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# The Peaceful Transition of Spain

How Authoritarianism Became Democracy

Emma Haiser

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# Introduction:

The peaceful transition from authoritarianism under Francisco Franco to a democratic constitutional monarchy after Franco's death stands as a critical juncture in modern Spanish history because of the uniqueness of the historical event. The transition occurred without direct foreign intervention to manipulate Spanish politicians into passing democratic legislation; instead, the transition was initiated by Francoist leaders who willingly enacted the regime's change which undermined their initial place in society. Notably, this transition is unique to any other authoritarian regime. The Spanish transition is the equivalent of Gorbachev convincing the communist party to institute a democratic constitution to govern the USSR with free political parties.<sup>1</sup> Of course, this never happened in the USSR or any other authoritarian regime of this nature, which is why the circumstances of Spain's transition are so intriguing.<sup>2</sup>

Spain's peaceful transition to democracy after the death of Francisco Franco was largely attributed to the youth and progressivism of the leaders of the government and the willingness of the Prime Minister and King to compromise with the liberal opposition and authoritarian opposition. The transition also coincides with the public support of democracy, emulated in university protests, mass labor strikes, pro-democratic terrorism, and the Catholic Church's detachment from the Franco regime. Furthermore, international influence impacted the speed in which the country adopted democracy; the potential economic benefits of membership in the European Union spurred on democratic sentiment, and the violent democratic revolution in Portugal posed as an example to Spanish politicians of the harm of delayed democratic

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<sup>1</sup> Encarnación, 35.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 35.

transition. By using scholarly literature to analyze Spanish history combined with references to various newspaper articles to provide personal context of the transition, this essay will explore how Spain successfully transitioned to a democracy after Francisco Franco's death. The research for this essay has found that the transition was made possible by public dissent against Franco, international support for a democratic Spain in Europe, and the new generation of politicians who sought progressive change.

# Chapter 1: Historical Background

## Section 1: Spain Before Franco

In December of 1931, a new constitution was ratified in Spain, establishing the Second Republic. This new government established a democratic state, granting new freedoms to the Spanish. Importantly, the Second Republic granted freedom of religion throughout Spain. As a newly established government, the Second Republic struggled to maintain legitimacy and popular support. By granting freedom of religion and thus alienating the Catholic Church, the Second Republic lost a great source of legitimacy. This, combined with mass poverty caused by the Great Depression and a steep national deficit, proved to be a heavy burden for the young republic.<sup>3</sup>

Tensions were growing in the new republic and in July of 1936, a *pronunciamiento* (coup d'etat) was launched by the Spanish military, triggering the Spanish Civil War.<sup>4</sup> This war was a

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<sup>3</sup> Barton, 226-228.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 225.

struggle between two sides, the Republicans (who supported the Second Republic) and the Nationalists (who supported an authoritarian state). Put prosaically, this was a conflict between progress and tradition, or light and dark.<sup>5</sup> The first weeks of the war proved to be chaotic for both the Republicans and Nationalists. Anyone who was thought to be a conspirator with the Nationalists became a target for mob violence that broke out as a reaction to the breakdown of governmental authority. Furthermore, violence against the Church broke out in droves that left 7,000 clergymen dead as a result. Similarly, the Nationalists targeted anyone who seemed to support the republican side or even appeared to be non-Catholic.<sup>6</sup>

Two months after the war had broken out, major European powers imposed an arms embargo against Spain.<sup>7</sup> This was caused by urges from France and Great Britain, who both feared the Spanish Civil War would cause another world war.<sup>8</sup> Despite the embargo, both sides of the war received international aid. The Nationalists were sent military and logistical support from the fascist regimes of Germany, Italy, and Portugal, while the Republicans were helped by the USSR with supplies of arms and equipment aid.<sup>9</sup> A unit of international volunteers known as the International Brigade also provided military support for the Republicans to protect democracy abroad. This was a contingent of international volunteers inspired to help the Spanish squash the rise of facism. Among these troops were the Lincoln Brigade from the United States. If it had not been for the International Brigade, the Republicans would probably not have survived the later years of the war.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 236.

<sup>6</sup> Alvarez, 237.

<sup>7</sup> Barton, 238.

<sup>8</sup> Alvarez, 242.

<sup>9</sup> Barton, 238.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 240.

In March 1939, the Republicans officially surrendered to the fascist Nationalists.<sup>11</sup> On April 1, 1939, Franco proclaimed, “Today, with the Red Army captive and disarmed, the Nationalist troops have attained their final military objectives. The war has ended.” The 36 year reign of the authoritarian dictator, Francisco Franco, had begun.<sup>12</sup>

## Section 2: The Regime of Francisco Franco

Francisco Franco was appointed *Generalísimo* (the commander of all Spanish armed forces) in September 1939.<sup>13</sup> Franco was motivated by the belief that the state was ruled by “God, fatherland, and family,” with deep sentiments for the protection of tradition and suspicion of citizen politics.<sup>14</sup> Francoism was defined by a rejection of democracy, liberalism, and pluralism.<sup>15</sup> His rule only comprised of series of repressions and concessions.<sup>16</sup> For example, labor unions were illegal under Franco but the regime gave laborers job security.<sup>17</sup> In Franco’s early stages of leadership, his regime gained some legitimacy through support from the Catholic Church-- an aspect which the Second Republic had lacked. This alliance also provided legitimacy for Spain in the eyes of international organizations and other states.<sup>18</sup>

The new regime was an authoritarian state which stripped personal freedom and enforced control of every aspect of the Spanish commonwealth. The new state imposed strict censorship

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 245.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 246.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 240.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 246.

<sup>15</sup> Alba, 233.

<sup>16</sup> Alvarez, 264.

<sup>17</sup> Carr, 209.

<sup>18</sup> Barton, 242.

and encouraged political apathy to mute public opinion and political opposition. To snuff out Republican sentiment, the Law of Political Responsibilities was passed in 1939. This law effectively criminalized all who supported the Second Republic and the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War. Between 1939 and 1945, more than 30,000 executions and 400,000 imprisonments took place based on this law alone. Franco sought to establish cultural homogeneity as well. In efforts to achieve this, the regional languages of Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Country were banned as official languages.<sup>19</sup>

Spain's economy under Franco was defined by autarky and state intervention.<sup>20</sup> Autarky cut off Spain from foreign trade and focused on internal production which made Spanish industry uncompetitive. Under state intervention, the regime seized control of Spanish resources which, distorted the market.<sup>21</sup> The Spanish economy of the early 20th century was heavily reliant on agricultural production. In an effort to control all facets of Spain, the new regime collectivized the agricultural sector with disastrous consequences.<sup>22</sup> After collectivization, there was a spike in food shortages, newfound necessity in rationing, and a national crisis over food.<sup>23</sup> Between 1939 and 1945, 200,000 Spaniards are estimated to have died from hunger or related diseases.<sup>24</sup>

With a relatively new regime and an economy in shambles, Spain remained neutral throughout World War II. Political support during the early years of the war certainly extended to Hitler and the Axis Powers, but as the tide turned in favor of the Allied Powers winning the war, so did Franco's support. In 1945, the Spanish were denied international support for

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 242-247.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 249.

<sup>21</sup> Alvarez, 268.

<sup>22</sup> Barton, 242.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 248.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 249.

rehabilitation because of Franco's initial support for the fascists of Germany and Italy. The creation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 explicitly excluded Spain from membership. Furthermore, Spain was denied any aid from the Marshall Plan-- the U.S. initiative to provide funds to restore war-torn Europe. Instead, the Spanish were meant to grovel in their own misery, devoid of any foreign assistance.<sup>25</sup>

After years of suffering, Spain's bad luck finally broke with the "Economic Miracle" of the 1960s.<sup>26</sup> The Stabilization Plan of 1959 was put into effect in order to semi-liberalize the economy and reestablish foreign trade. It is no coincidence that this plan immediately followed Spain's membership in the UN and agreements made with the United States to receive aid, these were leading influences in Franco's decision to liberalize the Spanish economy.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the new decade of the 1960s brought rigorous economic improvement that included rising wages, improved standards of living, rapid industrialization, and expansion of the middle class.<sup>28</sup> The prosperity of the 1960s gave rise to democratic sentiment, but it is no coincidence that economic improvement also coincided with rising opposition to Franco's authoritarian regime.

### Section 3: On the Road to Democracy

On December 23, 1973, Carlos Arias Navarro became the head of the Spanish government as the president.<sup>29</sup> Arias committed to the immediate "democratic opening" upon

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 250-251.

<sup>26</sup> Barton, 255.

<sup>27</sup> Alvarez, 278.

<sup>28</sup> Barton, 255.

<sup>29</sup> Share, 71.



taking his new position.<sup>30</sup> In efforts to adopt a system in Spain fit for Juan Carlos as king, Arias spearheaded what came to be known as the *Spirit of February 12*-- a pseudo-democratic program inspired by a speech about political change orated by Arias on February 12, 1974. The program consisted of three major reforms: increasing political participation of Francoists, democratizing the *Cortes*, and democratizing the local governments.<sup>31</sup> However, these reforms failed.

The death of the *Spirit of February 12* was caused by several factors. Firstly, Arias was a weak politician who failed to overcome the influence of hardline dissent.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, in March of 1974, the execution of a young Catalan terrorist-- who was accused of killing a policeman in a shootout-- created upheaval and dissent from the Spanish and international viewers.<sup>33</sup> This state execution caused Franco, Arias's government, and the reforms of the *Spirit of February 12* to lose support.<sup>34</sup> On July 1, 1976, King Juan Carlos demanded the resignation of Arias as Prime Minister, to be replaced by Adolfo Suárez.<sup>35</sup>

Upon Franco's death in November 1975, democracy began to take a deeper hold in the national government. In June 1976, the Law of Political Association was passed which legalized political parties.<sup>36</sup> Originally, party members were nervous to admit support for the Law of Political Association out of fear it would frame them to be pro-Francoist (given the law was sponsored by the Falangists, Francoist politicians); but, eagerness to legalize their party outweighed the fear of conformity.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Carr, 196.

<sup>31</sup> Share, 72.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>33</sup> Arango, 99.

<sup>34</sup> Share, 81.

<sup>35</sup> Arango, 103.

<sup>36</sup> Share, 78.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 101.

The Law of Political Reform was then passed in November, dissolving the *Cortes*.<sup>38</sup> This marked the greatest success of Suárez and Juan Carlos's first six months of collaboration.<sup>39</sup> The new law eliminated the role of dictator and established a bicameral legislature to be elected by universal suffrage.<sup>40</sup> On December 15, 1976, a referendum was held which found that 94.2% of Spaniards support democratization.<sup>41</sup> The referendum had incredible turnout as well. Excluding the opposition regions (like Catalonia), no more than 10% of voters abstained.<sup>42</sup> Following the referendum was a rapid series of democratic changes. For example, diplomatic relations with democratic nations began to blossom, all political parties (including the Communists) were legalized, and labor unions and strikes were decriminalized.<sup>43</sup>

The first election since 1936 was held on June 15, 1977.<sup>44</sup> Eighteen million people turned out to vote (76% of the voter population), in comparison to only three million in the 1936 election (22% of the voter population).<sup>45</sup> In the 1977 election, the biggest winners were Suárez's coalition of democratic candidates (gaining 47% of the vote) and socialists (gaining 29.3% of the vote).<sup>46</sup> In contrast, the biggest loser was the Francoists with only 8.3% of the vote.<sup>47</sup> By voting for two democratic parties as the majority without being bullied into voting for extremism, the Spanish public successfully buried Francoism.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Barton, 259.

<sup>39</sup> Arango, 108.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>41</sup> Barton, 259.

<sup>42</sup> Alba, 269.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 271.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 278.

<sup>45</sup> Carr, 227.

<sup>46</sup> Alba, 279.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 279.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 280.

Spain became a quasi-federal state, given a democratic parliamentary monarchy was established where citizens were represented in the central government through 17 geographic autonomous regions and among local governments within the autonomies.<sup>49</sup> In December 1978, the new Spanish constitution was passed with 88% of support from the voting population.<sup>50</sup> Political power was decentralized where the King was the head of state and commander in chief. The parliament was established to be a bicameral legislature elected through universal suffrage.<sup>51</sup> The new face of Spanish government successfully eradicated authoritarian ties to the Francoist regime without completely dismantling the structure of the national government. For the opposition to Franco, after nearly forty years of fighting for basic rights denied during the authoritarian regime, their objectives had come true as democracy granted the freedom and liberties so many had called for during Franco's regime.

## Chapter 2: Opposition to Franco's Regime

Even before Franco's death, there was mass mobilization of groups in support of democracy.<sup>52</sup> In the 1960s, cultural revival was structured around opposition to the Francoist regime.<sup>53</sup> But, it was mass opposition in the early 1970s which helped encourage transition to democracy.<sup>54</sup> However, the argument that mass opposition was a quintessential factor in the transition is misleading. Public opposition did have an impact, but the argument neglects to

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<sup>49</sup> Barton, 260.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 262.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 260.

<sup>52</sup> Encarnación, 34.

<sup>53</sup> Barton, 256.

<sup>54</sup> Share, 36.

address that Franco reacted to opposition with repression rather than democratic change.<sup>55</sup> In fact, mobilization was highly fragmented and therefore lacked the strength to force political change.<sup>56</sup> Rather than create democratic solutions, mass opposition created a political crisis.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, by the time of Franco's death, public opinion supported a complete abandonment of Francoism and a free election to decide a new form of government.<sup>58</sup>

## Section 1: Labor Strikes

The Spanish Civil War brought on the destruction of working class unions and parties.<sup>59</sup> The 1944 Labor Law gave a significant number of laborers complete job security with the high price of depriving laborers of unions and rights to workplace bargaining. In reality, this law was enacted to deter labor conflicts by repressing opportunity for laborers to organize.<sup>60</sup> But, with a wave of economic instability in the 1950s, came a wave of strikes in support for increasing labor wages.<sup>61</sup> But, in general, strikes during the '50s were spontaneous and varied in issue. For example, groups would protest for things like safer working conditions or proper washrooms.<sup>62</sup>

The goal of the frustrated workers was to achieve labor advancement through strikes.<sup>63</sup> Between 1960 and 1975, there was an exponential increase in the number of labor strikes in

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>58</sup> Carr, 209.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>61</sup> Barton, 253.

<sup>62</sup> Carr, 139.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 137.

Spain, even though strikes were illegal under Franco's regime.<sup>64</sup> In 1962, 45,000 Asturian miners were joined by 50,000 Basque and 70,000 Catalan miners in a two month strike for higher wages.<sup>65</sup> This was the first instance where a strike was fully reported in the press.<sup>66</sup> The strike was even covered in American news. A *New York Times* article called for increased wages for laborers as the editor believed this was the only way to stop the strikes.<sup>67</sup> The 1970s saw continued labor strikes in the building industry, mining, and metallurgy, but most especially in the new car factories.<sup>68</sup> The 1971 Syndical Labor Law passed and failed to stop labor unrest and to meet the expectations for democratization.<sup>69</sup> Although the labor strikes were clear calls to action, there was limited impact on labor unrest.<sup>70</sup>

## Section 2: University Opposition

Students have been using protest as a form of power for a long time.<sup>71</sup> Spanish universities were hotbeds for liberal opposition.<sup>72</sup> The mid-1950s brought a new wave of university opposition. Liberalization increased when "the generation of 1956" began university as they were the first students to have not experienced the Spanish Civil War.<sup>73</sup> In February 1956, student protesters and police clashed in the streets of Madrid. The protests of the 1950s

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<sup>64</sup> Share, 36.

<sup>65</sup> Carr, 139.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>67</sup> Eder.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>69</sup> Carr, 191.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>71</sup> Barton, 223.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 256.

<sup>73</sup> Share, 38.

were largely led by socialists, liberals, Marxists, and progressive Christians.<sup>74</sup> Protests aimed to expose the contradictions in Franco's regime.<sup>75</sup> This led to harsh repression of campus opposition activity.<sup>76</sup>

The Education Law of 1970 was passed to make universities better at turning students into cogs of the newly evolving capitalist society. But this law failed to solve the persistent university protests.<sup>77</sup> By 1973, every Spanish university was on strike.<sup>78</sup> Students fought for the short-term goal of democratization on campus and the long-term goal of democratization of Spain.<sup>79</sup> University protests embarrassed the Franco regime by eroding its legitimacy and showing its lack of public support.<sup>80</sup> Specifically, university opposition showed Franco's failure in establishing legitimacy with the Spanish youth.<sup>81</sup>

The student protests were born from several influences. The faculty on campuses were divided in their obedience to Franco, with some hardline supporters and other liberal leaning thinkers. The increase in protests shattered the traditional authority of the professors who supported the regime, as students rejected their ideals and power.<sup>82</sup> The repression by the regime through denying students the right to free speech and a free press, spurred on more opposition. The efforts to stamp out university dissent actually acted as fuel to the fire that propelled the students to continue their efforts. Coinciding with student resentment, was the support of their

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<sup>74</sup> Carr, 147.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>76</sup> Share, 38.

<sup>77</sup> Carr, 191.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>81</sup> Share, 37.

<sup>82</sup> Carr, 149.

resistance efforts by the Catholic Church as the Church shifted away from supporting the Francoist regime, to be discussed in section three.<sup>83</sup>

## Section 3: Church Opposition

In general, Spain's commitment to the Catholic Church has set the nation apart from most other Western European nations.<sup>84</sup> There was mandatory religious education, massive turnout to religious celebrations, and deeply embedded power granted to the church-- like control of censorship.<sup>85</sup> As Franco and the nationalists fought for the preservation of tradition and conservatism, the Church sided with Franco during the Spanish Civil War and remained a close ally until very late in Franco's dictatorship.<sup>86</sup> The Church and Spanish society's relationship began to wane near the end of the regime as well. Mass secularization and social change depleted the importance of religion in the everyday Spanish household.<sup>87</sup> By the time of Franco's death, rapid industrialization and socioeconomic change squeezed out much room for the Church.<sup>88</sup>

The Church was increasingly distanced from the Franco regime as brutalities and injustice carried out by the regime became public knowledge. In May 1960, 400 Basque priests published a denouncement of police repression and lack of liberty for peninsular people (including those of the Basque Country).<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, in 1963, 130 priests held a

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<sup>83</sup> Share, 38.

<sup>84</sup> Gunther, 142.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>86</sup> Share, 41.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>88</sup> Gunther, 143.

<sup>89</sup> Carr, 151.

demonstration in Barcelona against police brutality. A group known as the Young Catholic Workers had claimed, “to get involved in politics is a task for Christians.”<sup>90</sup> The liberalization of-- specifically, young-- Spanish clergy could no longer be ignored.

A stark change came in 1963 with Pope John XXIII and Vatican II.<sup>91</sup> The new Pope caused a spiritual renewal of the Spanish Church.<sup>92</sup> Rome gave newfound support to progressive clergy in Spain.<sup>93</sup> Pope John XXIII and Vatican II supported the separation of church and state in Spain.<sup>94</sup> The new Vatican worked hard to give the Church a new social conscience which explored the wrongdoings of leaders like Franco. Since Pope John XXIII’s standings and agenda directly attacked the foundation of Franco’s regime, Spain was largely censored from any publications by the Pope.<sup>95</sup>

Originally, the Spanish Church hierarchy remained loyal to Franco, even if lower rank Church members were beginning to dissent. But even the Church could not resist radicalization which eventually split the hierarchy.<sup>96</sup> The young clergy-- especially those coming from oppressed regions (Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia)-- more often supported democracy.<sup>97</sup> Even the Vatican council was divided, alienating the Francoist bishops.<sup>98</sup> The shift in thinking of many clergymen and the clear opposition from the Vatican was a threat Franco recognized.

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<sup>90</sup> Share, 42.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>92</sup> Carr, 151.

<sup>93</sup> Share, 44.

<sup>94</sup> Carr, 153.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>96</sup> Share, 42.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>98</sup> Carr, 154.



By 1971, relations between the Church and the regime had gone entirely sour, which was incredibly damaging to the regime.<sup>99</sup> Until Franco's death, the regime tried to repress the voice of the Church. The regime enacted suspensions of church assemblies, fines for sermons against the regime, censorship of church papers, and allowed illegal police entrance into churches.<sup>100</sup> In response to this attack on the Church, Spanish bishops demanded a revision of the 1953 Concordat between the Vatican and the Franco Regime. Furthermore, the bishops called for the separation of church and state.<sup>101</sup> The loss in support for the Francoist regime was the Church's attempt to reinforce the autonomy of the Church after seeing the cruelty the regime was capable of.<sup>102</sup> Even though the Church took a neutral stance to democratization in 1975, the decline in the support of the regime significantly decreased the likelihood of Francoism continuing after Franco's death.<sup>103</sup>

## Section 4: Terrorism

The unrest in Spain and sentiments against the Francoist regime led to the outbreak of violence and terrorist activity across the nation. The largest and most well known faction of terrorists was *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (Our Basque Homeland), more commonly known simply as ETA. But, this group was not alone in using violent measures to call for liberty and democratization. There were also groups of Communists who resorted to guerilla warfare in

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>100</sup> Share, 43.

<sup>101</sup> Carr, 155.

<sup>102</sup> Share, 43.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 65.

order to resist repression and wreak havoc for the Francoists. The violence generally consisted of minor political sabotage and primarily eluding the Civil Guard, Franco's paramilitary police.<sup>104</sup> The guerilla warfare tactic was not an effective way to promote change, but it was one some chose in order to express their frustrations when Spain lacked the basic liberties of speech and press for its public.

Three regions in Spain (Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Country) that differed from the general Spanish society in language and culture felt alienated as part of the Spanish nation since before Franco became dictator. For example, Catalonia has been campaigning for independence since 1922.<sup>105</sup> The Basque Country also felt like an outcast to the rest of Spain; especially, because their native language is Basque, not Spanish.<sup>106</sup> It is important to know, the Basque Country is politically diverse, but as a whole it does not support or condone terrorism. Originally when the ETA began their efforts, the Basque people renounced their actions, claiming they were incompatible with Basque life and culture.<sup>107</sup> The ETA was originally founded in 1959 as a party supporting patriotism, democracy, and non-confessionalism. The ETA was inspired by the wars for independence in Cuba, Algeria, and Vietnam with ideologies leaning towards Marxism.<sup>108</sup>

Terrorism blossomed where Francoist repression was most prominent.<sup>109</sup> When efforts by the ETA were repressed by the police, it further spurred on Basque nationalism and terrorist

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<sup>104</sup> Carr, 161.

<sup>105</sup> Barton, 220.

<sup>106</sup> Carr, 158.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 158.

<sup>109</sup> Share, 45.

activity.<sup>110</sup> But, terrorism was the type of opposition Franco was well equipped to handle. The regime controlled the media and therefore controlled the narrative of the terrorist attacks.<sup>111</sup> This caused terrorist attacks to become counter productive, generally harming democratic supporters' image. For example, the assassination of Carrero Blanco-- the then Prime Minister of Spain-- in December 1973 weakened the reformist sector of the regime.<sup>112</sup> Although, reformist sentiments had soared after the Burgos Trial in December 1970 where nine ETA officers were sentenced to death. The effects of this sentencing caused a scandal throughout Spain as pro-democratic demonstrations across the nation called for the pardoning of the condemned. Internationally, thirteen governments, the Pope, and Spanish bishops also called for a pardon.<sup>113</sup> The national and international pressure caused Franco to change their sentences from death to life in prison.<sup>114</sup>

In April 1975, terrorism was so frequent and concentrated that Franco announced martial law in the Basque Country, handing governing rights over to the Spanish Army.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, on August 27, 1975, the Antiterrorist Law went into effect. This law gave the police large swaths of virtually unchecked power. Police officers were allowed to arrest anyone they suspected of being terrorists and then torture the accused until they confessed. This law was so gruesome the Spanish Army refused to take part in the executions of Spanish citizens condemned under this new law.<sup>116</sup> Though illegal, the efforts of regional opposition like ETA was able to thoroughly denounce the Francoist regime to Franco's supporters and the world as a whole.

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<sup>110</sup> Carr, 159.

<sup>111</sup> Share, 44.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>113</sup> Alba, 234.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 235.

<sup>115</sup> Carr, 200.

<sup>116</sup> Alba, 244.

# Chapter 3: International Influences

## Section 1: International Democracy Takes Hold

During the late 20th century, Southern Europe experienced a wave of democratization. Importantly, in 1974, Greece and Portugal both achieved democracy through revolution.<sup>117</sup> The Portuguese Revolution was primarily a military coup against Portugal's dictator Marcello Caetano.<sup>118</sup> The violence of the revolution in Portugal showed King Juan Carlos that a speedy transition to democracy would be preferred to a slow one which could cause a violent revolution.<sup>119</sup> Juan Carlos was smart to make this connection as the democratic left of Spain did see Portugal's revolution as an example which they could replicate in Spain if needed.<sup>120</sup> An interviewer summarized the king's outlook on other democratic transitions, claiming, "Spain must spare no effort to avoid the disorder and chaos that Juan Carlos feels have been mistaken for democracy in some countries."<sup>121</sup>

The revolution in Portugal bore many similarities to the conditions in Spain. The coup was organized primarily by majors and colonels of the Portuguese Army with support from various military leaders. The organizers mainly included young officers who originally planned a

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<sup>117</sup> Share, 47.

<sup>118</sup> Alba, 238.

<sup>119</sup> Encarnación, 34.

<sup>120</sup> Share, 52.

<sup>121</sup> *The... Times*.

protest movement in support for higher wages and rightful promotions.<sup>122</sup> On top of better working conditions, there was substantial sentiment in support of joining the European Economic Community.<sup>123</sup> Similar to Franco's dictatorship, Portugal had suffered economic decline from the isolation forced upon their nation by Caetano. These factors, along with loss of support for the colonial wars in Africa, birthed the revolutionary Armed Forces Movement (AFM).<sup>124</sup>

The Portuguese revolutionaries wanted relatively similar things to the Spanish public and achieved them through the means of a coup. Juan Carlos recognized that in order to stay in power, he had to facilitate the transition to democracy smoothly and quickly. On April 25, 1974, the AFM removed the dictator and replaced the government with a new program. In this program, a temporary president was appointed, to be replaced in the free elections of the following year. Furthermore, censorship was lifted, and trade unions and political parties were legalized. These were some of the goals of the opposition to Franco as well, and-- as this essay will show-- these goals were achieved peacefully through the leadership of King Juan Carlos and Adolfo Suárez.<sup>125</sup>

## Section 2: Aid from the United States

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States sent massive aid to Europe in order to support its fragile economies and ensure no other political actor like Hitler or Stalin would come

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<sup>122</sup> Kay, 4.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 6.

to rise again. This aid came to be known as the Marshall Plan. From the United States' perspective, Spain overall had stayed neutral with slight Axis leanings and remained a fascist regime. Thus, Spain was excluded from receiving any benefits from the Marshall Plan, despite being in the midst of economic disaster that was so severe Spanish citizens were dying of starvation.<sup>126</sup> The humanitarian crisis gripping the Spanish people did not appeal to the United States' ethos, until the 1950s when the U.S.A was deeply invested in the Cold War. The United States (among other Western nations) realized despite its fascism, Spain was an ally in the fight against communism and the Soviet Union.<sup>127</sup>

In 1953, the Pact of Madrid was formed between Spain and the United States. Spain received massive amounts of economic aid in exchange for granting the United States air bases on Spanish soil. From the Pact of Madrid, Spain received the equivalent of \$625 million in aid between 1953 and 1957.<sup>128</sup> The Spanish economy began to flourish as aid uplifted the nation and encouraged reestablishing international trade. Between 1960 and 1970, Spanish GDP (gross domestic product) rose from 12.07 billion USD to 40.88 billion USD. The aid provided by the United States had important impacts on Spain. If Spain had not received supportive funds, the likelihood that the Spanish economy could transition from autarky to an open market capitalist economy would have been highly unlikely.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Barton, 252.

<sup>127</sup> Share, 48.

<sup>128</sup> Barton, 253.

<sup>129</sup> Share, 49.

## Section Three: Desire for International Involvement

Right after the creation of the United Nations in 1945, Spain was denied membership. Spain was largely isolated from international affairs and trade through their own economic policy of autarky and rejection of relations by UN members. But, by November 1950, the UN lifted the total embargo and allowed its members to have relations with Spain.<sup>130</sup> As the Soviet Union continued to creep westward, seizing satellite nations, Western Europe realized Spain-- though fascist-- was an ally to them in the fight against communism.<sup>131</sup> Therefore, in 1955, Spain became a member of the United Nations.<sup>132</sup> By 1960, Spain's isolation from the rest of the world had virtually ended with open relations with Europe and the United States.<sup>133</sup>

Further international involvement urged Spain to support democratization and conformity to the rest of Western Europe. For example, many Spaniards desired Spanish membership into the European Community (later to be established as the European Union) because it was said to cause political stability, an increase in the standard of living, and the creation of rapid modernization. The European Community consisted of three organizations to better help govern member nations: the European Economic Community (EEC), the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), and the European Atomic Energy Community. The most important of these organizations was the European Economic Community (EEC). The entrepreneurial elite of Spain wanted greater access to the benefits of the EEC and therefore supported democratization.<sup>134</sup> On

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<sup>130</sup> Barton, 251.

<sup>131</sup> Share, 48.

<sup>132</sup> Barton, 253.

<sup>133</sup> Share, 48.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 30.

January 1, 1986, Spain officially joined the European Community and all its connected organizations including the EEC.<sup>135</sup> Membership in 1986 reinforced the transition brought on by urbanization because of the increased mechanization of agriculture and the power of agricultural lobbyists in the European Community.<sup>136</sup>

Spain was harshly cut off from the rest of the world when Franco took power. Through the policy of autarky, the Spanish economy deteriorated, leaving the Spanish people desperate, hungry, and scared. As time went on, isolation began to wane and international relations were established once more. But even membership in the UN or the European Community by itself was not enough to establish democracy in Spain.<sup>137</sup>

## Chapter 4: Young, Progressive Leadership

The new leaders that came to power upon Franco's death were the most important factors of ensuring Spain's transition to democracy. From this, the transition to democracy was led from the inside out.<sup>138</sup> The first to democratize were the political leaders, with the last to feel the effects being the Spanish public. The manner in which the transitioners went about instilling democracy was through constitutional compromises in order to establish legitimacy for the new government.<sup>139</sup> It was the institutions of the old regime that were instructed to build the new democracy.<sup>140</sup> At all times, the transition had been controlled by the authoritarians of the old

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<sup>135</sup> Barton, 265.

<sup>136</sup> Gunther, 140.

<sup>137</sup> Share, 50.

<sup>138</sup> Encarnación, 34.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 35.



regime.<sup>141</sup> But, it was key that Suárez chose young, progressive leaders to facilitate the transition.

<sup>142</sup> This created a rejuvenation of the Francoist leadership.<sup>143</sup> Spain's transition was carried out by young, ex-Francoists who had never experienced the Civil War and had a future of opportunity ahead of them.<sup>144</sup>

## Section 1: King Juan Carlos

King Juan Carlos was the key to Spanish democratization. Juan Carlos's goal was to bring a constitutional, democratic, parliamentary monarchy to Spain. Though Juan Carlos was highly invested in the future of Spain and democratization, it is also apparent that this form of government also protected his position as king.<sup>145</sup> But from Franco's view, the king had not been molded to be a democrat, but rather the heir to continue the fascist regime. On November 7, 1948, a ten year old Juan Carlos arrived in Spain to get an education in order to be molded into Franco's heir. His education consisted of a general high school diploma, four years of military academy, and a two year intensive university program.<sup>146</sup> Historians may never know what shaped Juan Carlos or if his education liberalized him.<sup>147</sup> But historians do know Juan Carlos had become close to some political elites who were in favor of reform prior to his coronation.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Share, 123.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>144</sup> Alba, 280.

<sup>145</sup> Carr, 208.

<sup>146</sup> Arango, 95.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 104.

Juan Carlos, as the heir, was relatively popular among Franco's coalition.<sup>149</sup> Franco chose Juan Carlos as heir over Juan Carlos's father-- Don Juan. Franco avoided choosing Don Juan because he was too close in relation to King Alfonso XIII who had never abdicated; therefore, the designation of Don Juan would undermine Franco's legitimacy.<sup>150</sup>

On November 20, 1975, Francisco Franco died; two days later, Juan Carlos was crowned as king. Upon gaining power, Juan Carlos proclaimed himself as the "motor of change" for Spain.<sup>151</sup> Juan Carlos received substantial international support from Western nations.<sup>152</sup> Juan Carlos knew with the initiation of democratization, he would continue to be popular among international allies.<sup>153</sup>

Juan Carlos appointed Torcuato Fernández Miranda as president of the Council of the Realm-- an organ of the Francoist regime intended to advise the head of the state.<sup>154</sup> This appointment was part of Juan Carlos's plan to instill progressive leaders in all facets of the government. It was Miranda who ensured the Council of the Realm identified Adolfo Suárez as nominee for Prime Minister.<sup>155</sup> It was then up to Juan Carlos to formally approve his preferred nominee. It was Suárez's appointment that showed that the king was truly serious about bringing democratic change to Spain. With Suárez's appointment, the three top leadership positions of the government had been filled by progressives.<sup>156</sup> With these appointments, Juan Carlos was confident in the transition to democracy. In August 1976, Juan Carlos promised Spain would

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<sup>149</sup> Share, 68.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>151</sup> Barton, 258.

<sup>152</sup> Share, 81.

<sup>153</sup> Arango, 208.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>156</sup> Share, 86.

transition to a democratic monarchy while giving a speech in front of the U.S. Senate.<sup>157</sup> In 1981, the goal of democracy was put to the test when Antonio Tejero led a coup attempt by holding parliament hostage. Juan Carlos denounced the coup attempt and assured democracy had not faltered. The next day, the hostages were released with no casualties to note. Juan Carlos was a wicked leader and the key to supporting the new democracy of Spain. His control of the nation and popularity among the people allowed the coup attempt to die before it came close to success and the seeds of democracy to take root.<sup>158</sup>

## Section 2: Adolfo Suárez

In his early career, Adolfo Suárez was a loyal Francoist bureaucrat.<sup>159</sup> Suárez had spent his entire political life working for Franco. For this, prior to Franco's death, Suárez was not one to be known for having progressive leanings.<sup>160</sup> But, in secret, Adolfo Suárez had been one of the progressive political elites Juan Carlos had interacted with prior to coronation.<sup>161</sup> Suárez did not become well known until his renowned pro-democratic speech given in front of the *Cortes*, prior to his appointment as Prime Minister. From this speech, Spaniards believed Suárez would invest in a future for Spanish posterity rather than dwell in the past.<sup>162</sup>

Suárez was appointed as Prime Minister of Spain in July of 1976. The Prime Minister is the leader of the Spanish government. In this position, Suárez was determined to take the legal

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>158</sup> Alvarez, 314.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>160</sup> Arango, 107.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>162</sup> Alba, 264.

route in establishing Spanish democracy.<sup>163</sup> His goal was to amend the current constitution in order to maintain legitimacy for the new government, rather than starting with a new constitution.<sup>164</sup> Suárez's transition consisted of three major actions: to form a general consensus of the people, to isolate the "Bunker" (the radical conservative opposition), and open the channels of communication with the opposition.<sup>165</sup>

A major challenge of transition was facing the several groups of opposition. This was an issue Suárez took head on. There were three major political forces Suárez had to persuade in order to ensure transition, the democratic extremists, reform-oriented regime members, and the military.<sup>166</sup> In October 1976, the democratic extremists united in the call for the immediate formation of democracy.<sup>167</sup> Though the democratic extremists had faith Suárez would bring the abolishment of Francoism, they gave up their dreams of a Third Republic. They gave this up by agreeing to the restoration of the monarchy in exchange for free elections, trade unions, pardons of political prisoners, and the legalization of parties.<sup>168</sup> Suárez knew democracy would be impossible to achieve without the support of the democratic extremists, which is why Suárez approached the opposition with willingness to compromise.<sup>169</sup> Under Suárez, the government immediately contacted the opposition groups in order to negotiate.<sup>170</sup> The biggest concern was over electoral law, specifically the legalization of the Communist party.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Share, 86.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>165</sup> Carr, 222.

<sup>166</sup> Share, 93.

<sup>167</sup> Carr, 223.

<sup>168</sup> Encarnación, 36.

<sup>169</sup> Carr, 222.

<sup>170</sup> Share, 95.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 96.

In the end, despite authoritarian leadership in the transition, the opposition was able to negotiate fair elections, civil liberties, and equal access to the media.<sup>172</sup> These negotiations made it easier for the opposition to accept Suárez's version of transition.<sup>173</sup> Furthermore, the negotiations also acted as a way to avoid political fragmentation and polarization.<sup>174</sup> After the first six months of his appointment, Suárez had gained popular support, even the opposition respected him.<sup>175</sup>

In November 1976, the Law of Political Reform was passed which voted the old *Cortes* out of existence.<sup>176</sup> The preamble of this reform read, "Democracy, the result of the effort and work of the Spanish people, cannot be improvised." This reminded the Spanish public of Suárez and his government's dedication to transition.<sup>177</sup> This reform was the greatest triumph of the first six months of Suárez and King Juan Carlos's collaboration.<sup>178</sup> The government had been so confident the law would be approved, they had printed posters and reserved television segments in order to celebrate the victory before it had even been passed.<sup>179</sup> The Law of Political Reform introduced the notion of popular sovereignty.<sup>180</sup> The amendments of the Law of Political Reform introduced proportional representation, where 17 autonomous regions were created to act as representational districts.<sup>181</sup> The reform established universal suffrage to elect the representatives

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>174</sup> Encarnación, 36.

<sup>175</sup> Alba, 254.

<sup>176</sup> Barton, 259.

<sup>177</sup> Share, 102.

<sup>178</sup> Arango, 108.

<sup>179</sup> Asoca, A1.

<sup>180</sup> Share, 103.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 109.

and senators. By 1978, the reform had gained resounding popular support.<sup>182</sup> Since Suárez had come to power, Spain's rate of political apathy had substantially decreased, a positive sign for the reform and future involvement in the new democracy.<sup>183</sup>

## Conclusion:

Spain was most importantly influenced by its leaders. First, under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco. Then, King Juan Carlos provided Spain with a new set of leaders who worked in collaboration to democratize Spain. The nation was redesigned from the inside out, reorganizing the government and the role of politicians before expanding into structural change for society as a whole.<sup>184</sup> The nation was prepared for this change. Though there was hardliner dissenters against democracy and Francoists still remain today, the Spanish majority was supportive of change as seen in the vast number of protesters for democracy from university campuses to the streets of labor strikes.

The 21st century seems to have brought a slew of reasons to believe in the gloom of humanity from the 2008 Recession to the relentless war on terror. But the education of history-- even close history of the late 20th century-- can instill hope. For many democracy stands as a symbol of progress and freedom. In a world that seems to regress, reading about the triumphs of human existence is a reminder of the resilience of humanity to rise above injustice. Spain's

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>184</sup> Encarnación, 34.

transition to democracy is a mighty example of an authoritarian regime transitioning peacefully to a democracy.<sup>185</sup> It seemed to be a nearly impossible feat, but it was done.

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 35.

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