP and the BE. This gave a stronger impetus to unions and workers in general to step out onto the streets and attempt to influence politics. At the same time, it coincides with the retreat of non-traditional protest actors, such as the anti-austerity citizen coalitions, following their heavy involvement in the 2010-2014 protest cycle. Interestingly, we witness a decline in labour rights demands during the anti-austerity protest cycle. Although labour remained a central concern in popular mobilisation, it was, during these years, expressed in more varied demands, such as unemployment, precarity and in resistance to specific

laws/policies, in particular, the proposed increased in the TSU, as well as resistance to price increases of certain commodities.

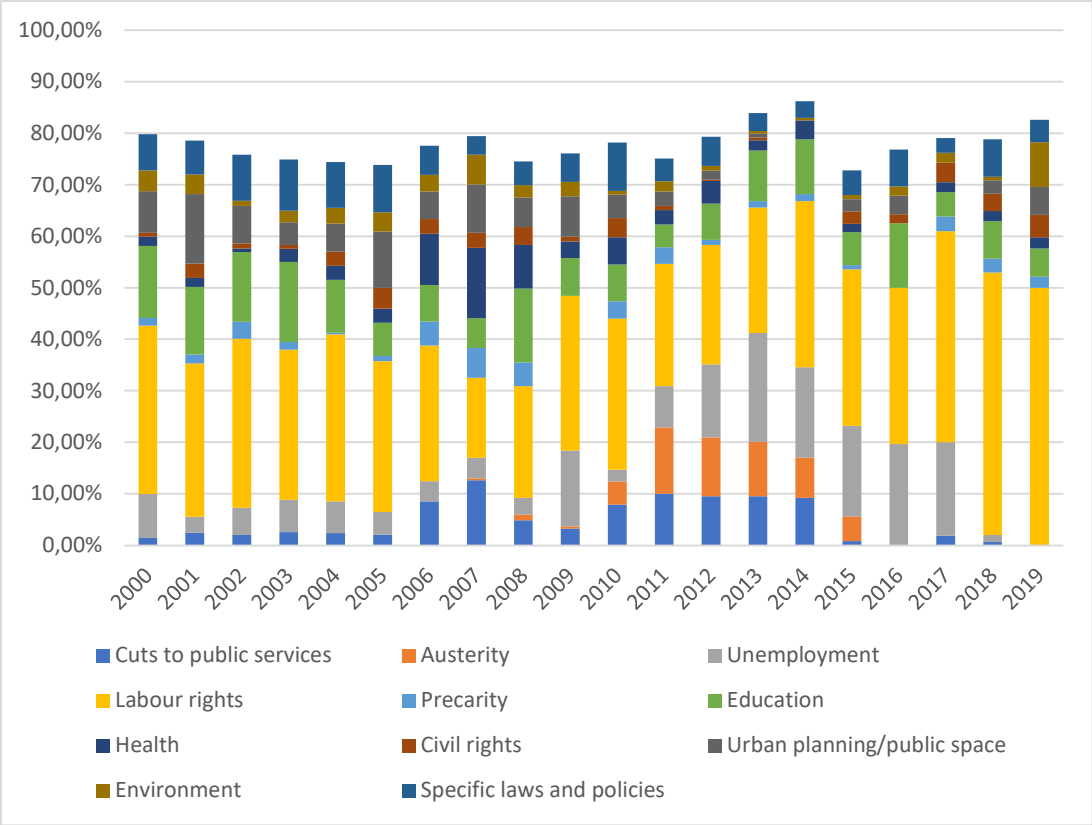
The second most important demands relate to education. These are particularly present in the first protest cycle, reaching their peak in 2003, when they represented 15.5% of all claims. This is related to resistance, in the first few years considered here, by public university students to increases in tuition fees and to high school students' resistance to the introduction of 90 minutes classes and demands for the introduction of sex-ed in the curricula. In addition, both high school and university students mobilise across the board to complain about the poor quality or absence of infrastructures, a demand that other protest actors, such as teachers and family members, adhere to, and often support teachers' protest events. This type of demands disappears from the public sphere during the anti-austerity protest cycle, to resurge afterwards (10.6% in 2014 and 12.6% in 2016).

Unemployment is the third most important claim, with a steep rise during the anti-austerity cycle, growing from 14.8% in 2009 to 21.4% in 2013, but it is actually between 2014 and 2017 that claims related to unemployment were more important (17.5% in 2014, 17.6% in 2015, 19.6% in 2016 and 18.1% in 2017), only to virtually disappear in the last two years of the series. This is unsurprising, given that unemployment rates rose sharply during the Great Recession, a development frequently attributed by protesters to the government willingness to surpass the harsh policies imposed by the Troika. Other important interrelated claims are, of, course, austerity, which is only relevant between 2010 and 2014 (oscillating between 4.5% in 2010 and 11.5% in 2012), therefore before and immediately after the start of the Troika program; and precarity, present throughout the whole period, but peaking between 2006 and 2008 (4.6% to 5.8%), 2010 and 2011 (around 3.3%) and the last three years, when it was a complaint uttered in 2 to 3% of the protest events.

On top of education, demands related to state service provision were also a significant reason why citizens demonstrated. For instance, cuts to public services are an important claim articulated in protest, with peaks in 2006 (8.5% of protest events) and 2007 (12.6%), following the reform of the national health system that resulted in the closing of smaller hospitals and 24 hours emergency rooms across the country. But this claim was also significant during the anti-austerity protest cycle (between 7.8% and 9.2% in 2010-2014), in the aftermath of the cuts to public care facilities for the elderly and

children. Often these are articulated with protest related to education and health, the latter also constituting an important claim, specifically between 2006 and 2008 (between 8.4% and 13.7% of all protest events).

Figure 5. Main demands expressed in protest events



(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

It is worth adding, however, that protest related to the provision and the quality of public services – and specifically in education and health – were often articulated in protest events that were labour related, in particular by public servants employed in these sectors. Finally, resistance to cuts to public services were already significant in the last years of the first protest cycle, during the second socialist government of José Sócrates (2009-2011), therefore reflecting already growing tensions between civil society and the state that would mount steadfastly during the following cycle of austerity.

In sum, class issues and socio-economic categories in popular mobilisation, as well as state policies relating to labour (affecting not only public servants, but also private companies' employees), are highly important in Portuguese protest. This finding also

lends support to previous work that shows that collective action continues to be closely linked to labour organisations, a lasting legacy of the revolution of 1974 (Accornero and Ramos Pinto, 2015; Duran-Munoz 2000; Fernandes, 2015 and 2017).

Although to a smaller degree, Portuguese citizens have also engaged in protests concerning the quality of the public space, noticeably in the first and third protest cycles, peaking in 2001 (13.5% of protest events) and in 2005 and 2007 (10.9% and 9.4%), mainly having to do with the quality of public infrastructures (roads, garbage collection and incineration, public safety, environment). This type of claims returned to the public sphere after the Great Depression, albeit with less intensity, and often coupled with environmental protests, a type of protest that constitutes the second most important claim in 2019 (8.7%). In this year, young people, activists and regular citizens participated in the global mobilisation organised by newly created citizens initiatives, such as Extinction Rebellion Portugal and Zero Waste Lab, protesting the inaction of governments and international institutions on the climate emergency. In the last and most participated demonstration, in September 2019, a number of these organisations convened the protest in alliance with the political party in the government (PS), the Left Bloc, the PSD and PAN – People–Animals–Nature party, a new party which had gained parliamentary representation in the 2015 election and increased it in 2019.

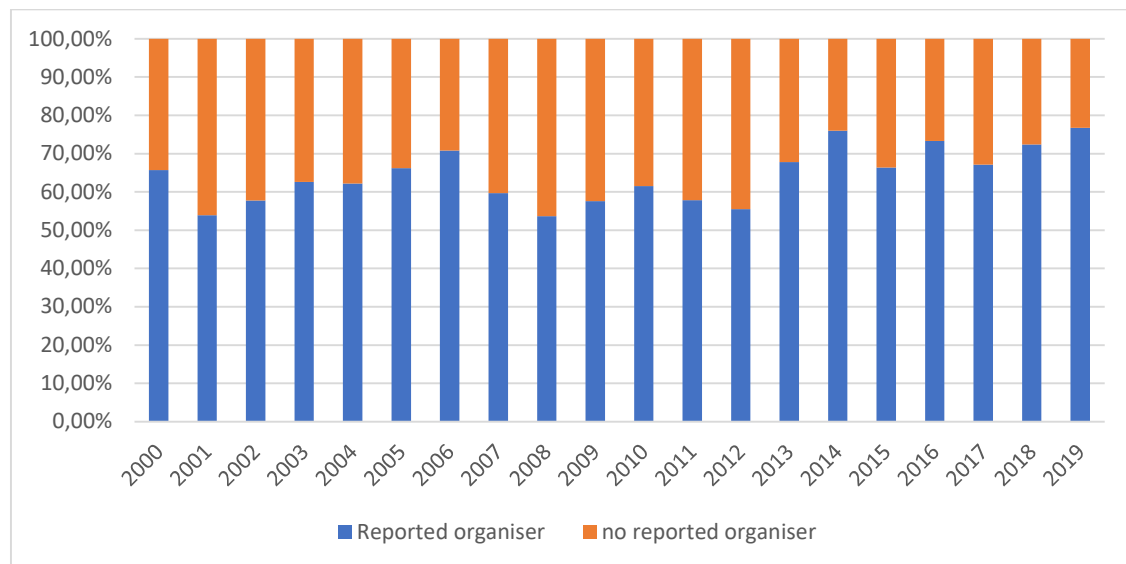
Finally, concerns related to civil rights have been expressed rather regularly in the Portuguese public sphere, but, interestingly, they were virtually absent from protest events during the anti-austerity protest cycle, achieving their lowest expressions ever in 2012 (0.2%) and in 2014 (inexistent). This points to what appears to be an interesting characteristic of Portuguese anti-austerity resistance, where claims related to the quality of democracy or to human or democratic rights were virtually absent from the public sphere, in contrast to the cases of Spain or Greece (Fernandes et al. 2020; Fernandes et al. 2021; Romanos and Sábada, forthcoming; Karyotis and Rüdig 2017).

The organisers of protest

In Portugal, between 2000 and 2019, 62.6% of protest events have a reported organiser. The fact that almost two thirds of popular mobilisation are reported to have

been called by known organisations, and not by spontaneous or informal groups, attests to the strong organisational basis of dissent in the country. However, when considering the yearly evolution, a more nuanced picture arises. Although the percentage of protest events with a reported organiser is rather stable, oscillating between 53.6% in 2008 and 76.7% in the last year of the series, it is normally in the years of more mobilisation that more events without an organiser occurred (46.1% in 2001, 42.3% in 2002, 46.3% in 2008, followed by 42.4% in the following year). Moreover, it was during the peak of the anti-austerity protest cycle that a significant number of protest events did not have a reported organiser (42.2% in 2011 and 44.5% in 2012). This fact constitutes an indicator that, although most protest was the work of organised and coalesced new and old social movement, some degree of informality was still present during this protest cycle. It is during the third protest cycle that less protest events with no reported organiser are reported, running along lower number of events, which could reflect the retreat of autonomous citizens initiatives from the Portuguese public sphere after the great recession.

Figure 6: Reported organiser in protest events



(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

Labour unions are the most important organiser of collective action (figure 7), being responsible for 50.2% of all protest events with a reported organiser. The second most important mobiliser are citizens initiatives (22.1%). Together, these are responsible for over 70% of all protest events with a reported organiser in the country in this 20 years

period, a sign that Portuguese civil society, at least when considering its traditional actors, remains strong, institutionalized and a representative of workers, popular classes and common citizens' interests. Student movements (both high school and university) are the third organiser of protest, albeit being responsible for a much lower percentage of events (6.8%). Still, this is also a sign of a healthy civil society and demonstrates early political socialization and involvement of the Portuguese youth. In addition, professional organisations called 5.1% of protest events and political parties were responsible for 3.3% of all occurrences.

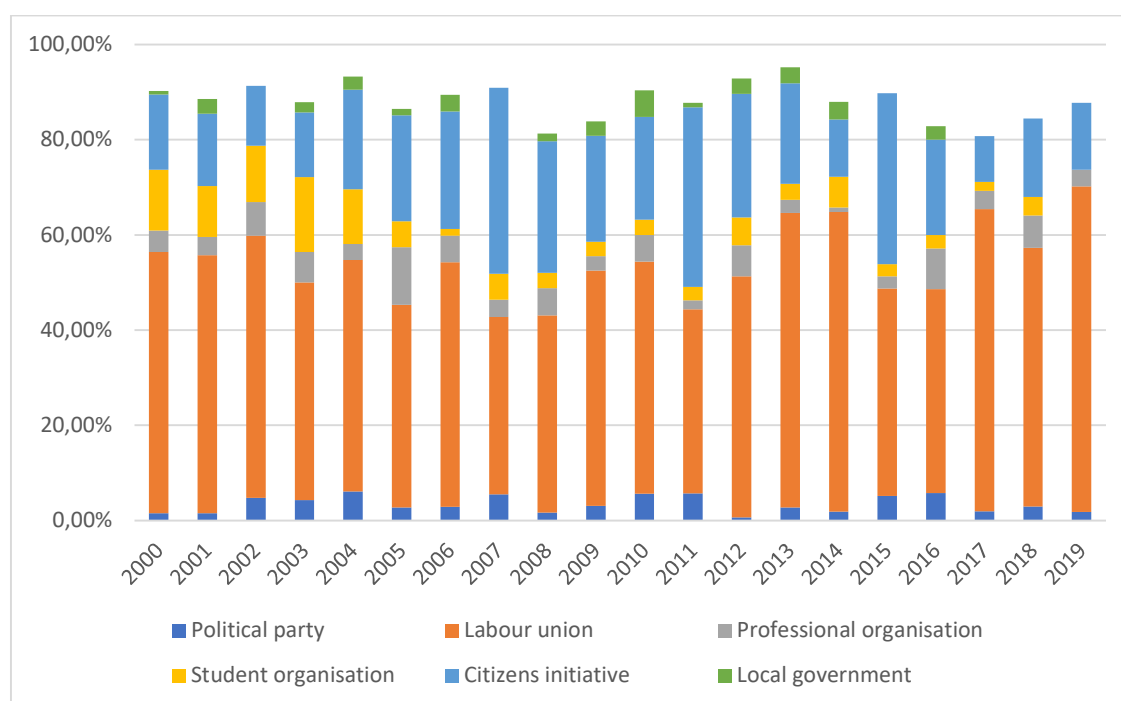
Throughout all protest cycles, labour unions remained an important organiser of protest in the country, but they were particularly active between 2000 and 2002, when they convened almost 55% of all protest events, and, most importantly, at the height of the anti-austerity dissent, organising over 60% of protest events in 2013-2014, and 50% in 2012. Interestingly, after the austerity cycle, labour unions' importance in collective action grows even more, being the organisers of 63.5% of protest events in 2017, 54.4% in 2018 and 68.4% in 2019. This fact could be explained by a political opportunity type of argument: the socialist government that took over office in 2015 ruled in an informal parliamentary coalition with the radical left (communist party and left bloc), thereby acquiring the image of a pro-labour coalition, which, in turn, stimulated unions to mount even more pressure and demands to the government.

Citizen's initiatives were also present in all three protest cycles, but especially so in the years 2006-2008. Their peak was in 2007, when they were responsible for 39.1% of protest events with a reported organiser (and 27.6% in 2008). These were mobilizations against the government's decision to close down local public services, particularly in health provision. Citizen's initiatives were also a significant player in the anti-austerity protest cycle, being present as the reported organiser of 37.8% of all protest events in 2011 and of 25.8% in 2012. Undoubtedly, this was the result of the mobilising ability of the recently formed citizen movements' platforms, particularly *Geração à Rasca* and *Que Se Lixe a Troika* (Accornero and Ramos Pinto, 2015; della Porta et al., 2017; Fernandes, 2017 and 2018), with other organisations also coalescing in protest organising, like newly formed pensioners movements and other platforms like, *E o povo, pá? / What about the people, hein?*, *Precários Inflexíveis / Inflexible Precariat*, *Democracia Verdadeira Já! / Real Democracy Now!* or *Movimento 12 de Março / 12 March Movement*. At the same

time, during this protest cycle, more segmented forms of activism declined (civic rights organisations, feminist, migrant or LGBTIQ+).

Citizen's initiatives have retreated from the public sphere in the last period of our analysis, 2015-2019, the exception being that first year, when they were responsible for 35.9% of all protest events with a reported organiser. These were mainly led by organisations of customers defrauded by banks, namely the extinct *Banco Espírito Santo* and the subsequent sale of *Novo Banco*, thereby carrying over claims from the anti-austerity protest cycle.

Figure 7. Main protest organisers



(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

Student organisations were particularly relevant in the organisation of protest during the first cycle. This was especially evident between 2000 and 2004, when they were responsible for over 10% of protest events each year, with a peak in 2003, when this type of organisations called 15.7% of protest occurrences. Their presence in the streets declined in the following years, only to have a slight resurgence in 2014. While commitment to organising protest events in the first few years of century can be attributed to the reasons already expressed above, the retraction of these type of organisations from

the public sphere in the second and third protest cycle is a little puzzling. Still, during the anti-austerity cycle, it was clear that young people were actively participating in collective action, as part of the citizens initiatives that called some of the biggest demonstrations (*Geração à Rasca* was the spontaneous brainchild of three university students).

One can consider, then, that students' scholarly identity was irrelevant to their participation in the second protest cycle, where the vast majority of protesters simply identified as citizens. It can also be said that the organisational experience acquired by student leaders in the first few years of the century could have contributed positively to their participation in the organisation of protest during the Great Recession. If that is the case, it constitutes a sign of a healthy civil society, engaging citizens for open political participation, albeit informal, from a young age. Moreover, it seems that students continue to be politically engaged, although acting outside their school/university affiliation, expressing demands in the public sphere that transcend education. This seems to be the case of one of the biggest protest events recorded in the last year of our analysis, the Climate Strike of 2019.

Another relevant organiser of popular mobilisation across protest cycles are professional organisations. Their most active years were 2002 (responsible for 7.1% of all protest events with a reported organiser), 2005 (12.2%), 2012 (6.5%) and, finally, 2016 and 2018 (8.6% and 6.8%). Overall, most of these organisations are those of the self-employed or entrepreneurs, reflecting the structure of the Portuguese economy, composed mainly of small businesses, but other professional categories such as firefighters or workers of the judiciary sector were also present.

Political parties do not emerge as a significant organiser of protest events. Still, radical left parties were responsible for 6.1% of all events with a reported organiser in 2004 (relating to civil rights, like the depenalisation of abortion, and condemning the government's decision to support the US invasion of Iraq), whereas in 2007 (5.5%) it was with right wing parties demonstrating against the depenalisation of abortion and left-wing parties pushing in the opposite direction. In 2010, 2011 and 2015 (5.5%-5.6%) protests by the radical left were directed against austerity and its' consequences. Finally, in 2016 (5.7%) there were only two protest events, one organised by the Madeira PCP against the local government and another organised by the extreme right PNR – Partido Nacional Renovador / *National Renovation Party* against immigration.

Nonetheless, political parties remained active through their role as allies of collective action, as we show in the following section. The same can be said about local governments, that acted as organisers of protest throughout most of the period, reaching their highest expression during the anti-austerity cycle (3.3% of protest events in 2009, 5.6% in 2010, 3.3% in 2010, 3.4% in 2012 and 3.7% in 2013). However, the claims uttered in local government-led protest do not vary across protest cycles, as they relate mainly to the closure of public services and to demands for better infrastructures at the local level, like roads, garbage collection and environmental protection.

Overall, our data confirms the importance of traditional mass organisations for collective action in Portugal. Labour unions show no sign of decline, as it is clear that they maintain a strong mobilisation capacity, having organised 70% of all protest events with over 10000 participants, with a particularly relevant role by the main union confederation, CGTP. From the point of view of protest, we are led to conclude that the strength of unions exceeds the number of their affiliates. Furthermore, it was also common for cooperation between “old” (unions) and “new” (citizens) movements to occur during the highest period of contention in Portugal (Fernandes 2017).

Citizens’ initiatives were also significant actors during the whole 2000-2019 period, especially during the anti-austerity protest cycle. They were responsible for a significant share of all protest with a reported organiser, which constitutes quite a striking finding, worthy of further exploration. Their importance oscillates between 9.6% in 2017 (the year of lower mobilisation) and 39% in 2007, right before the beginning of the anti-austerity protest cycle. Inversely, identity-based movements have not been able to engage a significant number of people in protest events.

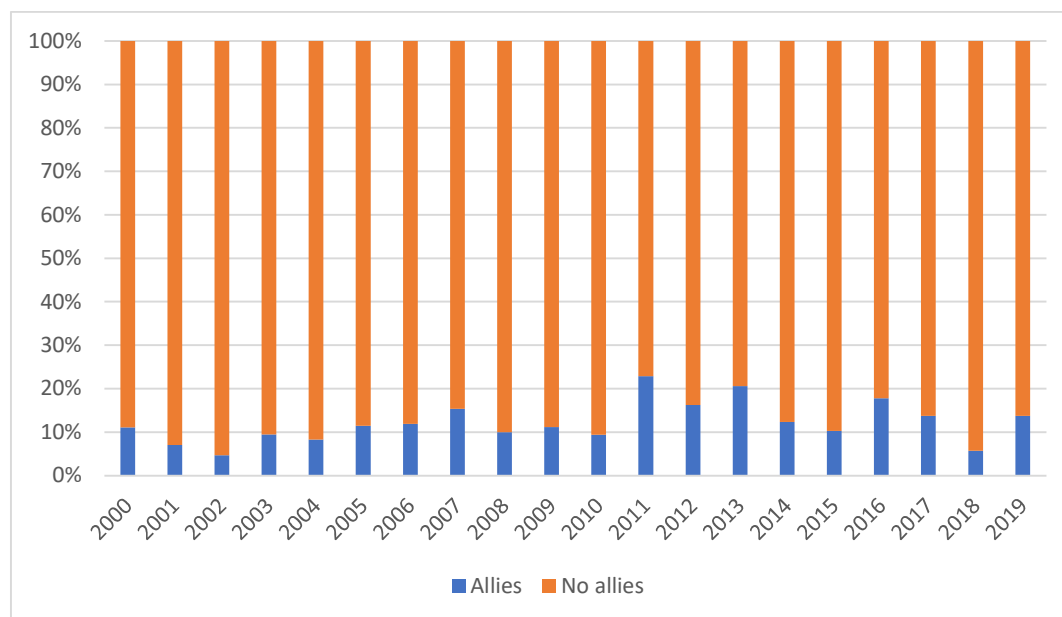
The allies of protest

The availability of allies is crucial for the emergency and impact of social movements, as they provide resources for sustaining collective action, but also political recognition and moral legitimacy (Goodwin, 2012, pp. 291-292). Moreover, the formation of coalitions and the joint organisation of protest campaigns is also an indicator of the institutionalization of the protest arena and of the autonomy of social movements.

In Portugal, most protest events are convened by one single organisation, and a substantial part of popular mobilisation is not the result of the formation of alliances between different protest actors, or different types of movements and mass organisations (figure 8).

However, this overall trend changed slightly during the second cycle of protest, as a higher percentage of alliances were reported between 2011 and 2013 (16.5%, 20.2% and 12.3%), the peak values recorded in the series. This trend of growing alliance-building continues in the third cycle of protest, particularly in 2016 (17.8%) and 2017 (13.7%), although these represent much less protest events than in the previous protest cycles.

Figure 8. Presence of allies in protest events

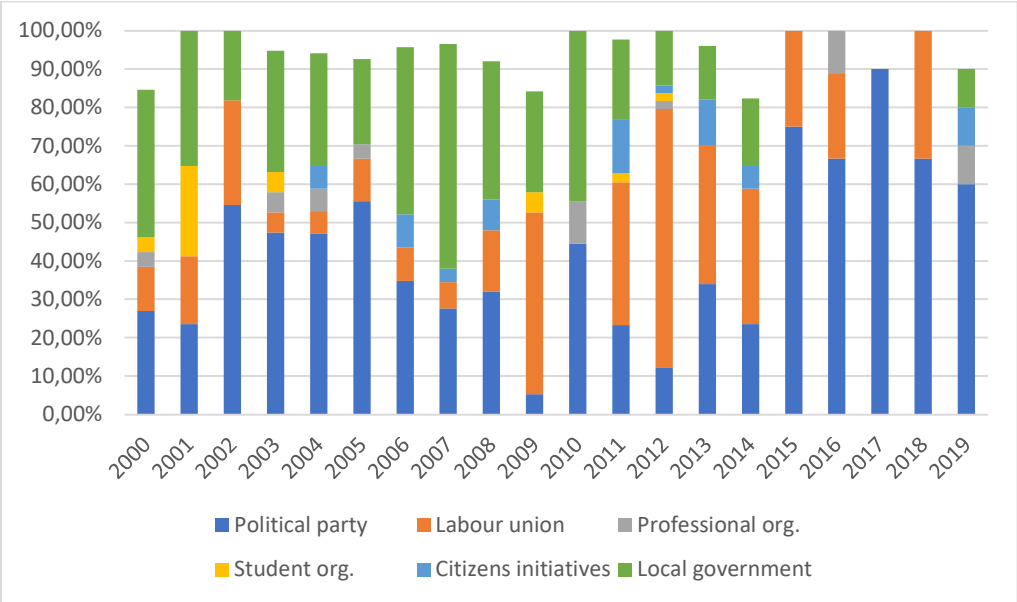


(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

Political parties, local governments and labour unions are the most frequent allies of popular mobilisation, a fact which, again, reveals the importance of mass political organisations in Portugal, as well as a relevant degree of institutional and party openness to protest (figure 9). However, these organisations take different roles in each cycle of protest. Political parties were, overall, a more frequent ally of street politics during the first protest cycle, particularly between 2002 and 2005. They were also a significant allied

force during the anti-austerity mobilisation, specifically at its very beginning (44.4% in 2010), but, interestingly, their presence declined at the height of the protest cycle (23.7% in 2011, 12% in 2012 and 34.7% in 2013). It is however, in the third protest cycle that political parties emerge as the most important ally of protest (75% in 2015 and in 2016, 90% in 2017, 66.7% in 2018 and 60% in 2019). It is, therefore, in the post-austerity cycle, that political parties are more present as allies in street politics, something which can be attributed, again, to the opportunities generated by the left-wing coalition *Geringonça* government, stimulating the mobilisation potential of the political parties of the radical left, which consider the new political context more propitious to having the demands and interests of their constituents satisfied.

Figure 9. Main allies



(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

Local governments are the second most important ally of protest between 2000 and 2019, and labour unions come at a very close third. Local governments are particularly relevant in the first protest cycle, when their presence was vastly more important than that of labour unions as allies of popular mobilisation. In 2000, they backed protesters in 38.5% of all events with a reported ally, in 2006, 43.5%, in 2007, 58.6%, and 36% in 2008, thereby playing a very important role in supporting protest events against the extinction of public services.

In the second protest cycle, local governments' presence in protest events gradually declines (from 44.4% in 2010 to 17.7% in 2014) and they virtually retreat from street politics in the third protest cycle. This is an interesting finding, particularly when considered together with the importance of local governments as organisers of protest. Local governments do, in fact, engage in informal political action, often against higher levels of government and irrespectively of political alignment. But they seem to have gradually retreated from the public sphere, standing less and less in alliance with their constituencies. As this retreat started already during the Great Recession, when 1168 local governments were extinguished and their budgets suffered significant cuts, one could argue that this policy reduced local governments capacity for political action and mobilisation, and might have impaired their linkages with the population.

Labour unions' presence in protest events as allies follows a different trajectory. In the first protest cycle, their presence was particularly strong in 2001 (17.7%) and 2002 (27.3%), retreating from alliance building in the following years. It is, however, in the pre-austerity years and during the anti-austerity cycle that labour unions emerge as the most important ally of street politics. They were the reported ally in 47.4% of protest events in 2009 and, as of 2011, they gradually became the most important ally (37.2% of occurrences in 2011, 66% in 2012, 36.7% in 2013 and 35.3% in 2014). In the aftermath of this very intense protest cycle, and although labour unions remain the most important organiser of protest, this legacy of alliance building does not seem to have survived, the exception being 2018, when they were present in 33.3% of all protest events with a reported ally.

Citizen's initiatives also act as relevant allies of protest, especially in the anti-austerity cycle of protest, with a peak in 2011 (14%) and 2013 (12.2%). Student organisations, inversely, have their peak in 2001 (23.5%), but seem to have retreated since then from making alliances with other social movements.

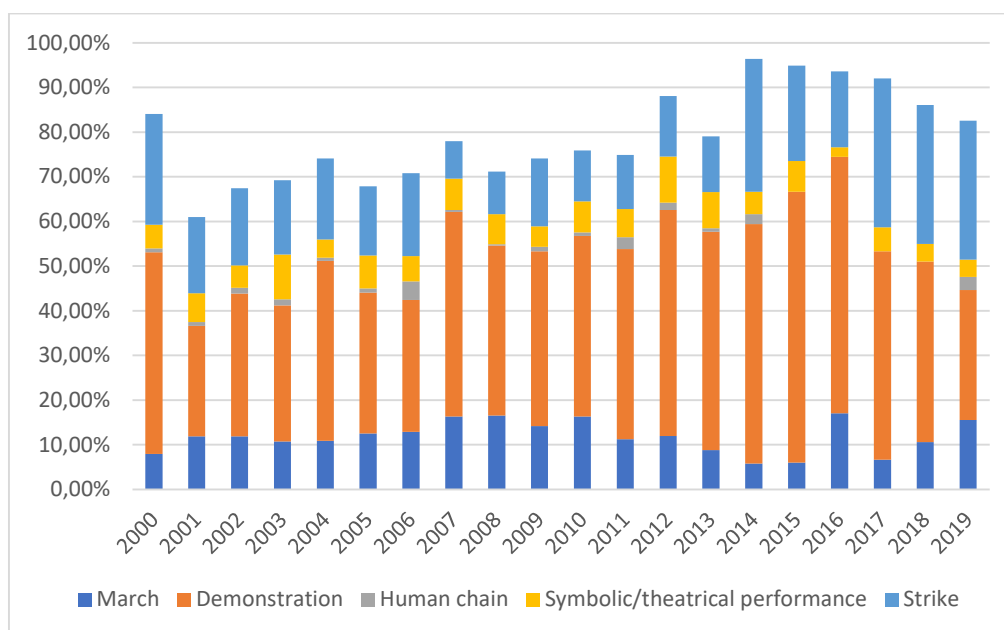
Overall, our findings are in line with previous research on the anti-austerity protest cycle, showing the importance of broad and cohesive coalitions with the ability to act at the national level and in articulation with labour unions and leftist parties (della Porta 2017, Fernandes 2017, Lima and Artiles 2018, della Porta et al. 2018). We will continue to address the issue of protest legitimacy in the next section.

The repertoires of protest

22

Between 2000 and 2019, the repertoires of mass protest in Portugal are mostly traditional, as demonstrations, strikes and marches account for almost 70% of all protest events (figure 10). Demonstrations are the most important repertoire, although displaying a rather uneven evolution – they are the most widely used protest form in all protest cycles, oscillating between 24.7% of all repertoires in 2001 and 60.7% in 2015. In 12 years out of the 20 analysed here, demonstrations account for over 40% of all protest methods (2000, 2004, 2007, and 2010 to 2018), and for over 50% at the end of the anti-austerity protest cycle (50.3% in 2012 and 53.6% in 2014). It is, however, in the last cycle considered here (2015-2019) that demonstrations reach their peak, at 60.7% in 2015 and 57.5% in 2016.

Figure 10. Main repertoires of protest



(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

Strikes are the second most important form of protest, although showing variations. Overall, they oscillate between 8.4% in 2007 and 33.3% in 2017. During the first and second protest cycles, they are less prominent, with the exception of 2000, when they accounted for 24.8% of all protest repertoires, and of 2014, when they represented

29,7% of all protest repertoires. In the other years of the anti-austerity protest cycle (2010-2013), though, they oscillate between 11.4% and 13.6% of all protest repertoires. Strikes appear again in full force in the protest sphere in the last years considered here, lingering above 30% between 2017 and 2019. It would appear, then, that strikes are a preferred repertoire in times of economic recovery and when left wing governments are in power, which could be attributed to a greater sense of job and financial security, as well as to greater perceived openness to labour demands and interests attributed to left wing governments – particularly when they are in informal coalitions with the Communist party and the Left Bloc.

The third most important protest method – marches – has a somewhat similar evolution to strikes (and often occur simultaneously), with the exception of 2000, when they represent 8% of all repertoires, one of the lowest values. It is in the pre-austerity years that marches rise to over 16% (16.3% in 2007 and 16.5% in 2008), but they are also an important protest method in 2012 (16.3%), gradually declining in the following years and reaching their lowest value between 2014 and 2015 (less than 6%). Preference for this protest repertoire seems to have risen again in the last protest cycle, as marches account for 17% of all protest methods in 2016 (the same value as strikes) and 15.5% in 2019.

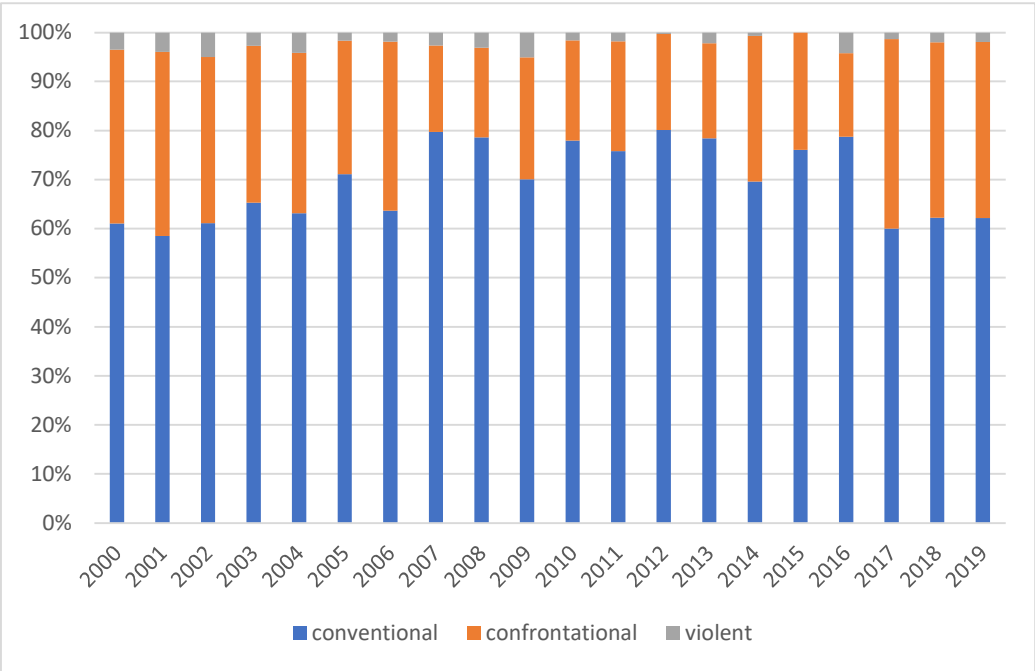
It is interesting to notice the evolution of the most creative protest method, theatrical or symbolic performances, which constitute the fourth most important protest repertoire. This is a particularly important protest repertoire in the anti-austerity protest cycle (reaching 10.3% in 2012 and 8.2% in the following year), and also in 2003 (10%), but their importance declines from 2015 onwards.

The picture depicted here demonstrates a clear prevalence of traditional protest repertoires, with some variety and creativity being introduced in the anti-austerity protest cycle. The decline of performative forms of occupation of the public space that is clear from 2015 onwards can be attributed, again, to a certain exhaustion felt by new protest organisers and participants after a particularly intense protest cycle, demanding higher engagement, which resulted in a return to almost exclusively traditional protest repertoires, led by traditional actors.

This trait of Portuguese protest is further confirmed when one looks at figure 11, which classifies protest repertoires in three categories: conventional (marches,

demonstrations, human chains, popular assemblies, symbolic or theatrical performances, hanging placards, petitions, distribution of flyers, open letters and press conferences); confrontational (strikes, occupations, sit-ins, roadblocks, boycotts, and filling a lawsuit); and violent (hunger strikes, attacks on property; attacks on people, self-mutilation)³ (see Tarrow, 2011; Romanos and Sábada 2021).

Figure 11. Type of repertoires



(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

Confirming our expectations, there is a predominance of conventional repertoires across the board, representing over 60% of all protest repertoires in all years except 2001 (58.5%) and 2004 (56.7%), and, in the majority of cases, representing over two thirds of all protest methods (2003, 2005, 2007 to 2016). Confrontational repertoires (whose values are mainly due to the importance of strikes) are important in the first protest cycle (between 32.5% and 37.5% in the first four years), but exhibit a decline in the anti-austerity protest cycle (19.7% in 2012 and 19.2% in 2013), rising again in the last few years of the last protest cycle (38.7% in 2017, 35.8% in 2018 and 35.9% in 2019), when strikes become one of the most important protest repertoires again, after a relative absence

³ Petitions, distribution of flyers, open letters, filling a lawsuit and press conferences are not considered as stand-alone protest repertoires in the Disdem database; rather, they were coded as complementary repertoires, only when coupled with other type(s) of protest method(s).

of this protest method during the anti-austerity mobilisation. Between 2001 and 2003, however, the other confrontational repertoires were more common, particularly in protest events relating to education, with students and parents often blocking schools, and citizens resorting to the same methods on protest events related to the quality of public infrastructures.

Finally, violent repertoires are very rare in Portugal. Their highest proportions were in 2002 (5%), 2009 (5.1%) and 2016 (4.3%). This form of protest was mainly hunger strikes. In 2002, inmates often went on hunger strikes to protest their living conditions and delays in their judicial processes. In 2009 and 2016, hunger strikes were mainly undertaken in relation to family matters (adoptions, custody rights).

In sum, the Portuguese protest arena can thus be considered as highly institutionalized and as a legitimate and relevant sector of political life, as shown by the predominance of accepted and traditional forms of collective action and by the extremely low proportion of violent repertoires. It is interesting to note that, in the anti-austerity cycle, perhaps the period in democratic history when protest was more intense since the Portuguese revolution, traditional repertoires had their highest proportion. Confrontational repertoires tend to grow only in very specific political contexts. Again, these patterns are a sign of the legitimacy of protest in Portuguese political life, reflecting a tradition of institutional openness and low state repression, as well as the cultural legacy of the peaceful democratic transition, in spite of its revolutionary and confrontational character (Duran-Munoz 2000; della Porta et al. 2018).

The targets of protest

Throughout the whole period, the main targets of protest in Portugal are the institutions of the State, such as the government, ministers and their ministries, local governments and the parliament. Also, boards of directors and management are an important target of dissent, especially during the first protest cycle (figure 12). In fact, between 2000-2009, the targets of protest are quite varied, encompassing a wider plurality of state actors, but also private interests (management and boards of directors, business owners). An interesting finding is the fact that contestation targeting managements/board of directors significantly declined from 2007 (14%) onwards, while, until then, they had

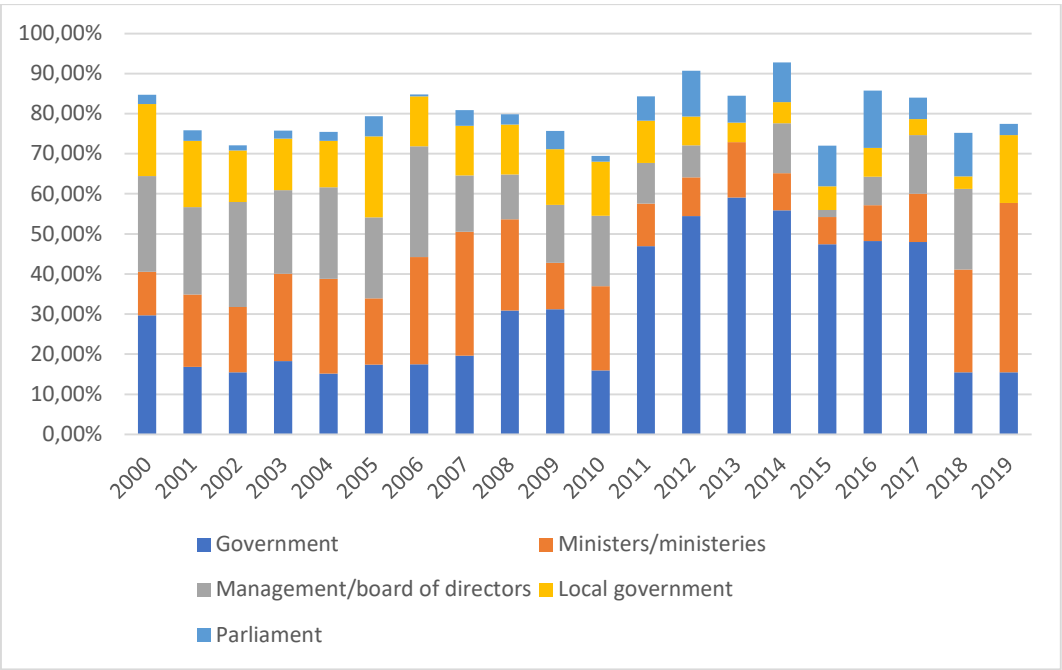
been the target of at least 20% of all protest events. During the anti-austerity protest cycle, private interests were the target of between 17.5% in 2010 and 0% in 2013 of all popular mobilisations, and their prominence as targets of protest tended to remain low in the third protest cycle (0% in 2019 and 1.7% in 2015), although with exceptions in 2017 (14.7%) and 2018 (21.2%).

From 2011 onwards, the government becomes the clear main target of protest. In 2010, the government attracted a mere 16% of all protest events – the lowest percentage in the series, in a year when popular mobilisation was dominated by professional class organisation targeting a wider variety of state actors (with ministries/ministers being the target of sectorial mobilization by public servants, particularly nurses and teachers). Direct opposition to the government expressed in protest events grows immensely after 2011 and until 2017, that is, at the start of the second protest cycle and during the first years of the third cycle. Up to 2017, well into the post-austerity cycle, the government remains the main target of all protest events (rising to 59.9% in 2013 and lingering around 48% from 2014 onwards). Although direct contestation to the government drops quite dramatically in 2018 and 2019, when it was the primary target of around 15% of all protest events, this is replaced by contestation to ministries/ministers (again, with the mobilisation of public employees such as nurses, teachers, and the police forces) (25.6% in 2018 and 42.3% in 2019). Overall, though, considering the government and specific ministries as targets of protest jointly, they are clearly the most important target of protest, showing a clear departure from more plural pattern of targets before 2011.

One could say that, after 2011, civil society targets the state more, probably reflecting the latter's growing role in policy-making and in managing the economy. This could also be the sign of a deeper nationalization of protest, further confirmed by the decline of local government as target of protest since 2013, and the growth, albeit small, of the parliament as a target since 2011. Contestation targeting local governments, the 4th most important target, was particularly important in the first protest cycle, oscillating between 11.6% in 2004 and 20.2% in 2005 (and hovering around 12% in most of the other years). Both in the second and third protest cycle, protest targeting local authorities is not as prominent as in the previous years, declining from 13.5% in 2010 to 3.1% in 2018 (although it rose dramatically in 2019, when local governments were the target of 16.9% of all protest, the third highest value in the whole series). As for the parliament, which, during the first protest cycle, was not a main target of dissent (between 1.3% of

all protest events in 2002 and 5.1% in 2005), it became an important target in 2012 and 2014 (11.3% and 9.9% of all protest events), a tendency that, albeit with oscillations, continues during the third protest cycle⁴.

Figure 12. Main targets of protest



(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

Other state institutions, such as the Presidency, the police and the armed forces, and the judiciary, do not attract significant dissent. Interestingly, in the first protest cycle, foreign governments were a significant target of protest events, specifically in 2002 (3.9%) and 2003 (4%). This was part of the global wave of protest against the 2002 operation Defensive Shield led by the Israeli government against the occupied Palestinian territories (and echoed during the annual 25th of April parade, celebrating the Portuguese Revolution, and on Labour Day), and against the USA invasion of Iraq in 2003. During the anti-austerity protest cycle, it was the international institutions of the *Troika* that attracted more transnational dissent (2.5% in 2010 and 3.5% in 2011). This tendency continues in 2015, already during the third phase of protest, when supranational

⁴ On the impact of the expansion of the state and its' policy role, and of the parliamentarization of politics on patterns of social protest, see Ekiert and Kubik, 2001, pp. 134-135; Tilly 1997a and 1997b.

organisations were again the target (5.9%) of protests expressing solidarity with the Greek people, who had just voted against the Troika bailout in that year's referendum, to no avail.

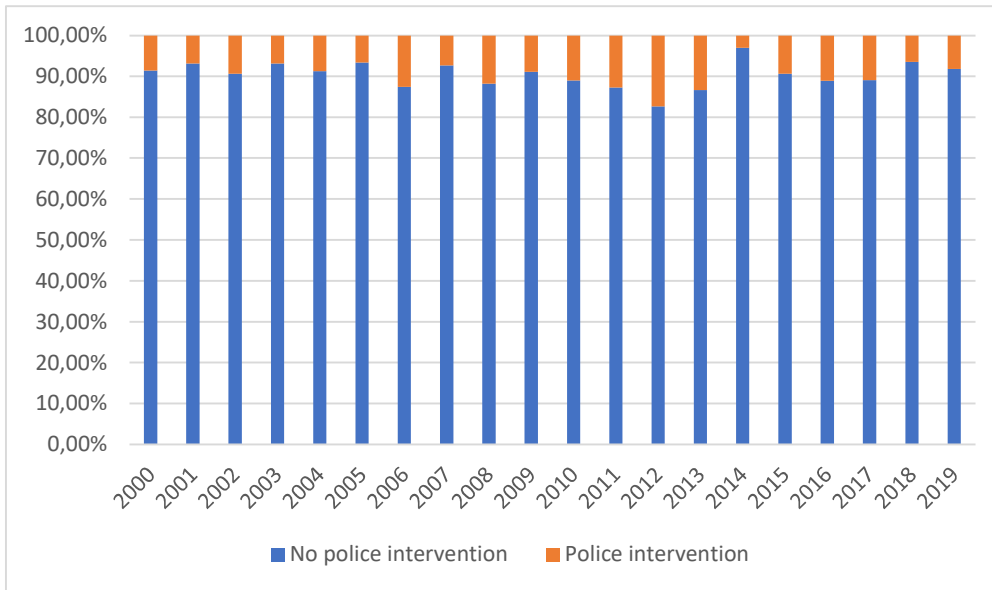
State reactions to protest

28

In this section, we analyse the reactions to protest by the state, in particular the reactions of the police forces and the degree to which state institutions engaged in negotiations with protesters. Overall, police action during protest events in Portugal is low (figure 13). The first protest cycle recorded very low values of police intervention, the exception being 2006 (police intervention of 12.6% in all protest events), on par with the prevalence of confrontational protest repertoires that year, such as occupations and roadblocks, adopted by a variety of participants in dissent (from workers mobilising for labour rights to citizens protesting for better public services and infrastructures). Police intervention clearly peaks at the height of the anti-austerity protest – 12.7% in 2011, 17.3% in 2012 and 13.4% in 2013, and although declining in 2014, the years of 2016 and 2017 also show high values (11.1% and 11% respectively), which could indicate that a more confrontational state posture against civil society established during anti-austerity protest cycle took root during the first years of the third cycle. Still, since 2017 there is a decline of police intervention, to levels close to the lowest of the whole period.

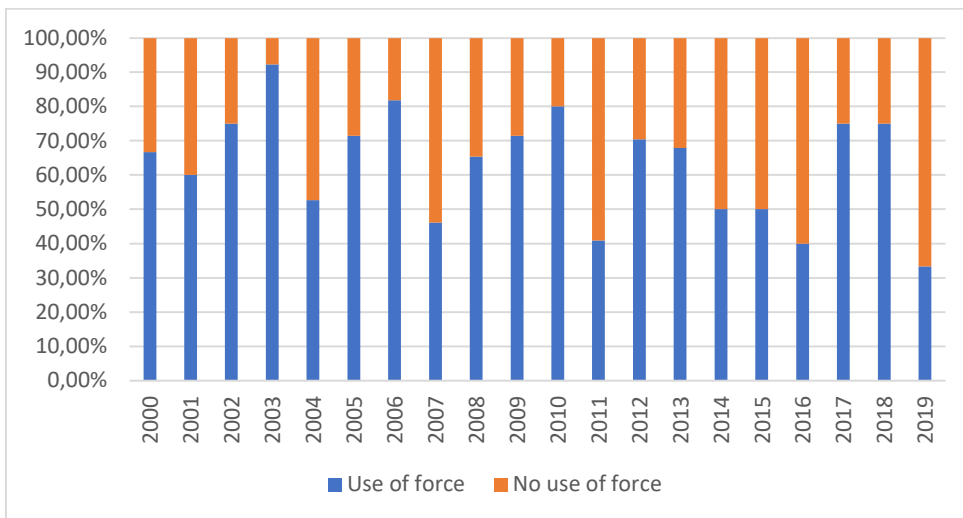
At the same time, the use of force by the police has been slightly declining since 2000 (figure 14). 2003 and 2006 recorded the highest percentage of protest events with use of force by the police (92.3% and 81.8%, respectively). This type of action is also common during the subsequent protest cycles (70.5% in 2012 and 67.9% in 2013, and 75% in 2017 and 2018), although at lowest levels. 2019 is the year of the whole series when the use of force was the lowest.

Figure 13. Police intervention in protest events



(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

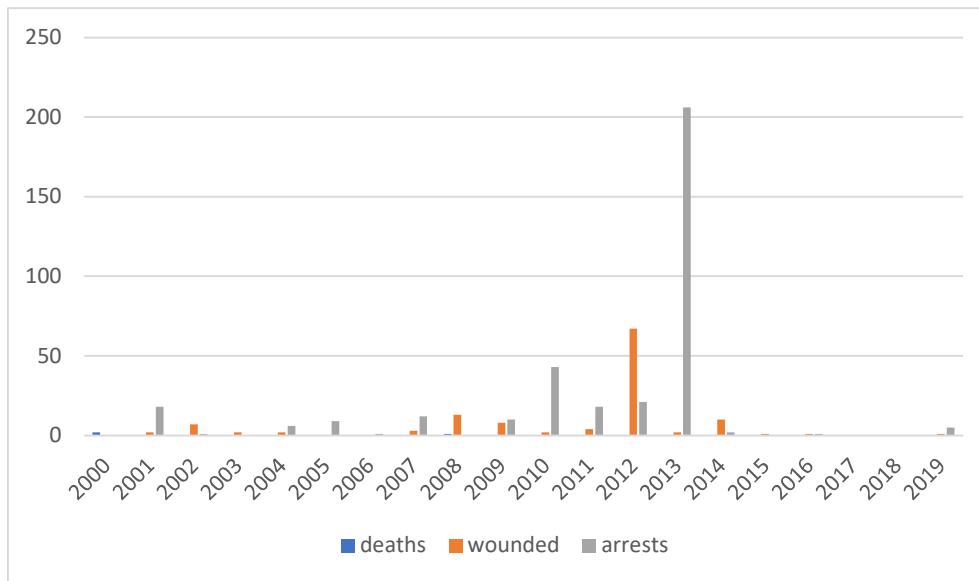
Figure 14. Use of force by the police



(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the use of force by the police resulted in a significantly higher number of casualties during the anti-austerity protest cycle (figure 15) – the number of wounded peaks in 2012, at 67, and the number of arrests in 2013, at 206.

Figure 15. Casualties

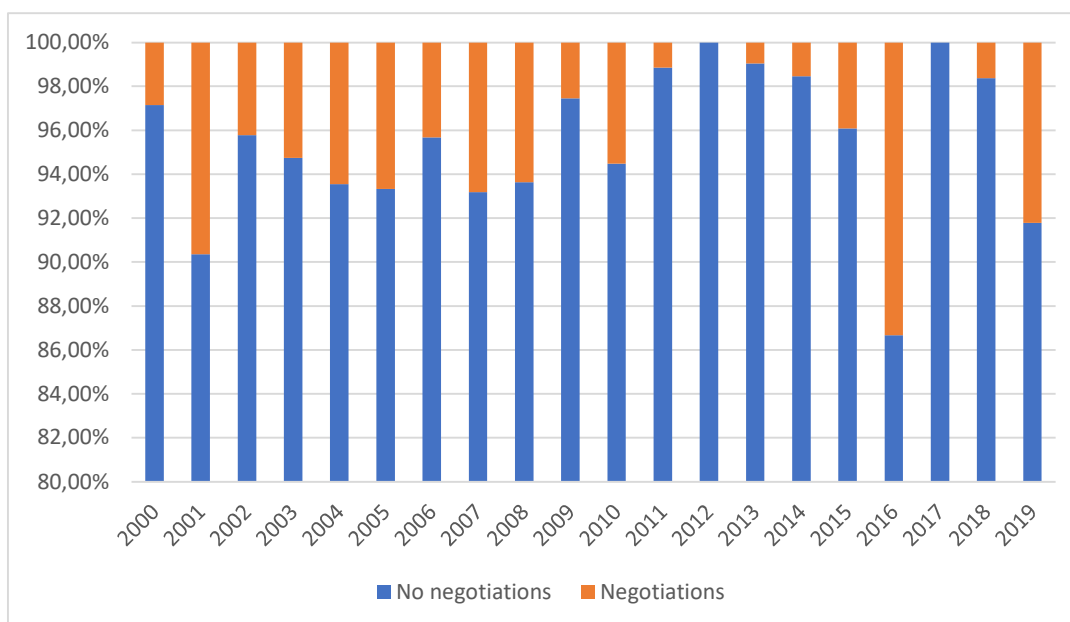


(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

Reactions to protest can also be gauged by analysing if negotiations between protesters and targets occurred (figure 16). In this respect, it is clear that most protest events do not result in any such negotiation. Some patterns, however, can be identified. A high percentage of protest events resulted in negotiations in the first protest cycle, peaking at 9.7% in 2001. After 2008, still during the first protest cycle, and until 2013, there is an overall decline of negotiations. The anti-austerity protest cycle had less negotiation (actually non-existent in 2012). Negotiations start to grow after 2014 and reach their highest value of the whole 2000-2019 period in 2016 (13.3%), after the election of the *Geringonça* government; 2019 is also a year of growth in negotiations (8.2%).

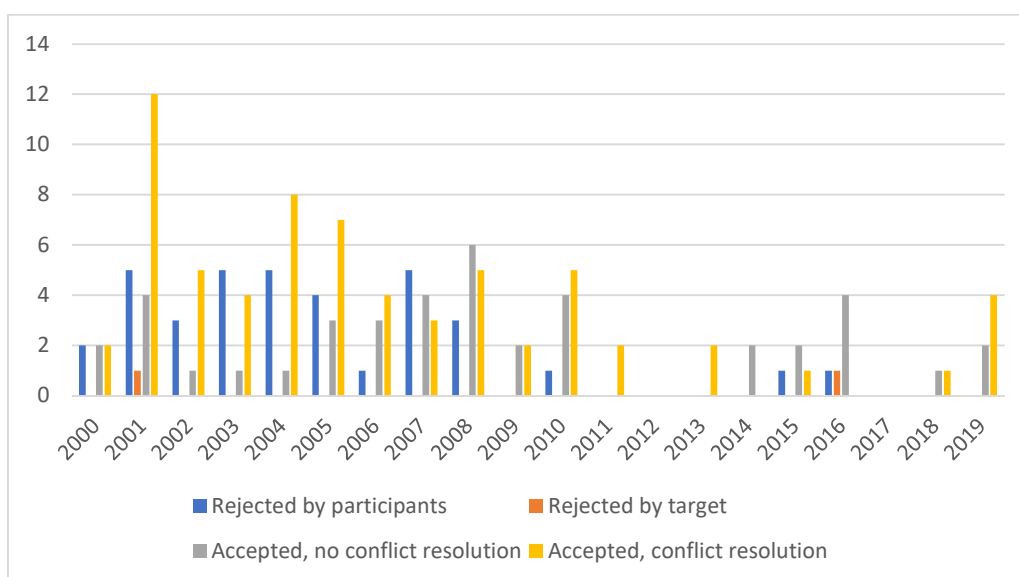
Considering the outcome of negotiations (figure 17), however, it is clear that the tendency for these to result in conflict resolution has been declining overall. Its peak was in 2001, when 12 protest events resulted in such an outcome. Only in seven occasions in the whole anti-austerity protest cycle was there conflict resolution. In 2019, however, four protest events resulted in conflict resolution, a fact that may be signalling a new tendency.

Figure 16. Negotiations between protesters and targets



(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

Figure 17. Outcome of negotiations



(Data: disdem.org; own elaboration)

Conclusion

This overview of the cycles and characteristics of protest in Portugal at the beginning of the 21st century allows us to draw some interpretative, albeit provisional, conclusions about the relationship between protest and democracy. From the point of

view of the institutionalization of protest, we can say that, in Portugal, a solid protest routine has been established, and protest clearly functions as a form of regular civic action, mobilising and expressing the values, interests and identities of thousands of Portuguese people. It can then be said that there is a consolidated protest arena in the country, with high levels of citizen mobilisation and protest events, especially during the anti-austerity cycle (2010-2014) – although these have significantly decreased between 2015 and 2019.

This conclusion is reinforced by our analysis of protest organisers. Mass organisations remain the main propellers of citizen mobilisation in the country, with labour unions, whose role actually grows throughout the period under review, taking central stage, reaching its highest value as organisers of protest events from 2015 onwards. Citizen's initiatives are a second mobiliser, showing a small decline in the third protest cycle, followed by student organisations, which, in contrast, were strongest especially during the first protest cycle (2000-2009). Nonetheless, mass organisations were always more relevant in popular dissent than any other type of organisation, including sectoral interest groups or representatives of identity causes.

Other sign of institutionalization is the growing tendency for protest movements to establish alliances among themselves and with other social and political actors (parties, local authorities, labour unions). This trait reaches its peak in the second protest cycle, but continues until 2019. Furthermore, the fact that political parties and labour unions constitute the main allies reveals a strong interconnection between the arenas of protest, interest representation and the party system.

In terms of the protest culture, democratic values and practices also prevail. Socioeconomic themes predominate in protest demands and claims, more easily solved by public policies of a redistributive type, such as workers' rights (a demand that increases over time), unemployment and education. Economic issues, then, are mainly expressed in the public sphere, revealing a form of protest referred to as "*contentious reformism*", oriented above all towards the correction of public policies, instead of towards changes in the structure of the political regime (Ekiert and Kubik, 2001, p. 184). Polarizing themes that could reveal incurable fractures in the democratic regime, such as civil rights, corruption, or the condemnation of parties and the political class, practically do not exist.

The protest repertoires in Portugal also show a high civic level. Traditional forms of collective action, peaceful and already established as legitimate in contemporary democracies, prevail, such as demonstrations, which grow over time. Strikes are the only prevalent disruptive protest repertoire, but its importance declines between 2000 and 2014, to grow again from 2015 onwards. However, collective action is extremely peaceful, with violent repertoires reaching extremely low values.

Finally, also in relationship with the State, there is evidence of an increase in the institutionalization of protest across the whole period, and, consequently, of the strengthening of democracy. Not only are the institutions of representative democracy globally the main direct target of protest, but protest targeting the government, ministries and parliament increases over time, which reveals the nationalization of protest. Opposition to political parties, the judicial system, the armed forces and the police is also very low. State repression and the number of wounded and imprisoned remain incipient as well, although increasing slightly during the anti-austerity cycle. Although the use of force in police interventions grows over time, in the third cycle there are no more prisoners and wounded, and negotiations between the State and the protest movements increase again. In general, we can then say that these are signs of greater, though still limited, acceptance and incorporation of protest claims by state authorities.

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