

Carvalho, T. (2022). Contesting austerity: Social movements and the left in Portugal and Spain (2008-2015) (p. 196). Amsterdam University Press.

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In 2011, a wave of global discontent reverberated around the world, echoing the fervor of the iconic uprisings of 1968 and 1989. While the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street garnered the most journalistic and scholarly interest, there were lesser-known, yet impactful, protests on a global scale. Addressing this blind spot, Tiago Carvalho's "Contesting Austerity: Social Movements and the Left in Portugal and Spain (2008-2015)" rigorously examines and compares anti-austerity mobilizations in the Iberian context. Drawing from his 2019 doctoral research leading to a Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Cambridge, Carvalho's book has gained widespread acclaim for its substantial contribution to understanding social movements during times of crisis. The book meticulously analyzes the causes and short- to medium-term causes and consequences of these mobilizations, emphasizing the similarities and differences between the protests in both countries following the Great Recession.

Throughout the book, Carvalho's commitment to methodological rigor is evident. Using a process-oriented approach, he meticulously reconstructs the contentious processes in Portugal and Spain, employing a mixed-methods strategy that integrates both quantitative and qualitative data. The research design is based on a groundbreaking Protest Event Analysis (PEA) database, resulting in a comprehensive compilation of 4,566 events that chart the evolution of the protest cycle. These data serve as the basis for detailed descriptive analyses, a rarity in social sciences dominated by a positivist paradigm. Going beyond mere event counts,

Carvalho's inclusion of eventful protests adds depth to the analysis and underscores his commitment to systematic and in-depth storytelling. This approach makes the volume accessible to a wide readership, including scholars, students, and activists. Accompanying the quantitative data are 44 author-conducted interviews with relevant Spanish and Portuguese actors - activists, politicians, union leaders - creating a mixed-methods strategy that facilitates our understanding of the anti-austerity mobilizations. The use of paired comparisons and process-tracing logic enhances the depth of Carvalho's analysis and offers nuanced explorations of causal processes.

Theoretical innovation is another hallmark of Carvalho's work. The book critiques existing research on anti-austerity movements and advocates for a more comprehensive approach. Emphasizing the importance of studying interactions between actors, the book combines the "contentious politics" approach with recent advances in social movement theory. His cyclical approach, which emphasizes the relationships between institutional and non-institutional actors, explores dimensions such as time, space, actors, networks, alliances, organization, repertoires, strategies, and demands.

Thus, chapters 2 to 4 delve into the phases of the protest cycle in Portugal and Spain, providing in-depth analyses from 2008 to 2015. Carvalho establishes a historical foundation by explaining the impact of democratic transitions on civic and democratic culture in both countries. If anything, the immediate antecedents of the Spanish Indignados could be traced back to 2000, including protests against controversial decisions of Aznar's first term, such as those following the decision to transfer water from the Ebro River, which motivated notable demonstrations (2001-2003) and contributed to the later intensification of the territorial split between Catalonia and the rest of the state. Similarly, the mobilizations against the World Bank Summit in Barcelona (2001) could also be mentioned as a precursor of the 15M movement, as

it played a key role in the radicalization of Catalan youth, establishing informal and formal networks that played a key role during the events of 2011.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on turning points in protest movements and differences in the protest cycle between Spain and Portugal. Carvalho introduces key actors such as "Geração à Rasca" in Portugal and "Juventud Sin Futuro" and "Democracia Real Ya" in Spain, the architects of the massive mobilizations of 2011. The author explains how each country faced the peak of the economic crisis (2012-2013) with different arrangements between social actors. In Spain, the Mareas, hybrid and emblematic mobilizations involving unions and social movements, played a crucial role in the fight against specific measures. In Portugal, events like the Que se Lixe a Troika (QSLT) in September 2012 required an alliance with unions to successfully mobilize for social rights and radical ideas of revolution. Carvalho identifies fewer actors and demands in Portugal during this period, revealing differences in the dynamics of contention. He also highlights the centrality of the housing crisis in Spain, framed not only as a matter of social justice but also as a democratic right amidst the bursting of the speculative bubble.

The last empirical chapter (number 5) examines the dynamics within party systems during the electoral period (2014-2015), analyzing the Portuguese debates on left unity against austerity (especially within the Bloco de Esquerda) and the transformation of left parties in Spain, especially the emergence of Podemos and municipalist political formations. This chapter summarizes the main conclusions of the comparison between the two southern countries. Initially, both contexts experienced parallel protest movements, but Portugal adopted an intermittent pattern characterized by sporadic large protest events. In contrast, Spain experienced a sustained wave of mobilization that lasted until late 2013 and ushered in new political parties. Carvalho attributes these differences to the nature and configuration of actors, which influence different forms of demand generation. His analysis shows that Portugal's

response was primarily constrained within the existing institutional framework, guided by dominant actors such as parties and unions seeking to preserve the welfare state. Spain, on the other hand, witnessed disruptive social movements that challenged both austerity and political institutions, resulting in diverse discourses and conceptions of citizenship.

Carvalho concludes by summarizing the main findings, emphasizing the need to analyze interactions between institutional and non-institutional actors. The book's two main ideas—movements beyond social movements and detailed country-specific analysis—challenge conventional approaches, opening avenues for future research. In doing so, his book enriches our understanding of protest as a multifaceted phenomenon embedded in modern democratic politics. In conclusion, "Contesting Austerity" by Tiago Carvalho is a scholarly endeavor that makes a significant contribution to the literature on social movements. The book stands out as a valuable resource for those interested in contentious politics, offering a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative analysis with qualitative insights. Its methodological innovation, theoretical depth, and detailed description make it an indispensable resource for researchers, scholars, and students interested in understanding the complexities of anti-austerity mobilizations in the Iberian context during the Great Recession.