

# **The Politics of Contemporary Spain**

**Edited by Sebastian Balfour**

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# The Politics of Contemporary Spain

*The Politics of Contemporary Spain* charts the trajectory of Spanish politics from the transition to democracy through to the present day, including the aftermath of the Madrid bombings of March 2004 and the elections that followed three days later. It offers new insights into the main political parties and the political system, into the monarchy, corruption, terrorism, regional and conservative nationalism and into Spain's policies in the Mediterranean and the European Union. It challenges many existing assumptions about politics in Spain, reaching beyond systems and practices to look at identities and political cultures. It brings to bear on the analysis the latest empirical data and theoretical perspectives.

Providing a detailed political analysis in an historical context, this book is of vital importance to students and researchers of Spanish studies and politics. It is also essential reading for all those interested in contemporary Spain.

**Sebastian Balfour** is Professor of Contemporary Spanish Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His research interests cover the history and politics of twentieth-century Spain. Recent publications include: *The End of the Spanish Empire 1898–1923* and *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the road to the Spanish Civil War*.



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# Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	vii
<i>List of contributors</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<b>Introduction: Spain since the transition to democracy: an overview</b>	<b>1</b>
SEBASTIAN BALFOUR	
<b>1 From consensus to competition: the changing nature of democracy in the Spanish transition</b>	<b>6</b>
JONATHAN HOPKIN	
<b>2 The monarchy of Juan Carlos: from dictator's dreams to democratic realities</b>	<b>27</b>
PAUL PRESTON	
<b>3 Corruption, democracy and governance in contemporary Spain</b>	<b>39</b>
PAUL M. HEYWOOD	
<b>4 Using terror against terrorists: the Spanish experience</b>	<b>61</b>
PADDY WOODWORTH	
<b>5 Terrorism and nationalist conflict: the weakness of democracy in the Basque Country</b>	<b>81</b>
JOSÉ MANUEL MATA	
<b>6 Convergència i Unió, Catalonia and the new Catalanism</b>	<b>106</b>
ANDREW DOWLING	
<b>7 From National-Catholic nostalgia to constitutional patriotism: conservative Spanish nationalism since the early 1990s</b>	<b>121</b>
XOSÉ-MANOEL NÚÑEZ SEIXAS	

<b>8 The reinvention of Spanish conservatism: the Popular Party since 1989</b>	146
SEBASTIAN BALFOUR	
<b>9 The Socialist Party in government and in opposition</b>	169
MÓNICA MÉNDEZ-LAGO	
<b>10 Between ambition and insecurity: Spanish politics and the Mediterranean</b>	198
RICHARD GILLESPIE	
<b>11 Spain in the new European Union: in search of a new role and identity</b>	215
MARY FARRELL	
<i>Index</i>	235

# Illustrations

## Tables

1.1 The Spanish party system – some base indicators (1977–2000)	11
1.2 Shares of votes and seats in Spanish parliamentary elections, 1977–2000	13
3.1 The 2003 Corruption Perceptions Index (Western Europe)	40
5.1 Basque satisfaction with the Statute of Autonomy	85
5.2 Preferences regarding the state framework in the Basque Autonomous Community	85
5.3 Basque national identity	93
5.4 Basque nationalist identification	95
5.5 Fear of active participation in politics	96
5.6 Feeling free to talk about politics	96
5.7 Evolution of attitudes towards ETA	101
9.1 Total number of candidatures and percentage out of the total number of municipalities	172
9.2 Federal Executive Committee (FEC)	182
9.3 Degree of renewal (Federal Executive Committee, FEC)	182

## Figures

1.1 Percentage of overall vote, and percentage of vote for statewide parties, won by the two largest parties in Spain, 1977–2000	11
1.2 Percentage of overall vote won by non-statewide parties, in Spain, 1977–2000	12
3.1 CPI rankings of Spain, 1980–2003	41
3.2 Self-sustaining relationships between social capital and governance	50
5.1 Putative structure of the Basque National Liberation Movement (BNLM)'s basic network 2004: activities and organisations	98
9.1 Yearly growth in members of PSOE and in local branches	180
9.2 Number of members of PSOE (male and female), 1977–96	181
9.3 Evolution of public opinion regarding the performance of the PP in government and the role of the PSOE in opposition	191





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# Introduction

## Spain since the transition to democracy: an overview

*Sebastian Balfour*

The bomb outrage in Madrid on 11 March 2004 caused the world's media to focus their lenses briefly on Spain. What they witnessed was a society with a continued power to mobilise. This mobilisation took new forms. Text messaging and mobile phone calls brought people out into the streets and squares of the cities in solidarity and protest, and helped to rally voters for the election. Far from being intimidated by the terrorists, Spanish voters turned out in unprecedented numbers a few days later on 14 March to make their electoral choices (some 2.5 million more people voted than in the 2000 elections, a rise in voter turnout of 8.5 per cent). Against most predictions, the Socialists won a majority of votes and formed a new government to replace that of the Popular Party, which had been in power since 1996. The startling alternation of government represented a sea-change in political culture because the political system had become increasingly polarised. Twenty-seven years earlier, the transition to democracy, on the contrary, had been characterised by a high level of consensus.

One of the aims of this book is to explain why. *The Politics of Contemporary Spain* charts the trajectory of Spanish politics since the transition to the present day, looking inwards as well as outwards. It does so by focusing in depth on a number of key political processes, policies and parties. It thus goes beyond the textbook summaries about Spanish politics that are beginning to appear in response to a growing international interest in Spain. The authors, largely historians and political scientists from Spain and the UK, are either well-known experts in specific fields of contemporary Spain or young academics with fresh perspectives, many of whom first presented some of their ideas in a seminar series with the same title as this book organised by the Cañada Blanch Centre for Contemporary Spanish Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

In his chapter on the politics of the transition and consolidation, for example, Jonathan Hopkin argues against the widely held view that Spain provides a model for a well-oiled evolution from consensus to majoritarian democracy. On the contrary, he claims that the emergence of a competitive, rather than collusive, party system was the result to a great extent of contingency, and that Spain was fortunate that the hasty abandonment of

consensual decision-making in 1980–1 did not fatally destabilise the delicate transition process. Paul Preston traces the reasons why Juan Carlos became a popular monarch in a society with weak monarchical roots. In the course of the dictator's final years, motivated by a healthy instinct for self-preservation, Juan Carlos dramatically redefined his role. Throughout the process, there was an element of cynicism and calculation and a considerable contribution from a number of shrewd political advisers. Through his intervention against the attempted coup of 1981, the king cleared the monarchy of the stigma of Francoism and earned the right to be head of state. But Preston argues that his legitimacy is a very personal one and not necessarily a guarantee of the legitimacy of the crown. For his part, Paul Heywood examines political corruption in Spain and argues that traditional analytical approaches emphasising structural factors and the influence of social capital are insufficient as explanations. Instead, he emphasises the importance of incentives and opportunity structures associated with the changing nature of governance in Spain since democracy. The apparent fluctuations in the level of corruption are due more to oversaturation in the media and 'cycles of contestation' than any real diminution of corrupt practices.

The three following chapters about regional nationalism and the state also challenge existing analyses about Spanish politics. In the first, the Irish writer and journalist Paddy Woodworth looks back on the war against terrorism which Spain has been fighting for many years, examining in particular the state's use of dirty war tactics against ETA in the 1980s and the consequences for Spanish democracy since then. He argues that this dirty war undermined the democratic struggle against political violence but that this lesson seems to have been assimilated by policy-makers and counter-terrorist strategists alike. The relative success of the Spanish media and judiciary in exposing it was a remarkably mature achievement for Spain's young democracy. In a sombre analysis, José Manuel Mata examines the present-day situation in the Basque Country in which nationalist terrorism and persecution continue with the support of important sections of the Basque population, whose political culture, he maintains, is anti-democratic. Ethno-political discrimination against non-nationalist Basques, who number half the population, is rooted in a retrograde and essentialist nationalism that has succeeded in destroying the consensus vital to the functioning of democracy. Andrew Dowling, on the other hand, looks at the relatively successful trajectory of political Catalanism from the end of Francoism to the left-wing rainbow coalition that won the regional elections of 2003. He focuses in particular on the party that dominated Catalan politics in all that period, *Convergència i Unió* (CiU), as a result of a series of conjunctural factors, from strategic errors on the part of Spanish and Catalan social democracy to the role of Catalan communism in the shaping of the democratic environment in Catalonia. The CiU, he argues, transformed the terrain of politics in Catalonia to such an extent that the new

government led by the Socialists has adopted Catalanisation as its flagship policy.

Xosé-Manoel Núñez and I both bring new perspectives to bear on the phenomenon of rehabilitated conservatism in contemporary Spain. Núñez gives an overview of the new 'patriotic' discourse of Spanish conservative intellectuals and policy-makers linked to the Popular Party since the early 1990s, particularly during its two terms of office between 1996 and 2004. He argues that the renovation of this discourse is more apparent than real and that it still suffers from legitimacy deficits, above all in its failure to condemn the Francoist regime. This makes a common understanding with the left difficult in matters such as national symbols, liturgy and particularly the defence of Spain's territorial unity against peripheral nationalisms. Indeed, the absence of politics of memory plays a very important role in Spain's present-day public opinion. I examine the reinvention of Spanish conservatism since the transition to democracy, arguing that the Popular Party is not old wine in a new bottle but has undergone considerable renewal in its engagement with democratic politics. Nevertheless, authoritarian and right-wing mentalities persist in the party, matched by an incomplete assimilation of parliamentary democracy, as exemplified in the decision to join the Iraq war coalition. In the post-Aznar regime, the party, with a new unelected leader, found itself unexpectedly in opposition and isolated in a parliament celebrating the post-electoral honeymoon of its rival, the Socialist Party.

Mónica Méndez-Lago demonstrates that the effect of governmental power on the Socialist Party when it won the elections of 1982 was extreme because it had little time to develop its organisation before assuming office. Although attaining power was a catalyst for membership growth, it also hindered the internal dynamism of party organisation and shaped its growth in a way that had diminishing returns over time. Reliance on the resources made available by government constrained the party's organisational capacity to react to new environments, particularly once it lost most of those resources. Its unexpected victory in the 2004 general elections opened up a new phase both in Spanish politics and in the development of the party.

The last two chapters look at Spain's external relations. Richard Gillespie examines the growing importance to Spain of the Mediterranean, particularly in terms of national security concerns relating to immigration, the challenge posed by Islamist movements in North Africa, and Moroccan claims to Spanish territorial possessions. He identifies the main trends in Spanish Mediterranean policy since the death of Franco, looking at both domestic and exogenous factors such as the collapse of the Middle East peace process, 9/11, the war on Iraq, the bomb outrage in Madrid and the electoral victory of the Socialists. Mary Farrell argues that while Spain has benefited hugely from the European Union both economically and politically since its accession in 1986, Spain's alignment in the war in Iraq under the Aznar government, EU enlargement and internal regional tensions have threatened internal unity and external consensus. With the



new Socialist-led government in office comes a return to the philosophy that shaped the national policy of their predecessors who took the country into the European Community; that it is through constructing and consolidating Europe's role in the world that member states, and Spain in particular, can define the national interest.

To go back to the opening words of this introduction, the elections of 14 March 2004 were a sign of the strength of the democratic process in Spain today; and it is a measure of the success of the transition to and consolidation of democracy over three decades. The unsung heroes of the transition were those who organised mass protests against the Dictatorship of Franco, many of whom suffered torture and imprisonment. They helped to create the conditions in which authoritarian rule became untenable and democracy virtually irrepressible. The political system that emerged was the result of tough and protracted bargaining between political elites of the centre and the left and those on the right willing to accept democracy. The dynamics of this pacted transaction have been the subject of intense investigation. But it is usually forgotten in the abundant literature that elite accommodation was conditioned by mass pro-democracy mobilisations in the streets and squares of urban Spain.

Another aspect of the transition that is often ignored is that Spaniards embraced democracy so easily not because of the skills of the negotiators but because they had already embraced the civic values that underpin democratic organisation and this, in turn, was partly the result of the accelerated modernisation of the 1950s and 1960s and Spain's economic assimilation into Europe. That does not mean that civil society emerged ready made. Indeed the relative weakness of civil networks and the lack of pluralist traditions and associational activity in Spain remained for some time, and still remains to some extent, one of the deficits of Spanish political life.

The democratic transaction that ensued was impelled by pragmatism and rational choice and based on a calculation of the balance of power between right and left and changing electoral opportunities. With the reluctant compliance of its politicians, the Dictatorship of Franco was eased out of existence rather than overthrown, as the left had hoped. A price was exacted by the right for the new democracy, part of which was a tacit agreement that reconciliation in the present did not have to entail reconciliation with the past. Franco's torturers were quietly pensioned off and the injustices of the past remained shrouded in silence. The revival of civil society is exemplified by the recent efforts of the nationwide popular organisation, the Association for the Recuperation of Historical Memory, to uncover the mass graves of those murdered by the rebels in 1936 and to bury the victims. Acknowledging the crimes of the recent past can only strengthen democracy.

The Constitution was itself a model of consensual politics but where agreement could not be reached crucial issues were left ambiguous, to be resolved when democracy was fully consolidated. At least in one area, the

price of ambiguity is still being paid today. The thorny question of the real nature of the semi-federal model adopted during the transition after much compromise has not been resolved and may turn out to be a major headache for the government of the Socialist PSOE. In principle, the Constitution envisages the eventual integration of all Spain's regions, both the historic and the semi-invented, into a symmetrical, quasi-federal system. But the Catalan government seeks to maintain the existing asymmetry by deepening the process of devolution to its region, while the Basque government seeks to go beyond the Constitution to establish a new relationship of *de facto* independence from Spain. In the absence of any compensatory measures, the renegotiation of their statutes of autonomy agreed by the Socialist government (which falls short of Basque nationalist demands) entails not just the widening of the differential between the regions but also the risk of a substantial deficit in the financial system of the state of the autonomies as a whole.

Yet the Socialist government has demonstrated its willingness to address many of the issues left unresolved since the transitional pact, some of which require constitutional reform, such as the need to transform the Senate into a genuine chamber of regional representation. It would be rash to suggest that the transition to and consolidation of democracy may finally be completed soon (when it won power in 1996 the Popular Party government unwisely proclaimed the beginning of the second transition), but for all the continued belligerence of the PP and the residue of presidentialism in the Socialist government, the signs are positive for democracy in that a new spirit of dialogue permeates political life in Spain.

# 1 From consensus to competition

## The changing nature of democracy in the Spanish transition

*Jonathan Hopkin*<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The Spanish transition to democracy attracted a wave of scholarly interest in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and few aspects of the process remain unstudied. The juridical mechanisms and political negotiations underpinning the reform,<sup>2</sup> the emergence of parties and electoral politics,<sup>3</sup> the role of the military,<sup>4</sup> and the attempts to address territorial tensions<sup>5</sup> all received extensive attention. Subsequent work focused on the concept of consolidation, with threats to democratic stability itself constituting the main concern.<sup>6</sup>

Now that the dust has settled and no one doubts the sustainability of Spanish democracy, it seems appropriate to look into what kind of democracy has emerged in Spain, and why. Despite the predominant role played by negotiation and consensus in the process of regime change, by the early 1980s the new political system had developed the key characteristics of a majoritarian democracy.<sup>7</sup> In other words, although cooperation and negotiation between political forces was necessary to establish democracy in Spain, cooperation gave way to free, and sometimes intense, competition for power once democracy was perceived as consolidated. Rather than the coalitional form of government characteristic of countries such as Italy, Belgium or the Netherlands, Spain has been governed by single-party administrations, alternating between left and right: a qualified version of the 'Westminster model'.

This shift from 'consensus' to 'majoritarian' democracy makes the Spanish case central to recent debates on building and consolidating new democratic regimes. The literature on democratization posits an intractable dilemma between democracy as cooperation and democracy as competition. On the one hand, scholars have argued that ideological polarization threatens democratic consolidation, and that institutions should therefore be designed in such a way as to avoid political competition becoming too conflictual.<sup>8</sup> Juan Linz, for example, has argued powerfully that presidential democracies tend to polarize political positions, putting democracy at risk.<sup>9</sup>

On similar lines, much of the literature on transitions has emphasized the importance of elite pacts and consensus in building support for new democratic regimes.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, an alternative view emphasizes the dangers for democracy if political competition is restricted or suppressed. For example, Hagopian took issue with the 'elite settlement' route to democracy as adopted in Brazil, arguing that it entrenched non-democratic practices and protected the positions of privileged groups, undermining the quality of the emerging democracy.<sup>11</sup>

The debate therefore seems to draw two conflicting conclusions: democratization is most likely to succeed if political competition is constrained, but the quality of the resulting democracy will suffer if collusion between political elites becomes institutionalized.<sup>12</sup> The process of democratization in Spain, however, has benefited from the 'best of both worlds'. The Spanish 'model' of pacted transition has been lavishly praised for its success in overcoming what most observers believe was a significant potential for political conflict at the end of the Franco era. Yet this consensual transition to democracy quickly gave way to a competitive battle for power between government and opposition, averting the ills of collusive democracy that have afflicted Italy, for example.

This chapter is concerned with how the contest between competing types of democracy was resolved in post-Franco Spain. It shows how, as the transition period drew to a close, Spain underwent a shift from a 'consensual' mode of democratic government to a more competitive or 'majoritarian' kind of democracy, to use Arend Lijphart's terminology. It explores the reasons for this shift, emphasizing the importance of contingent strategic choices made by political and social elites, and concludes by assessing the implications of the Spanish case for theories of democratization.

## **The rise and fall of consensus in the Spanish transition**

Lijphart's definition of consensus and majoritarian democracy is based on two dimensions: the *executive-parties* dimension, which looks at the nature of party competition and government formation, and the *federal-unitary* dimension, which focuses on the territorial structure of the state and the type of constitution. Lijphart found that democracies tended to cluster into two types: consensus democracies, characterized by multi-party systems, balanced executive-legislative relations, and decentralized constitutional structures, and majoritarian democracies, in which a smaller number of parties compete for control over a relatively strong executive in a basically centralized, unitary state.<sup>13</sup>

In the Spanish case, there has been movement on both the executive-parties dimension and the federal-unitary dimension in the quarter of a century of democratic government. There is little dispute that Spain has become a more 'federal' state since the transition to democracy, as the 1978 constitution provided for the transfer of significant powers from the centre

to the autonomous regions.<sup>14</sup> On this dimension Spain is closer to the consensual end of the scale. However on the executive-parties dimension Spain has moved in the opposite direction, to such an extent that it appears closer to the majoritarian than to the consensus model, with a pattern of 'government and opposition', in which two large parties alternate in power. This shift has taken place without constitutional changes, and under the same electoral system (a form of proportional representation with a majoritarian bias which penalizes small parties with dispersed support).<sup>15</sup> This can be seen in three areas: the composition of government, the pattern of executive-legislative relations, and the party system.

### ***From government by consensus to single-party rule***

Clearly Spain's transition was not the work of a broad multi-party coalition. On Franco's death in November 1975, a single-party authoritarian state was in place, and none of its institutions were composed of freely elected representatives – indeed, political parties were at that time illegal. The transition was initiated and implemented by a government nominated by the dictator's successor King Juan Carlos in July 1976. But in spite of its undemocratic origins, the government of Adolfo Suárez in fact consulted widely with all the relevant political forces. Suárez had secret talks with opposition leaders, including the leader of the banned Communist Party (PCE), Carrillo, to convince them that he intended to establish full democracy in Spain. At the same time, he convinced the components of the Dictatorship that his plans would respect the constitutional order and maintain political stability. A Law for Political Reform was passed, within the Francoist constitutional framework, which envisaged free elections with an electoral law designed in consultation with both regime conservatives and opposition leaders. Such was the degree of consultation on the reform that the text was described as 'cross-eyed' (*estrábico*), since it appeared simultaneously to satisfy incompatible demands: full democracy for the opposition and constitutional continuity for regime conservatives.<sup>16</sup>

This consensual theme continued after the first democratic elections. Adolfo Suárez's hastily organized party, the Union of Democratic Centre (UCD), won the elections, allowing him to remain in power to direct the remainder of the transition. Although the UCD governments of 1977–82 were not formally coalitions, they fell into the 'consensus' category in a number of ways. The party itself was heterogeneous, originating as a coalition and following a broadly factional dynamic in the distribution of power both in the party and in the government.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, especially in the 1977–9 period, a number of prestigious independents served in the UCD governments, undermining its 'partisan' quality. The high levels of cabinet instability – five mid-legislature reshuffles in as many years – and extensive policy disagreements reflect a lack of party discipline inside the government.

Moreover, as minority administrations, the UCD governments were obliged to build coalitions in order to pass legislation. In the 1977–9 period, supermajorities integrating virtually all the parliamentary groups were commonplace (this has been described as a ‘consociational model of transition’).<sup>18</sup> Despite the sometimes fractious nature of interparty relations in the 1979–82 parliament, analyses of legislative votes reveal a persistently high level of interparty collaboration in parliamentary votes.<sup>19</sup> This was partly a response to the need to update Spanish legislation in a variety of areas, but partly a consequence of the UCD’s vocation as a centrist party seeking to govern ‘for all Spaniards’.

The PSOE governments from 1982 to 1993 were, in contrast, almost exclusively partisan, highly cohesive and supported by solid single-party majorities which allowed them to push through very partisan legislative programmes. Although, like any party, the PSOE had its own internal factional dynamics, there was no detectable pattern of proportional allocation of portfolios to structured party factions. Although a degree of interparty cooperation on some legislation persisted, governments in this period followed a party programme and rarely bothered to seek support from other parliamentary groups.<sup>20</sup> Between 1993 and 2000, first the PSOE and then the PP fell short of parliamentary majorities, and were forced into pacts with ‘peripheral nationalists’ to maintain their minority administrations, although the executive remained strongly partisan in both cases. In the 2000–4 parliament the PP enjoyed an overall majority, and the pattern of single-party majority government returned.

### ***Executive-legislative relations: the weakening of parliament***

The constitutional framework governing executive-legislative relations in post-Franco Spain has facilitated executive dominance over parliament, both under the Francoist Fundamental Laws, but also under the democratic 1978 constitution.<sup>21</sup> However, there has been considerable variation in the balance of power under the democratic institutional framework: the executive-legislative relationship was relatively balanced between 1977 and 1982, whilst the executive has clearly dominated since 1982 (again with a parenthesis in 1993–2000).<sup>22</sup>

The 1977–9 parliament was in effect a constituent assembly, and Suárez used his party’s plurality status to negotiate consensual solutions to divisive constitutional issues, rather than imposing a partisan text. The pattern of executive-legislative relations was therefore rather balanced, although Suárez used his dominant position within the UCD to deny his own parliamentary group any real influence over government policy. The most critical negotiations over contentious constitutional issues took place outside parliament, and the UCD parliamentarians with formal responsibility for the constituent process were marginalized.<sup>23</sup> Paradoxically, however, Suárez’s neglect of his own parliamentary supporters served the purpose of integrating

the parliamentary opposition more fully into the process of drafting the constitution. Suárez's objective was to pass a constitution with the overwhelming support of the parliament. As a result, the other parliamentary groups had an effective power of veto over some government proposals.<sup>24</sup>

After 1979, the deterioration of Suárez's leadership position strengthened parliament. The end of the constituent process made it more difficult to build supermajorities, and the UCD's minority status left it vulnerable to parliamentary defeats. Growing divisions within the party undermined the discipline of the UCD parliamentary group. Consensus was maintained for the passing of Autonomy Statutes for the pressing cases of the Basque Country and Catalonia, but broke down for some of the remaining regions. The UCD minority government began to suffer regular parliamentary defeats, and attempts to find consensual solutions for divisive questions such as education, workers' rights and family law failed, although there was a brief revival of consensus after the 1981 coup attempt. In short, between 1979 and 1982 the executive was in no position to impose policy on parliament. The difficult investiture votes of March 1979 and February 1981 and the censure motion of May 1980 testify to this executive weakness and the resurgence of the legislature.

After 1982 the González governments had cohesive parliamentary majorities which obviated the need for consensus or consultation with the ideologically antagonistic opposition, AP (Alianza Popular).<sup>25</sup> Executive dominance permitted a series of highly partisan and potentially divisive measures (the legalization of abortion, educational reforms favouring the state sector, significant increases in taxation) to be implemented with little parliamentary difficulty. González's position as Prime Minister remained secure even after major political setbacks, such as his change of heart over NATO, soaring unemployment and a successful general strike. Only with the loss of its majority in 1993 was the González government's authority curtailed. In 2000–4, the Aznar government had a solid majority, and parliament reverted to a subordinate role. A quantitative study of the proportion of legislation originating from the executive rather than parliament during these different periods, reported by Lynn Maurer,<sup>26</sup> confirms this picture.

### ***The emergence of an 'adulterated' two-party system***

Spain has had a multi-party system throughout the post-Franco period. However the nature of that system has changed over time, with significant shifts occurring both in 1982 and in 1993. Measures such as the number of effective parliamentary parties and the number of issue dimensions fail to capture the extent of this shift (Table 1.1). So what has happened to the Spanish party system to make it more majoritarian?

The best way to illustrate the shift is to look at the proportion of the vote won by the two largest parties in the system (Figure 1.1). In the first two democratic elections (1977 and 1979), the two biggest parties, the PSOE and

Table 1.1 The Spanish party system – some basic indicators (1977–2000)

<i>Election</i>	<i>Number of parties (Congress)</i>	<i>Effective number of parties (Electoral)</i>	<i>Effective number of parties (Congress)</i>
1977	11	4.16	2.85
1979	14	4.16	2.77
1982	10	3.33	2.32
1986	12	3.57	2.63
1989	13	4.16	2.77
1993	11	3.53	2.70
1996	11	3.28	2.72
2000	12	3.12	2.48
Average	11.8	3.66	2.66

Sources: José Ramón Montero, 'Stabilizing the Democratic Order: Electoral Behaviour in Spain', in Paul Heywood (ed.), *Politics and Policy in Democratic Spain: No Longer Different?* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 53–79; José Ramón Montero and Juan Linz, 'The Party Systems of Spain: Old Cleavages and New Challenges', in Lauri Karvonen and Stein Kuhnle (eds), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments Revisited* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 150–96.

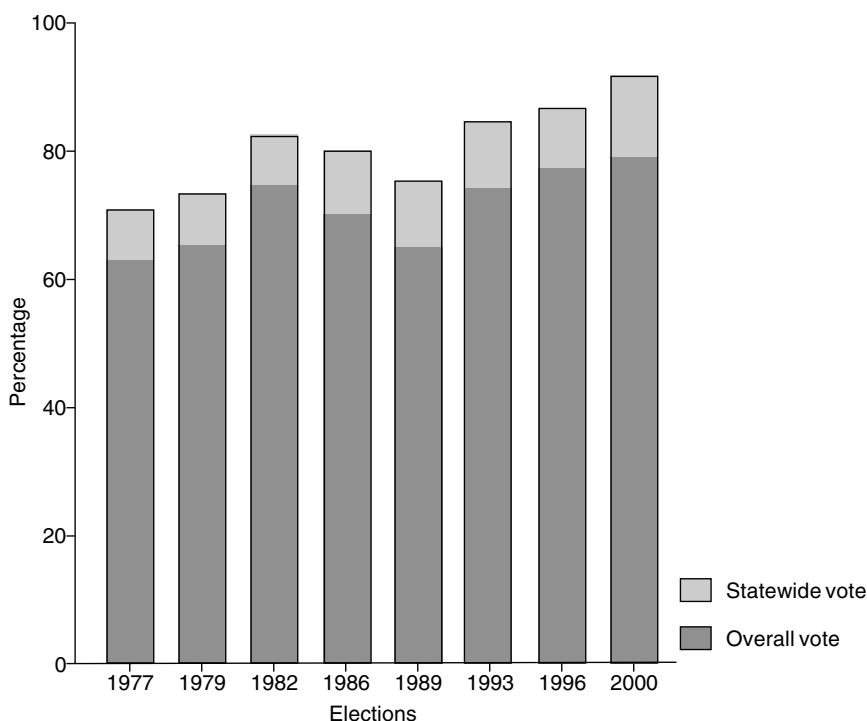


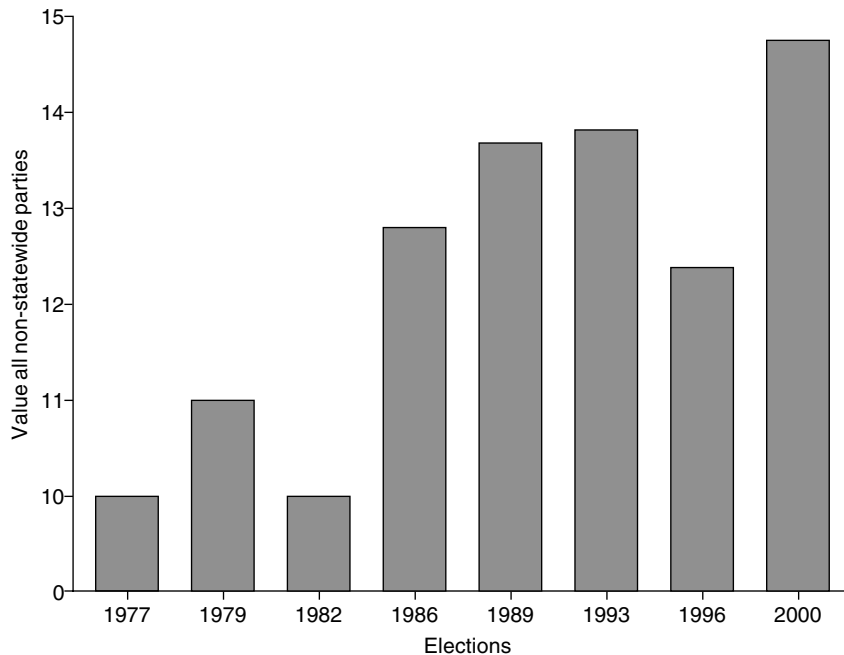
Figure 1.1 Percentage of overall vote, and percentage of vote for statewide parties, won by the two largest parties in Spain, 1977–2000.



the UCD, together won just short of two-thirds of the total votes. In 1982, the proportion of the vote won by the two largest parties (this time the PSOE and the AP) leapt to 74.5 per cent. Although this number dropped back a little during the rest of the 1980s, it rose again through the 1990s, reaching a new peak of 78.6 per cent in the 2000 elections. There is therefore a clear tendency towards a bipolar system, in which the two most powerful parties win over three-quarters of the total vote – a situation roughly equivalent to that of the United Kingdom.

This tendency is in part disguised by the persistently large number of parties winning parliamentary representation in Spain (Table 1.1). Party system fragmentation has been maintained at high levels by the strong performance of non-statewide parties, whose vote share has grown steadily from around 10 per cent in the first democratic elections to just under 15 per cent in 2000. In short, the Spanish party system has displayed two contradictory trends: an increasing concentration of the vote around the two large statewide parties, and a growth (and increasing dispersion) of the vote for non-statewide parties.

The changes in the distribution of votes amongst statewide parties, which win around 90 per cent of the parliamentary seats, have fundamentally altered the dynamic of the party system (see the changing vote shares in Table 1.2). The pre-1982 party system could be classified as moderate



*Figure 1.2* Percentage of overall vote won by non-statewide parties, in Spain, 1977–2000.

Table 1.2 Shares of votes and seats in Spanish parliamentary elections, 1977–2000

	1977		1979		1982		1986		1989		1993		1996		2000	
	%V	%S	%V	%S	%V	%S	%V	%S	%V	%S	%V	%S	%V	%S	%V	%S
PSOE	29.3	33.7	30.4	34.6	48.1	57.7	44.1	52.6	39.6	50.0	38.8	45.4	37.5	40.3	34.1	35.7
AP/PP	8.2	4.6	6.1	2.9	26.4	30.6	26.0	30.0	25.8	30.6	34.7	40.3	38.9	44.6	44.5	52.3
UCD	34.4	47.4	34.8	48.0	6.8	3.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
CDS	—	—	—	—	2.9	0.6	9.2	5.4	7.9	4.0	1.8	0.0	—	—	—	—
PCE/IU	9.3	5.4	10.8	6.6	4.0	1.1	4.6	1.7	9.1	4.9	9.6	5.1	10.6	6.0	5.5	2.3
Other SW	8.8	1.8	6.9	0.3	1.8	0	3.4	0	4.0	0	1.4	0	0.6	0	1.3	0
CiU	2.8	3.1	2.7	2.3	3.7	3.4	5.0	5.1	5.0	5.1	4.9	4.9	4.6	4.6	4.2	4.3
EAJ-PNV	1.6	2.3	1.7	2.0	1.9	2.3	1.5	1.7	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.5	2.0
Other NSW	5.6	1.8	6.6	3.3	4.4	1.2	6.2	3.4	7.4	4.0	7.6	2.9	6.5	3.1	8.9	3.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Spanish Ministry of Interior, elaboration Ingrid van Biezen and Jonathan Hopkin.

Notes

%V = share of votes cast.

%S = share of seats in Congress of Deputies.

Other SW = other statewide parties.

Other NSW = other non-statewide parties.

pluralism, with two large centre-oriented parties both potentially capable of governing (the UCD and the PSOE) flanked by two smaller less moderate parties (the AP and the PCE), neither of which were genuine anti-system parties. The presence of four relevant statewide parties imposed a coalitional logic on party interactions.

After 1982, this balance was overturned as the PSOE obtained a comfortable and sustainable single-party governing majority. The UCD's disappearance allowed the Socialists to monopolize the pivotal centre space in the party system, whilst the PCE's decline minimized the threats to its left wing. In short, the system shifted from a balanced and fluid moderate pluralism with a coalitional dynamic to a dominant party system with higher levels of polarization and interparty antagonism. But as the Socialist vote entered into decline, a further shift in 1993 brought greater balance to the system. The disappearance of the centrist CDS mostly benefited the PP, which emerged as a potential governing party to rival the PSOE. In 1996 it overtook the PSOE, and in 2000 won an overall majority. The recent 2004 election resulted in a further alternation.

The Spanish party system has therefore developed into what could be described as an 'adulterated' two-party system. Despite quite a high number of parties represented in parliament, the party system essentially revolves around a bipolar competition between two large statewide parties. The strong presence of non-statewide parties, and the nature of the electoral system, place obstacles in the way of the winning party achieving an overall majority. However, the post-1982 pattern of alternating single-party