



Check for updates

OPEN ACCESS

SUBMITTED 11 March 2025

ACCEPTED 05 April 2025

PUBLISHED 1 May 2025

VOLUME Vol.07 Issue05 2025

CITATION

Carlos Fernandes. (2025). Collaboration and Conflict: The Complex Relationship Between Activist Groups and Political Parties in Portugal's Climate Movement. *The American Journal of Political Science Law and Criminology*, 7(05), 1–5. Retrieved from <https://www.theamericanjournals.com/index.php/tajpslc/article/view/6106>

COPYRIGHT

© 2025 Original content from this work may be used under the terms of the creative commons attributes 4.0 License.

Collaboration and Conflict: The Complex Relationship Between Activist Groups and Political Parties in Portugal's Climate Movement

Carlos Fernandes

Student of Political Sciences Studies University of Lisbon, Lisbon,
Portugal

Abstract: This study explores the complex relationship between activist groups and political parties in shaping the climate movement in Portugal. Through a combination of qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews with key stakeholders from environmental organizations, political parties, and governmental institutions, this research examines the dynamics of resistance and collaboration that characterize the climate activism landscape in the country. While political parties have provided institutional frameworks for environmental policies, activist groups have consistently challenged governmental inertia and pushed for more radical climate action. The findings reveal that the relationship between these two groups is often characterized by tension and compromise, but also synergy in certain instances, particularly in the context of youth-led movements like Fridays for Future. The paper discusses how these dynamics impact the effectiveness of the Portuguese climate movement in influencing national policy and contributing to international climate advocacy.

Keywords: Climate Movement, Activist Groups, Political Parties, Portugal, Resistance, Collaboration, Environmental Policy, Youth Movements, Political Activism, Climate Action, Fridays for Future, Environmental Justice.

Introduction: The Portuguese climate movement has evolved over the past few decades, driven by growing concerns over climate change, environmental degradation, and the urgent need for global action. In

Portugal, climate activism has been shaped by a combination of grassroots movements and institutional politics, with activist groups often clashing with political parties over the pace and scope of climate action. On the one hand, activists push for more ambitious, radical policies and demand accountability from the political establishment. On the other hand, political parties have the responsibility to craft policy solutions that balance economic, social, and environmental concerns, often leading to negotiations that dilute more aggressive demands from activists.

The central research question guiding this study is: How do the relationships between activist groups and political parties influence the direction and effectiveness of the Portuguese climate movement? This study focuses on understanding both the resistance faced by activist groups in their attempts to push for transformative climate policies, as well as the collaborative efforts that emerge between activists and political parties in pushing forward common climate agendas.

This relationship is further complicated by the intersection of youth-led movements (such as Fridays for Future) with the traditional environmental advocacy structures. Understanding the role of youth movements and their capacity to influence political parties is critical for future climate action strategies in Portugal.

The climate crisis has become one of the most pressing issues of the 21st century, with global movements emerging to demand immediate and transformative actions to mitigate its effects. In Portugal, the climate movement has taken root with a blend of grassroots activism, youth-led initiatives, and political engagement, leading to a dynamic and often contentious relationship between activist groups and political parties. This relationship is marked by both resistance—as activists challenge political parties for their perceived inaction on climate change—and moments of collaboration, as both parties seek to influence and enact environmental policies. Over the past decade, Portugal's climate movement has grown in prominence, influenced by both international pressures, such as the Paris Agreement, and the increasing intensity of domestic climate-related disasters, such as wildfires and droughts.

At the heart of this movement, activist groups have emerged as critical forces, pushing for immediate and systemic changes to combat climate change. Groups like Fridays for Future Portugal, Extinction Rebellion, and a host of local NGOs have become the public face of youth activism, demanding that the Portuguese

government take stronger measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, transition to renewable energy, and prioritize environmental justice. These organizations often see themselves as disruptive actors in the political process, challenging the status quo and pushing for urgent and radical climate action. For them, the incremental changes offered by political parties are seen as insufficient to meet the scale of the crisis. As such, these groups often frame their activism in terms of moral urgency, calling for swift policy changes that prioritize long-term sustainability over short-term economic concerns.

On the other side, political parties in Portugal, particularly those aligned with the Socialist Party (PS) and Bloco de Esquerda (BE), have taken steps to integrate climate change into their platforms. The Portuguese government, under the leadership of the PS, has made significant strides in adopting climate policies that aim to meet European Union (EU) climate targets, such as achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Political leaders have promoted measures such as investment in green technologies, incentives for renewable energy production, and regulations aimed at reducing emissions from transportation and industry. However, despite these policy advancements, political parties often find themselves constrained by economic realities, party politics, and competing national priorities. This results in compromises that activists view as too slow or weak, particularly when it comes to issues like fossil fuel dependence and the protection of jobs in carbon-intensive industries.

The relationship between activist groups and political parties in Portugal's climate movement is thus characterized by a series of interactions that range from contentious debate to mutual collaboration. While activists often critique political parties for inadequate action, there are instances where cooperation occurs, especially when political actors seek to align with public sentiment or respond to grassroots pressure. For example, Fridays for Future Portugal has engaged in dialogue with political leaders, influencing the national climate agenda through demonstrations, petitions, and advocacy work. In return, some political parties have adopted more ambitious climate targets, partially in response to youth-led pressure.

However, the nature of these interactions is often not one of seamless partnership. Resistance from activist groups remains a crucial element of the Portuguese climate movement. Activists continue to demand bolder and more transformative policies, frequently accusing political leaders of being overly focused on maintaining economic stability at the cost of urgent environmental needs. This tension between environmentalism and

economic pragmatism remains at the core of the political discourse surrounding climate change in Portugal.

As the Portuguese climate movement continues to evolve, the interaction between activist groups and political parties will remain a defining feature. Both groups are navigating their roles within a broader global movement for climate action, one that increasingly intersects with issues of social justice, inequality, and sustainability. The future of climate policy in Portugal will depend on the ability of these actors to reconcile their differences, build constructive partnerships, and overcome the structural barriers that impede more ambitious action. Understanding the dynamics of this relationship is crucial not only for evaluating the effectiveness of Portugal's climate movement but also for informing broader policy strategies at the European and global levels.

Through this exploration, this paper examines how the tensions between activist resistance and political collaboration in Portugal's climate movement shape the country's approach to tackling climate change, with implications for how other nations may navigate similar conflicts in their own political landscapes.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative research design to explore the dynamics of resistance and collaboration between activist groups and political parties in Portugal's climate movement. Data was collected using a combination of semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

Sample and Participants

The participants included:

- 15 representatives from activist groups, including environmental NGOs, youth movements, and grassroots organizations such as Fridays for Future Portugal and Extinction Rebellion.
- 10 political party representatives, ranging from left-wing to center-right political parties that have played significant roles in shaping environmental policies in Portugal, such as the Socialist Party (PS), Bloco de Esquerda (BE), and Partido Comunista Português (PCP).
- 5 governmental officials working within environmental agencies or involved in climate policy implementation.

Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth interviews conducted between January and March 2023. Interviews were semi-structured to allow for flexibility in capturing different perspectives on the activist-

political party relationship. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour and was transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Additionally, policy documents, press releases, and official statements from political parties and activist groups were analyzed to contextualize the interviews and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interactions between the two groups.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes and patterns in the data. Using NVivo software, interview transcripts were coded, and recurring themes related to collaboration, resistance, and compromise were identified. The data was then triangulated with policy documents and media coverage to ensure validity and comprehensiveness in interpreting the findings.

RESULTS

The results of this study illustrate the complex, often ambivalent relationship between activist groups and political parties in Portugal. The main findings can be grouped into three key themes: resistance, collaboration, and compromise.

RESISTANCE

One of the most prominent themes in the interviews with activist groups was the resistance they encounter from political parties, particularly when advocating for radical climate policies. Activists from organizations like Fridays for Future Portugal emphasized the frustration they feel when political parties, especially the Socialist Party (PS), fail to commit to ambitious climate goals. Activists criticized the government's slow pace of action in areas such as transitioning to renewable energy, decarbonizing transportation, and enacting stricter environmental regulations for industry. Activist groups often described their role as that of a catalyst for change, pushing the political establishment to act faster and more decisively on climate issues.

Many activists felt that political parties prioritized economic concerns (such as job creation in traditional sectors like fossil fuels) over environmental justice. This conflict was particularly evident in debates over the future of Portugal's fossil fuel industry, where political parties were seen as hesitant to impose regulations that might disrupt economic stability.

Collaboration

Despite the tensions, collaboration between activist groups and political parties was also highlighted, particularly in instances where both parties found common ground on certain issues. For example, activists and left-wing political parties like the Bloco de Esquerda (BE) and Partido Comunista Português (PCP)

collaborated on initiatives to promote green energy and environmentally sustainable farming practices. These collaborations were seen as an opportunity to align political action with grassroots demands for a more inclusive and just transition toward a low-carbon economy.

Activists from youth movements, in particular, expressed their belief in the power of dialogue and negotiation with political figures, viewing collaboration as a necessary means to ensure that climate policies have long-term institutional support. A key example of this cooperation was the involvement of Fridays for Future Portugal in discussions with the government on the 2030 National Climate Plan.

Compromise

Another recurring theme was the compromise that occurs when both political parties and activist groups meet in the middle, often in response to external pressures such as EU climate directives and international environmental summits. While activists generally pushed for bolder actions, they often had to accept more moderate solutions. Political parties, particularly those in government, expressed concerns about the economic impact of a rapid transition, arguing that more gradual reforms were necessary to protect workers' rights and ensure social equity during the transition to a greener economy.

These compromises were often reflected in the policy statements and legislative proposals put forward by political parties, which included a mix of both progressive climate targets and market-driven solutions, such as the promotion of green tech and eco-friendly investments.

DISCUSSION

The dynamics of resistance and collaboration between activist groups and political parties in Portugal's climate movement illustrate a tension between the radical demands of grassroots activism and the incremental pace of institutional policy-making. On the one hand, activist groups, particularly youth-led movements like Fridays for Future, demand systemic change and urgent action on climate change, seeing political parties as insufficiently bold in their approach. On the other hand, political parties must balance environmental concerns with economic realities and public sentiment, leading to compromises that often frustrate activists.

This study also underscores the critical role of youth-led movements in catalyzing political action. The collaboration between youth activists and progressive political parties has led to tangible advancements in climate policy, including stronger commitments to

renewable energy and carbon neutrality goals. However, the study highlights that for a truly transformative climate agenda to succeed, more integrated action between grassroots movements, political parties, and governmental institutions is needed.

Implications for Policy and Practice

1. **Strengthening Alliances:** It is essential for activist groups to build stronger alliances with political parties across the spectrum to influence policymaking in favor of environmentally sustainable policies.
2. **Youth Engagement:** Political parties should prioritize engaging with youth-led movements, ensuring that climate policies reflect the urgency and equity concerns raised by younger generations.
3. **Clearer Legislative Frameworks:** Activists and policymakers must work together to create clearer and more ambitious legislative frameworks that align with international climate agreements while ensuring social justice during the transition.

CONCLUSION

The Portuguese climate movement is shaped by a dynamic interplay of resistance and collaboration between activist groups and political parties. While challenges remain, particularly in balancing economic and environmental concerns, the momentum for climate action continues to grow, fueled by the commitment of activist groups and the evolving engagement of political parties. Understanding these complex relationships is critical for advancing effective and inclusive climate policies that meet both environmental and social goals.

REFERENCES

- Abajo-Sanchez, Camille. 2022. Devenir activiste pour le climat: Formation à la désobéissance civile comme processus de socialisation chez des jeunes militants d'Extinction Rebellion à Paris. *Educação, Sociedade and Culturas* 62: 1–18. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Abizadeh, Arash. 2005. Does Collective Identity Presuppose an Other? On the Alleged Incoherence of Global Solidarity. *American Political Science Review* 99: 45–60. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Amnå, Erik, and Joakim Ekman. 2015. Standby Citizens: Understanding non-Participation in Contemporary Democracies. In *Political and Civic Engagement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Edited by Martyn Barrett and Bruna Zani. London: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group, pp. 96–108. [\[Google Scholar\]](#)
- Baer, Hans A. 2021. *Climate Change and Capitalism in*

- Australia: An Eco-Socialist Vision for the Future*. London: Routledge. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]
- Balser, Deborah B. 1997. The Impact of Environmental Factors on Factionalism and Schism in Social Movement Organizations. *Social Forces* 76: 199–228. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]
- Blings, Steffen. 2020. Niche Parties and Social Movements: Mechanisms of Programmatic Alignment and Party Success. *Government and Opposition* 55: 220–40. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]
- Bowman, Benjamin, Pooja Kishinani, Sarah Pickard, and Marion Smith. 2023. Radical Kindness: The Young Climate Activists Transforming Democracy. In *Youth Political Participation—Youth Knowledge* #29. Brussels: Council of Europe and European Commission, pp. 15–33. [Google Scholar]
- Campos, Ricardo, and João Carlos Martins. 2024. Ontological insecurity and urgency as a political value. Discourses of youth climate activists in Portugal. *Globalizations* 21: 1180–96. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]
- Carbonaro, Giulia. 2023. A ascensão da extrema-direita na política portuguesa. *Euronews*, August 17. Available online: <https://pt.euronews.com/2023/08/17/a-ascensao-da-extrema-direita-na-politica-portuguesa> (accessed on 25 February 2025).
- Carvalho, Anabela, Maria Fernandes-Jesus, Carla Malafaia, and Mehmet Üzelgün. 2022. *The Climate Movement in Portugal: JUSTFUTURES Project Report*. Braga: University of Minho. [Google Scholar]
- Chironi, Daniela, Donatella della Porta, and Chiara Milan. 2024. Chapter 1: The Political Participation of Young People in Times of Crisis: A Framework for Analysis. In *Handbook on Youth Activism*. Edited by Jerusha Conner. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 140–53. [Google Scholar]
- Cunha, Manuela Ivone, and Antónia Lima. 2010. Ethnography and the public sphere: Summarizing questions. *Etnográfica* 14: 61–69. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]
- Della Porta, Donatella. 2020. *How Social Movements Can Save Democracy: Democratic Innovations from Below*. Cambridge: Polity Press. [Google Scholar]
- Della Porta, Donatella, and Dieter Rucht. 1995. Left-Libertarian Movements in Context: Comparing Italy and West Germany, 1965–1990. In *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements*. Edited by Craig Jenkins and Bert Klandermans. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 229–72. [Google Scholar]
- Diógenes-Lima, Juliana, Sara Pinheiro, Joana P. Cruz, and Carla Malafaia. 2023. If Not Even the School Listens to Us...: Echoes of Climate Justice on the Ground. *Journal of Social Science Education* 22: 4. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Google Scholar]
- Espírito-Santo, Paula, Marco Lisi, and Bruno Ferreira Costa. 2018. Party Membership and Activism in a New Democracy: Evidence from the Portuguese Case. *Dados* 61: e165. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]
- Falzon, Mark-Anthony. 2009. Introduction: Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research. In *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research*. Edited by Mark-Anthony Falzon. Farnham: Ashgate. [Google Scholar]
- Fernandes-Jesus, Maria, Elvira Cicognagni, and Isabel Menezes. 2014. Civic and political participation: Young people of Brazilian origin in Portugal/Participação cívica e política: Jovens imigrantes brasileiros/as em Portugal. *Psicologia e Sociedade* 26: 572–82. [Google Scholar]
- Fernandes-Jesus, Maria, Maria Luísa Lima, and José-Manuel Sabucedo. 2020. “Save the climate! Stop the oil”: Actual protest behavior and core framing tasks in the Portuguese climate movement. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 8: 426–52. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]
- Fernandes-Jesus, Maria, and Raquel Gomes. 2020. Multiple Players, Different Tactics, a Shared Goal: Building Bridges and Political Agency While Fighting Against Oil and Gas Drilling. *Frontiers in Communication* 5: 33. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]
- Flor, Aline. 2023. Estudantes voltam a uma nova greve pelo clima: Estão inquietos com o custo de vida. *Público*, March 2. Available online: <https://www.publico.pt/2023/03/02/azul/noticia/estudantes-voltam-nova-greve-clima-estao-inquietos-custo-vida-2040873> (accessed on 25 February 2025).
- Garcia, Ana, Dora Rebelo, Juliana Diógenes-Lima, Maria Fernandes-Jesus, and Carla Malafaia. 2025. Intersectionality in youth climate activism as educational practice: Political, pragmatic, and pedagogical dimensions. *Frontiers in Education* 9: 1491387. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]
- Gold, Tomás, and Ann Mische. 2024. Channeling Antipartisan Contention: Field Structures and Partisan Strategies in a Global Protest Wave 2008–2016. *American Journal of Sociology* 129: 1660–1719. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]