



FOURTH EDITION

ROUTLEDGE

CONTEMPORARY

SPAIN

Christopher J. Ross, Bill Richardson and
Begoña Sangrador-Vegas

Contemporary Spain

Contemporary Spain provides an accessible introduction to the politics, economy, institutions, media and cinema of contemporary Spain.

This fully revised fourth edition includes new material that makes this the most comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date account of the situation in Spain at this juncture.

Key features include:

- accessible and authoritative background information ideal for the non-specialist language student
- each chapter contains a Spanish/English glossary giving guidance on the use of specialist terms in context along with further reading
- ideal starting point for more in-depth study.

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- coverage brought up to date to include the current economic crisis, related austerity measures and social difficulties
- new section on the changing public perception of the Spanish monarchy and significant new cases of corruption
- several chapters expanded to include key topics such as the role of the internet and social media, key economic issues currently facing the country, youth employment and civil discontent
- 'Spain in the Contemporary World' thoroughly revised to include a more comprehensive account of the relationship between Spain and the EU and other parts of the world
- new chapter on 'The Media and Film' covering the most relevant directors and films in contemporary Spanish cinema. This chapter also includes a discussion on the regional differences and cultures of the various autonomous communities.
- suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter.

Contemporary Spain is an invaluable resource for all undergraduate students on Hispanic Studies courses. The authoritative background information provides a solid foundation and a springboard for further study.

Christopher J. Ross is Senior Lecturer at the Vienna University of Economics and Business.

Bill Richardson is Professor and Head of Spanish at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

Begoña Sangrador-Vegas is Lecturer in Spanish at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

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Christopher J. Ross
Bill Richardson
Begoña Sangrador-Vegas

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For Ulli and Tony, with love. C.R.

Para Asia y Uca, con afecto. B.R.

Para mi aita, ama y Amaia, por enseñarme
a cuestionar el mundo. El presente es solo
una de las posibilidades del pasado. B.S.V.

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Preface

Every year more and more people are taking Spanish studies in higher education. Increasingly, too, those studies are focusing on contemporary Spanish society and the use of language within it. The two aspects are inseparable. An understanding of all but the most trivial of Spanish texts, both written and spoken, requires access to the body of knowledge about their own country and society which is common to all reasonably educated Spaniards. The aim of this book is to allow English-speaking students to access that same body of knowledge.

To illustrate the point, take the following (hypothetical) sentence from a UK newspaper: 'Labour's modernizers will this week tackle head-on two of the thorniest issues facing the party: selective education and electoral reform.' To understand it, the reader not only requires familiarity with English syntax and general vocabulary, but also needs to be aware of the meaning, and connotations, of the specific terms 'Labour's modernizers', 'selective education' and 'electoral reform', all of which form part of the cultural baggage of the educated UK-based English-speaker. This book's primary purpose is to equip English-speaking students of Spanish with the basis of the equivalent body of knowledge and understanding about Spain.

Even more than in general language, culturally defined terminology appears to give rise to problems of interference. Again, to take an example: the party which won Spain's 1996 election habitually figures in the English-language press as the 'Popular Party'. Use of this name, taken directly from the Spanish *Partido Popular*, removes an important element of meaning from the Spanish term and is significantly misleading – as well as faintly ludicrous. It makes no more sense than to say a Spanish text has been 'translated' into English, merely because in appearance 'traduce' resembles the Spanish word *traducir* (to translate).

The book's second purpose is to help students to avoid some of the more glaring linguistic pitfalls of this type. Here a note of caution must be sounded. In some cases, English usage is too well established to be challenged. Even though 'Committees' would be much more appropriate, the trade union federation *Comisiones Obreras* is already widely known as 'Workers' Commissions'. Similarly, although 'coalition' is usually applied to a government, it is already widely used in the English-language names of

Spanish political parties such as *Coalición Popular*, which would be better rendered by 'People's Alliance'.

Another obvious problem in preparing the book was that of selection. I have attempted to cover those concepts and terms which seem to me to occur frequently in texts, together with sufficient background explanation to allow them to be understood. The task was complicated by the change of government which occurred during the final phase of writing. Inevitably, there will be increasingly frequent reference to the party and individuals who now run Spain, and less to their predecessors. Nevertheless, the Socialists had been in power for so long and through a period of such rapid development that their names and actions will remain an essential point of reference for many years to come.

The book is arranged in a series of topic-based chapters, each of which attempts to introduce the main features of one facet of Spanish society and its institutions. It is intended for readers without specialist knowledge of any of the subjects concerned, and technical language is kept to a necessary minimum. Although not a reference book as such, the various sections and sub-sections are intended to be self-standing, so that readers can dip into a particular topic or aspects of it. There is frequent cross-referencing, indicated by section numbers in square brackets, to allow threads of interest to be followed across topic boundaries. Inevitably, this approach makes for a degree of intrusiveness and repetition, but I have taken the view that it is desirable in the interests of easy usage.

The glossaries included after each chapter are in no sense intended to be comprehensive. They are meant to complement published dictionaries by picking out usages that I have found from experience to be difficult to locate, or potentially misleading, or both. The bracketed Spanish terms inserted in the main text are intended to give an indication of usage in context; there is no suggestion that they are the sole, or even the most usual, equivalent of the preceding English concept or phrase. Where fully assimilated English versions of Spanish terms exist, they are used in the text, e.g. Saragossa, Aragon. Where they do not, the original Spanish form is used, including any accents. This applies in particular to proper names, e.g. Felipe González.

Even more than the text as a whole, the listing of initials and acronyms is, of necessity, selective. I have attempted to include only those which are habitually used to refer to the organization or concept without further explanation, e.g. PSOE. Where sets of initials have effectively supplanted the full term, such as the radio station *Cadena COPE*, they are not included in the list.

A list of further reading is included at the end of the book. It is deliberately brief, including only items which seem to me reasonably accessible to the non-specialist reader. Particular mention should be made of John Hooper's

The New Spaniards, an outstanding work of journalism that gives an extraordinarily vivid and sympathetic picture of contemporary Spain. There is, of course, no substitute for the quality Spanish press in keeping up with events in the country; a number of titles are now available on the internet. For more analytical material the best source is the *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, formerly the *Journal of the Association for Contemporary Iberian Studies*.

I owe a sincere debt of gratitude to various people who have helped in the production of this book. First and foremost among them are my wife and parents, for their unfailing support down the years. Second, my former teacher and colleague Diarmuid Bradley; that I could even think of undertaking such a project is due to his wisdom, inspiration and friendship. Last but very far from least, valued colleagues at Heriot-Watt University, especially Kent Sproule and Ann McFall for support and solidarity beyond the call of duty, and Graeme Lewis for his help in producing the maps. Needless to say, the errors and imbalances of the book have nothing to do with any of them, but are entirely my own responsibility.

Chris Ross
February 1997

Preface to second edition

Apart from the addition of two chapters, on the European tier of government and the individual regions, and updating of others, the main change with respect to the first edition is that the list of acronyms and abbreviations has been suppressed as a separate unit. This time I have taken the view that these are best incorporated in the (expanded) index, to enable interested readers to access all the information provided on a particular item from a single point.

I should like to thank those readers who kindly alerted me to errors in the first edition; their corrections have been gratefully taken up in the new one. On the other hand, I have not attempted to do as a number of comments suggested and extend the book's coverage to wider social developments. That would have exceeded both my competence and the space available. Happily, since the first edition's appearance a number of publications have come on the market which address such aspects specifically.

Chris Ross
March 2002

Preface to third edition

In this edition, we have updated the contents of the book, and have re-organized the chapters to give more space to certain topics which are now of crucial importance. We include a chapter on 'Social Challenges' which addresses, among other topics, immigration and the situation of women, and another new chapter on the mass media. We also include a brief account of the events of 11 March 2004, now a seminal date in contemporary Spanish history, and have brought together in one chapter the various references to the army, the forces of law and order and the justice system. While the elimination of the old 'Interests and Lobbies' chapter means that there is no separate section on the Catholic Church in Spain, references to the important role played by the Church are numerous throughout the book and each is contextualized within the topic being discussed.

We have extended the list of useful websites at the end of the 'Further reading' section. For a deeper understanding of the issues, however, the best sources are often still published books and articles; for this reason we also offer the reader who wishes to examine the topics in depth a longer reading list, one that includes advanced material as well as more accessible items.

We are extremely grateful to all those who took the time to read individual sections of the book and offer comments and suggestions. They include Pilar Alderete Díez, Mercedes Arévalo Catalán, Matías Bedmar Moreno, Mel Boland, Pedro-José Bueso Guillén, Óscar García García, Fiana Griffin, Ana María Lanau Larramona, Paula Lojo Sandino, Chris Monahan, Philip Ryan, Begoña Siles Ojeda, Karina Socorro Trujillo and Catherine Way. Tamsin Smith and Bianca Knights at Hodder Education were always extremely supportive and encouraging. We were given further invaluable assistance by Paula van Herk of the European Commission, by Niamh Walsh and Marie Reddan of NUIG Library, and by María Luisa Marteles Gutiérrez del Álamo and Miguel Ángel Miguel of the Spanish Embassy in Dublin.

Some of the technical aspects of keeping the text in good order were looked after by Karen Berry, Laura Daly, Robert Richardson, Deirdre Swain and Marina Wild.

Any errors or inadequacies that remain are, of course, the responsibility of the authors.

Bill Richardson
Begoña Sangrador-Vegas
June 2008

Preface to fourth edition

In this version of the book, we have added material on Spanish cinema, in light of the importance of film in contemporary Spain, both as an industry and as an art-form. This has been incorporated into the final chapter, which is now entitled 'The Media and Film'; the chapter also includes a sub-section on digital media. The material that formerly appeared in the final chapter of previous editions on the autonomous regions has been incorporated, to some extent, into other chapters where it is most relevant, in particular in [Chapter 3](#), which is now entitled 'Nationalism and Regionalism'. Much of the remaining material on the regions has been omitted on two grounds: first, it is readily accessible these days on internet sources; second, it is constantly changing, and thus becomes outdated almost as soon as it appears in printed form.

In general, we continue to aim at concentrating on less time-sensitive material, although there is no doubt that much of the information we offer changes fairly rapidly. This is particularly the case, of course, of a chapter such as [Chapter 5](#), which deals with economic issues, although we hope the reader can get a good sense there of how Spain has developed in that respect in recent decades and of what the broad outlines of the country's economy look like as it appears to be emerging from the recent crisis. Politically, there have been important developments since the third edition also, some of the most important of these being clearly related to the economic collapse. We offer an overview of the new political situation in a re-vamped [Chapter 2](#), 'Political Parties'. Closely connected to that is a new section on the 15-M Movement in [Chapter 6](#), 'Social Challenges'.

Given the likely need to find out more about the various topics we cover, and to continually update that knowledge, we have added some suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter under the heading 'Explore More'. Although the list of suggestions is fairly brief in each case, it includes material in English and in Spanish, in electronic and paper form, both general introductory material and more specialized sources or discussions of specific aspects of topics.

We could not have produced a new edition without the assistance and generously offered expertise of Marie Byrne, Orla Dixon, Javier Guzmán y Piñero, Owen Harrington Fernández, Leo Hickey, Joanna Marciniak, Philip Nolan, Patricia Prieto Blanco, Alastair Richardson, María (Mariuca)

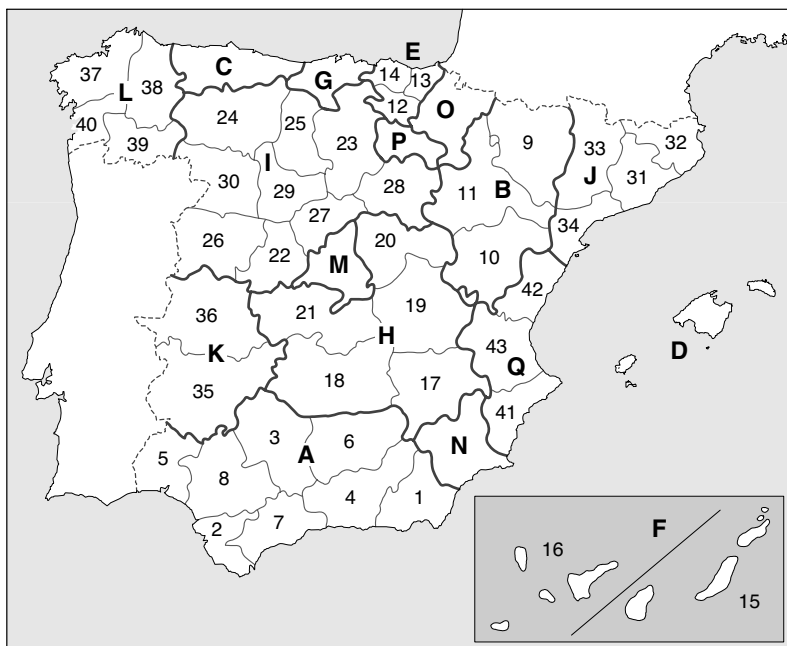
Sanabria-Barba, Begoña Siles Ojeda, Rafael Soriano Ortiz and Tony Tracy. Geraldine Smyth assisted with the manuscript, and Samantha Vale Noya at Taylor and Francis was always very helpful and encouraging.

Chris Ross
Bill Richardson
Begoña Sangrador-Vegas
June 2015

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Map of Spain, showing regions (Autonomous Communities) and provinces



A Andalusia

- 1 Almería
- 2 Cadiz
- 3 Córdoba
- 4 Granada
- 5 Huelva
- 6 Jaén
- 7 Málaga
- 8 Seville

B Aragon

- 9 Huesca
- 10 Teruel
- 11 Saragossa

C Asturias

[Oviedo]

D Balearic Islands

[Palma de Mallorca]

E Basque Country

- 12 Alava [Vitoria-Gasteiz]
- 13 Gipuzkoa [San Sebastian]
- 14 Biscay [Bilbao]

F Canary Islands

- 15 Las Palmas de Gran Canaria
- 16 Santa Cruz de Tenerife

G Cantabria

[Santander]

H Castile-La Mancha

- 17 Albacete
- 18 Ciudad Real
- 19 Cuenca
- 20 Guadalupe
- 21 Toledo

I Castile-León

- 22 Ávila
- 23 Burgos
- 24 León
- 25 Palencia
- 26 Salamanca
- 27 Segovia
- 28 Soria
- 29 Valladolid
- 30 Zamora

J Catalonia

- 31 Barcelona
- 32 Girona
- 33 Lleida
- 34 Tarragona

K Extremadura

- 35 Badajoz
- 36 Cáceres

L Galicia

- 37 Coruña
- 38 Lugo
- 39 Ourense
- 40 Pontevedra

M Madrid

N Murcia

O Navarre

[Pamplona]

P The Rioja

[Logroño]

Q Valencia

- 41 Alicante
- 42 Castellón
- 43 Valencia

Note:

[] Indicates provincial capital, where different from province name

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Introduction: The historical context

With its population of over 46.5 million, Spain now ranks among the world's largest economies. Beyond any doubt it belongs to the select club of industrialized Western democracies, and it is a fully-fledged and influential member of the European Union. Yet it is little over thirty years since Spain finally emerged from relative economic backwardness and international isolation, not to mention the shadows of a forty-year dictatorship. Even though it has since undergone immense and rapid changes, this radically distinct experience means that Spain – even more than other countries – cannot be understood without some knowledge of its history. This introductory chapter accordingly attempts to give an overview of that history focusing, first, on the critical period from around 1800 up to the death of the dictator Franco, and then on the process by which Spain finally joined the mainstream of Western liberal democracy.

0.1 The nineteenth century and its lengthy aftermath

Spain's situation in 1975 was the product of a long process of decline (*decadencia*) that had been in train for over three centuries. The highpoint of its history had come in the century and a half following the astonishing year of 1492, which began with the completion of the country's seven-century-long 'Reconquest' from the Moors and ended with the arrival in the Americas of Spanish ships under the command of Christopher Columbus (*Cristóbal Colón*). During that time it emerged as the first genuinely global power, dominating Europe and controlling vast areas in the Americas. Thereafter, however, it steadily lost political influence while stagnating socially and economically.

The crucial phase came in the nineteenth century, when most of the Western world experienced the great advance into modernity, an advance made possible by the earlier intellectual revolution of the Enlightenment (*Ilustración*) and embodied politically in the overthrow, or at least undermining, of absolute monarchy (*absolutismo*) as the system of government. However, just as that movement made little impact on Spain, so the country was barely touched by the three phenomena which together brought about modernization – industrialization, liberalism and nationalism.

Where these appeared they tended to be mutually reinforcing, and their non-appearance in Spain was similarly interlinked. The failure to industrialize was both cause and consequence of the weakness of the middle class (*burguesía*), which proved incapable of establishing a regime based on the rule of law and individual liberties. The lack of a dynamic middle class also deprived Spain of the key factor in forging a sense of common nationhood. Furthermore, such industrialization as did take place served to accentuate the distinctiveness of two of the country's disparate regions, the Basque Country and Catalonia, where it triggered off political reactions based on the idea of a separate identity.

The result was that Spain fell into a state of relative backwardness (*atraso*). While for other Western countries economic advance went hand in hand with

the acquisition of colonial empires, for Spain the loss of most of its American colonies was matched by domestic stagnation. A relatively weak and divided liberal movement failed to establish the bases of a modern economy or democratic rule. For half a century from 1820, changes in government occurred typically as the result of military coups (*pronunciamientos*), of which there were frequent examples. One such rising led, more by accident than design, to the fall of the monarchy and the creation of a republic (1873–74). This proved to be a disaster; by its end, Spain seemed threatened with complete collapse.

Eventually, a further coup restored the monarchy and put in place a political arrangement known as the Restoration Settlement. Under this, the military was kept out of politics for half a century, but at a high cost. In a caricature of democracy, two parties – in reality, barely distinguishable elite cliques – voluntarily alternated in power (*turno pacífico*) through an institutionalized system of election rigging (*fraude electoral*) managed by powerful local bosses (*caciques*). In 1898 this system was shaken by what became known as the ‘disaster’: humiliating defeat by US forces in the Caribbean and the Philippines, leading to the loss of Spain’s last important colonies. But, outside the field of literature, the ill-defined regenerationist movement (*regeneracionismo*) provoked by these events produced virtually no meaningful changes.

Instead, the country became ever more sharply divided into what were often referred to as the ‘two Spains’. One comprised what we would now call the right, the forces of authority and tradition: the monarchy, the Church and the military, allied with large landowners, independent small farmers and most of the urban middle class. On the left side of the divide was ranged an even more motley collection of industrial workers, landless peasants and urban intellectuals, influenced by ideas that ranged from anarchism through Marxist socialism to liberalism.

After the First World War – Spain’s non-involvement in which meant it was denied any surge of unifying national feeling – control over the country swung between these two mutually irreconcilable forces. First came the conservative dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923–30), the failure of whose ‘revolution from above’ brought down the monarchy for a second time. There followed a Second Republic, which itself swung from left to right and back again in the space of just six years, before a military uprising plunged the country into civil war.

The struggle was an unequal one. The Republic, it is true, could count on considerable support from the worse off, and from the strategically vital industrial regions of Catalonia and the Basque Country. But, crucially, it received little backing from abroad. The main Western democracies, France and the UK, stood idly by; the Soviet Union, after initially providing much-needed logistic aid, abruptly withdrew its support in 1938. The uprising, meanwhile, received considerable supplies of both men and machines from the Fascist powers of Italy and Germany. Together with the support of most of the army – as well as significant sections of the people – this proved decisive, and in 1939 the Republican forces surrendered to the rebel Nationalists (*nacionales*).

By 1939 the victorious rebels’ undisputed leader (*Caudillo*) was General Francisco Franco. His personal power was the first key feature of the regime (*franquismo*) he

created. The second was its basis in the traditionalist ideas of the Spanish right, centred on Spain's glorious past, the Catholic Church and strong central authority, while the third was a strong tinge of fascism. The vehicle for that was the Falange, a party modelled explicitly on Mussolini's Fascist Party and founded by the charismatic José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the son of the country's ex-dictator. His killing at the outbreak of the Civil War converted a potential rival to Franco into a martyr for his cause.

While the war was still in progress, Franco forcibly amalgamated the Falange with various other groups to form the so-called National Movement (*Movimiento Nacional*), although the old name was retained in popular usage. As well as a powerful instrument of propaganda and social control, the Falange provided Franco with an ideological basis for his regime, the notion of so-called organic democracy (*democracia orgánica*). In line with its ideas, the regime outlawed all parties other than the Movement, and met all opposition, whether from workers, students or the defenders of cultural identity in the Basque Country and Catalonia, with more or less brutal repression. Indeed, only in recent years has the uncovering of unmarked graves shown just how murderous Francoism truly was.

Franco's closeness to the Fascist powers led to Spain's international isolation after their defeat. Most importantly, the country was excluded from the American-funded Marshall Plan of economic aid which triggered recovery in the rest of Western Europe. In 1953 isolation was somewhat relaxed. A Concordat with the Vatican and a Defence Agreement with the US were both signed, the latter allowing American military bases to be established on Spanish soil. Yet Franco continued to block trade and travel, and even on occasion refused offers of outside economic assistance in the name of economic self-sufficiency (*autarquía*).

By the middle of the 1950s this course had proved disastrous. The country was near bankrupt and living standards remained perilously low; Spain was classified by the United Nations as a developing country until the next decade. In these dire straits Franco brought into his government a group of technical experts (*tecnócratas*), mainly lawyers and economists drawn from the conservative Catholic lay group Opus Dei rather than the Falange. They brought about a change in policy that allowed foreign trade, tourists and investment into Spain, while allowing out those of its own people unable to find work at home. The result was the prolonged period of economic expansion which made the word 'boom' part of the Spanish language and, allied with continued repression, served to dampen opposition to the regime.

The Franco regime also underwent an ideological change in its later stages. Even before the crisis of the 1950s discredited its economic doctrine, it had been obliged to distance itself from fascism by the latter's total defeat. In response, the regime tied itself ever more closely to the most conservative elements in and around the Catholic Church and proclaimed a new ideology of so-called Catholic Nationalism (*Nacionalcatolicismo*). As well as finally eliminating the Falange's original traces of egalitarianism and modernization, it placed a dead hand over artistic innovation and free thought of virtually any kind.

Ironically, the Church was one of the first sources from which overt discontent with the regime eventually began to emerge. The dissent of liberal lay Catholics, and some clergy, was fostered by the debates and decisions of the Second Vatican Council

(*Concilio Vaticano II*) held between 1962 and 1965, while bishops and priests in the Basque Country and Catalonia became increasingly vociferous in their backing for regionalist feeling there. When the relatively liberal Cardinal Enrique y Tarancón took over as head of the Spanish Catholic Church in 1971, its bishops went so far as to issue a joint statement that implied disillusion with the Franco regime and regret for their role in the Civil War. Much if not most of the Church remained deeply traditionalist in social and political outlook, but it was no longer the regime's unflinching bulwark. Meanwhile, similar changes were taking place among the business community, the more dynamic sections of which were increasingly frustrated by the European Community's refusal to countenance Spanish membership so long as the regime lasted [4.1.1.1].

More active opposition came from two sources, the first being the industrial workforce. Organized with the help of illegal trade unions, strikes proved impossible to prevent and regularly escalated into street clashes with the police. Not infrequently, army intervention was needed to suppress them. The second was the feelings of regional distinctiveness the regime had signally failed to stamp out. In Catalonia, these centred on cultural issues and mainly involved the middle classes. In the Basque Country, however, nationalism developed an armed wing, ETA, which established close links with Basque workers, already the most radicalized in Spain.

In fact, ETA's main significance was as a catalyst that transformed Basque nationalism into a major political force. Its actions never posed a serious threat to the regime while Franco lived. One, however, did have a significant effect on the prospects of its surviving him. In 1973, an ETA commando blew up the car carrying the first and only man to whom Franco had entrusted the office of Prime Minister, Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, a key element in the dictator's plans to preserve authoritarian rule after his own death.

In one sense these depended on restoring the monarchy, an institution which commanded the loyalty of most conservative Spaniards, especially the army. With this in mind, Franco had long since secured control over the upbringing of Prince Juan Carlos, son of the legitimate heir, whom he groomed carefully to succeed him as head of state. The machinery of government, however, was to remain in the hands of loyal Francoists, to be led by Carrero Blanco had he lived, while a peaceful succession was to be guaranteed by the still fiercely loyal army. Franco himself seems to have believed that these arrangements would ensure the survival of his regime; just before he died on 20 November 1975 (20-N) he asserted that matters were 'all tied up'.

0.2 The transition to democracy

Even had Carrero Blanco survived, it is highly doubtful that his master's confidence would have been vindicated. Like many a dictator, Franco mistook acquiescence with his repressive regime for full-hearted support, something it had never enjoyed except among a small minority. Certainly, opposition remained muted by fear of another civil war and the balm of rising material prosperity. Yet the very fact of his death released the pressures for change that had built up during the later years of his rule and ultimately forced a transition to democracy (*transición democrática*).

In part, those pressures derived from the economic progress the regime had itself stimulated. The contacts engendered by incoming tourism and temporary emigration

in search of work had shown many ordinary Spaniards that, contrary to the regime's assertions, liberal democracy produced considerably higher living standards than it could offer. To the liberal middle classes, for whom economic conditions were easier, democracy offered the attraction of greater intellectual and artistic freedom. To younger Spaniards in general it promised a more relaxed and enjoyable lifestyle.

Powerful external forces also favoured change. Alarmed by the Portuguese revolution of 1974, the US government feared that attempting to prolong dictatorship might result in Spain's turning Communist. More realistically, business interests in Western Europe were eyeing the Spanish market, to which continuing dictatorship would deny them access. Last but not least, political parties elsewhere in Europe, especially those of the left, provided financial as well as moral support to backers of change.

These were divided, broadly speaking, into two camps. One was made up of individuals who, while working with or for the old regime, had come to accept that some form of meaningful democracy was necessary, even desirable, once Franco was dead. These liberalizers (*aperturistas*) formed a disparate, unorganised group whose aims were in a sense negative; wishing for change, they wished also to keep it within strict bounds. The genuine opposition, considerably larger in numbers, covered an even wider spectrum of opinions, ranging from revolutionary leftists to liberal Catholics. Its organized core lay in the two main parties of the pre-Franco Spanish left, the Communists and Socialists, whose stated aim was a complete break with the past (*ruptura*).

Exactly what that meant was unclear. Certainly it implied the establishment of democratic structures in which those who had worked with the former regime should have no part to play. For sections of the opposition, though, it also suggested radical social and economic changes involving restrictions on the power of private capital. Such demands were anathema to other supporters of democratization, both inside and outside Spain.

These differences hardly mattered in the immediate aftermath of Franco's death. His protégé Juan Carlos was proclaimed king and immediately confirmed as Prime Minister the man who had succeeded Carrero Blanco in that office, Carlos Arias Navarro. By reputation a timid liberalizer, Arias followed no clear course. On the one hand, the authoritarian tone of his speeches gave heart to die-hard Francoists (*el búnker*). On the other, he was unwilling or unable to impose the ruthless repression they urged on him. Still technically illegal, opposition became increasingly vocal and visible. Widespread industrial unrest reflected workers' growing impatience in the face of the runaway inflation triggered by the 1973 oil crisis. Its clumsy repression often resulted in mass demonstrations and further clashes with the police, sometimes with fatal results. Events were getting dangerously out of hand.

At this crucial juncture, in July 1976, King Juan Carlos and his closest advisers took what proved to be a decisive step. Having forced Arias to resign as Prime Minister, they used the small room for manoeuvre left to them by Franco's complex arrangements to appoint in his place a high-ranking but relatively unknown Francoist bureaucrat, Adolfo Suárez. Their choice provoked consternation and fury from the opposition. In the event, however, it was to mark the true beginning of Spain's transition.

It was precisely Suárez's past that allowed him to move the situation forward. A former head of the regime's state broadcasting service and Secretary-General of the National Movement, he had immense knowledge of the operation of the old regime and many of its leading figures. That allowed him to achieve what, on the face of it, seemed impossible; to persuade Francoists to dismantle the Francoist state. Using a mixture of procedural manipulation and covert pressure on individuals, Suárez persuaded the Francoist puppet Parliament to pass a Political Reform Act (*Ley de Reforma Política*), which was overwhelmingly ratified in a national referendum on 15 December 1976.

The Act provided for a new, democratically elected Parliament. To ensure its legitimacy, Suárez had already ended the ban on political parties provided they were formally approved by the government. Over the 1977 Easter holiday he took the decisive step of legalizing the Communists, thus allowing all significant elements of the opposition to contest the coming general election. Held on 15 June 1977, it was won surprisingly but comfortably by the party Suárez had cobbled together for that purpose, the Democratic Centre Union (*Unión de Centro Democrático/UCD*).

Yet the Prime Minister lacked an overall parliamentary majority and so needed the opposition's support to undertake the more extensive changes clearly demanded by popular feeling. At the same time, the already grim economic situation was aggravated by a wave of strikes and demonstrations. These in turn provoked rumblings from army leaders unhappy at the legalization of the Communists. Political murders by shady far-right groups heightened the tension still further. For all these reasons Suárez was anxious to reach agreement with the left-wing opposition.

It was a desire shared by the Socialist and Communist leaders, Felipe González and Santiago Carrillo respectively, who had expected to block the Reform Act and then to win the 1977 election. At the same time, they too were concerned that continued industrial unrest might provoke a coup and a return to dictatorship. The Socialists especially were under pressure from their foreign allies and financial backers, the most important of whom were the German Social Democrats, to tone down their more radical socio-economic demands.

The result was the spirit of compromise (*consenso*) that characterized this crucial phase of the transition. Its most famous fruit was a new Constitution. The text agreed in Parliament was based on a draft prepared by a seven-man committee (*los padres de la Constitución*) containing – contrary to Suárez's initial plan – three representatives of the opposition. Put to a popular vote on 6 December 1978, it was approved by a convincing majority throughout Spain except in the Basque Country, where the outcome was, at best, ambiguous.

Like other such documents, the 1978 Constitution establishes the main institutions of a democratic state form and defines their roles. Not surprisingly given Spain's recent past, it also sets out a wide range of rights and liberties, some of them – like the 'right to work' – being clearly more in the nature of aspirations. At the time, its greatest achievement was seen to be the resolution of three fundamental fissures that had divided Spain for a century or more: between monarchism and republicanism, between the Catholic Church and anti-clericals, and between peripheral (Catalan and Basque) and Spanish nationalisms. Yet, almost forty years on, the last of these

cleavages yawns wider than ever, and the other two, while less dramatic than before 1978, still remain unsealed.

Seen from another angle, the Constitution marked the opposition's final abandonment of its hopes for a complete break with the past. In effect, key fields such as business, public administration and the security forces would continue to be run by their incumbents, mostly Francoist appointments. Meanwhile, González and Carrillo had been using their influence to moderate the wage demands of their followers, a crucial factor in curbing and then reversing the economy's slide into recession. But the job-creating measures promised in exchange were barely implemented – and ineffectual where they were. 'Compromise' had been largely on the part of the left. And for many ordinary Spaniards, democracy was bringing little improvement in their lives.

Their disillusion (*desencanto*) was obvious at the second post-Franco election, held in March 1979, at which turnout fell substantially. Over the next two years it was amplified by a growing sense of political instability. Despite a second victory at the polls, the ruling UCD fell into increasing turmoil and, at New Year 1981, Suárez abruptly and mysteriously resigned. Meanwhile, the Basque Country and Catalonia were granted extensive devolution, triggering demands from other regions for similar autonomy; these, in turn, were seized upon by some on the right as proof that Spain was in danger of breaking up. And crucially, the armed Basque separatist group ETA stepped up its murderous activities, of which the security forces were the principal target. Their understandable, bitter resentment was ripe to be channelled by the military's most reactionary elements.

It was well known that these were considering a coup, to be justified by popular dissatisfaction with democracy and the country's alleged ungovernability. Indeed, several times plans were discovered and foiled when already well advanced. Eventually, on 23 February 1981 (23-F), civil guards under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Antonio Tejero stormed the Spanish Parliament during the investiture of Suárez's successor as Prime Minister, Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo. For thirty-six hours they held its members captive, along with journalists and Parliament officials. Simultaneously, various army units mutinied, led by their officers; in Valencia, General Milans del Bosch ordered tanks onto the streets.

Most sections of the army, however, remained loyal to the constitutional order. Together with the police they brought the revolt under control and released the captives. Although it was some time before all its leaders were identified, the attempted coup was effectively over in a day and a half. Briefly it seemed to confirm all the worst fears about the inherent instability of Spanish democracy; in the event its effect was to dispel them. For the coup sparked off a massive popular and political reaction. No significant public figure spoke out in its support. Instead, political leaders ranging from the Communists to former Francoist ministers headed public demonstrations in support of the new regime. The largest, in Madrid, brought over a million people onto the streets. Spaniards might have been disillusioned with democracy, but they were virtually unanimous in preferring it to the alternative offered by the military extremists.

The next eighteen months constituted a strange interlude. The main aim of the governing UCD – to prevent anything resembling a revolution – had now been

achieved. Faced with other highly contentious issues such as divorce, and lacking the political skills of its founder, the party crumbled into its various constituent factions. As a result, Calvo Sotelo was unable to take the decisive action needed to deal with the country's problems. Yet the opposition was reluctant to force him from office for lingering fear of another coup attempt.

Finally, however, the premier's position became untenable and a third general election was called. Held on 28 October 1982 (28-O) it resulted in an overwhelming victory for the Socialist Party, whose leader, Felipe González, took over the reins of government in an atmosphere of complete normality. For the first time in Spanish history, one freely elected government had been replaced by another of a different political persuasion without any significant section of society seriously questioning the legitimacy of the change. The transition, it seemed, was complete.

One result was to elevate the transition to virtually mythical status. Indeed, it was frequently cited as a model of peaceful change for countries in Eastern Europe, Latin America and elsewhere when these, too, emerged from dictatorship. The 1978 Constitution, in particular, has been venerated to an extraordinary degree by the Spanish elite, despite its failure to touch upon such increasingly important topics as the environment, the role of major corporations and the media – not to mention the digital sphere. More recently, though, this uncritical view has been called into question – and not only in the Basque Country, where it had always been widely contested.

In essence, the transition's critics argue that Spain's new regime was tainted from the start because it was based on a tacit agreement on almost all sides to forget, to blot out from collective memory the events of the Civil War and the Franco era (*pacto del olvido*). This deal was encapsulated in the general amnesty granted in 1977. On the one hand, it freed political prisoners and absolved others condemned essentially for opposing the dictatorship. On the other, it granted immunity from prosecution to Francoist security force personnel who had seriously abused human rights in a variety of ways, up to and including torture and murder. Certainly, this made it possible to move remarkably quickly from dictatorship to a state impeccably democratic in its form. But it also meant that many injustices, on both sides of the political spectrum, went unaired. Above all, it ensured that the post-Franco right never had to admit, far less pay for, the complicity of many of its leaders and supporters with the Franco regime – or even to concede that Francoism was fundamentally brutal, unjust and ineffective. Pragmatists would argue that there was no viable alternative to amnesia. But it seems hard to reject the idea that some of contemporary Spain's problems stem from its failure to come fully to terms with its recent past.

0.3 Glossary

20-N (m)	20 November 1975 (death of Franco)
23-F (m)	23 February 1981 (attempted coup)
28-O (m)	28 October 1982 (election of first Socialist government)
<i>absolutismo</i> (m)	absolute monarchy/rule
<i>aperturista</i> (mf)	liberalizer (at end of Franco era)
<i>atraso</i> (m)	backwardness
<i>autarquía</i> (f)	autarky, policy of economic self-sufficiency

<i>búnker</i> (m)	die-hard Francoists
<i>burguesía</i> (f)	middle classes, bourgeoisie
<i>cacique</i> (m)	(corrupt) local party boss
<i>Caudillo</i> (m)	'Leader', title assumed by Franco
<i>Concilio Vaticano II</i> (m)	Second Vatican Council
<i>consenso</i> (m)	spirit of compromise (characteristic of transition period)
<i>Cristóbal Colón</i> (m)	Christopher Columbus
<i>decadencia</i> (f)	(historical) decline
<i>democracia orgánica</i> (f)	'organic democracy', Francoist term for regime philosophy
<i>desencanto</i> (m)	disillusion (with democracy, esp. c. 1978–81)
<i>franquismo</i> (m)	Franco regime
<i>fraude electoral</i> (m)	election-rigging, electoral fraud
<i>Ilustración</i> (f)	the Enlightenment
<i>Ley de Reforma Política</i> (f)	Political Reform Act
<i>Movimiento Nacional</i> (m)	National Movement, single party of Franco regime
<i>nacionales</i> (mpl)	Francoist forces (in civil war)
<i>Nacional sindicalismo</i> (m)	'National Syndicalism', ideology of earlier Franco regime
<i>pacto del olvido</i>	tacit agreement by major political actors to 'forget' the events of the Spanish Civil War and Franco era
<i>los padres de la Constitución</i> (mpl)	'fathers of the (1978) Constitution', a seven-man committee that prepared the draft of the 1978 Constitution
<i>pronunciamiento</i> (m)	(nineteenth-century) military revolt
<i>regeneracionismo</i> (m)	post-1898 regenerationist movement
<i>ruptura (democrática)</i> (f)	clean break with the past (i.e. Franco regime)
<i>tecnócrata</i> (mf)	technocrat; expert (adviser to Franco regime post-1960)
<i>transición democrática</i> (f)	transition to democracy
<i>turno pacífico</i> (m)	system of alternation in power based on electoral fraud
<i>Unión de Centro Democrático/UCD</i>	Democratic Centre Union; governing party 1977–82

0.4 Explore more

In English

Spain since 1812 (Hodder, 2009), by C.J. Ross, recounts the last two centuries of Spanish history in an accessible manner, approaching it from a contemporary social and political context, while W. Chislett's *Spain: What Everyone Needs to Know* (OUP, 2013) also gives a basic introduction to Spanish politics, culture and recent history. John Hooper, in *The New Spaniards* (Penguin, 2006), offers a lively and vivid account of the country and its people and this book is still useful for understanding contemporary Spain. Gerald Brenan's classic *The Spanish Labyrinth* (CUP, 2014), written in the 1930s, is a personal and very perceptive account of the background to the Spanish Civil War, while Paul Preston's *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain* (Methuen, 1986) is an authoritative account of the political transformation of Spain that took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The *Encyclopedia of Contemporary*

Spanish Culture (Routledge, 2002) by E. Rodgers (ed.) provides reliable information on many of the topics discussed in this chapter and in the book generally.

In Spanish

Carmen Mora's *España, ayer y hoy: itinerario de cultura y civilización* (SGEL, 2002) is an accessible textbook that offers a basic overview of modern Spanish history and society. An interesting account of Spanish history from the earliest times to the present aimed at a general readership is Julio Valdeón et al.'s *Historia de España* (Austral, 2006), written by three eminent Spanish historians. The four volumes of Javier Tusell's *Historia de España en el siglo XX* narrate the history of Spain since 1898 in some detail; all are worth reading, especially volume 4 (Santillana, 2007) on the transition to democracy and the first period of Socialist rule. The *International Journal of Iberian Studies* publishes specialist articles in English and Spanish on specific topics of relevance to contemporary Spanish politics and society. For the period prior to the transition, the *Introducción a la historia de España* (Teide, 1977) by Antonio Ubieto et al. offers a comprehensive and very readable single-volume account of Spain's history from prehistoric times onwards.

The Spanish state

The basis of a country's public life lies in the institutions and mechanisms by which it is governed, the state. The equivalent Spanish term (*estado*) is often used specifically to refer to Spain's own central government institutions – the monarchy, the Parliament, the political executive made up of the Prime Minister and the cabinet, and the administrative apparatus subordinate to it – as opposed to the country's various regional governments. The distinction has two bases, one being political rhetoric. The other is the fact that, unlike the central – and, indeed, local – institutions, whose features were established in the 1978 Constitution [0.2], the regions are the product of a process that may have begun with the Constitution but which was not delimited by it – and which is still going on today. Yet they are now such an established part of the country's governing structures that it seems appropriate to deal with them, too, in the present chapter.

1.1 The monarchy

The Constitution accords a central role to the monarchy, or 'Crown' as it is called in the text. The king – there has been no female monarch since 1978 – is Spain's head of state (*jefe de estado*). Constitutionally speaking, it is he who makes senior official appointments, including that of the Prime Minister; laws are issued and justice carried out in his name. However, these, like all his actions, are essentially formal in nature, and require the endorsement (*refrendo*) of another important constitutional figure – the government, its head, or parliament – from which the actions in practice emanate. Similarly, the requirement for royal endorsement of decisions such as legislation or the appointment of ministers is a pure formality. The monarch's powers of initiative are, in fact, negligible.

Only in two areas might royal influence be seen as real. One is the king's role in appointing a Prime Minister following a general election. Under normal circumstances, he has no discretion in this regard; he calls on the leader of the largest party to form a government and, once they have received the requisite parliamentary vote of confidence, swears them in. Theoretically, the role could acquire greater importance after a close general election, where no party enjoyed a clear parliamentary majority, a scenario that has become reality following the 2015 general election [2.2]. Nonetheless, on the only two occasions it has arisen so far, in 1993 and 1996, there was no evidence of any attempt at royal influence, which in practice seems inconceivable.

The second way in which the king is seen as possibly exercising real influence is through his role as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces (*Mando Supremo de las Fuerzas Armadas*). Here again there is no question of his exercising planning or operational control; these functions lie clearly with the appropriate institutions (government and parliament) and, like others, require only formal endorsement by the head of state. It is true that during the 1981 coup attempt, and on other occasions, the first constitutional monarch, Juan Carlos, may well have played an important part in preventing an insurrection. But his ability to do so depended not

on his constitutional role but on personal connections built up during his own years of military training under the old regime.

Juan Carlos's actions in 1981 – persistently portrayed by the media in as favourable a light as possible – earned him considerable praise as a defender of the new Spain. And for some twenty years his reputation remained good as he plotted a similar course, helping through his personal actions to consolidate both the country's democratic order and the monarch's role within that. Indeed, some detected less a revival of monarchism as such than a personal cult centred on the king himself (*juancarlismo*).

Thus for a long time there was widespread agreement that Juan Carlos's official visits abroad (*viajes oficiales*) represented a highly effective form of 'marketing' for Spain. Internally, the deliberately ostentatious exercise of his right to vote (*derecho de voto*) reminded any Spaniards who harboured lingering doubts about democracy that the contemporary monarchy is a pillar of that form of government, not an alternative to it. Perhaps, too, maintenance of a relatively modest lifestyle and royal household (*casa real*) served to underline the constitutional aspiration to greater equality.

Another important factor in Juan Carlos's popularity was the respect felt for his wife, Queen Sofía, because of the personal sympathy she repeatedly displayed in consoling the victims and survivors of serious accidents. Conversely, one of the first causes of the king's fall from grace was the realization that Sofía was increasingly being left to perform such duties alone. Gradually, rumours of Juan Carlos's serial infidelities, long suppressed by the sycophantic media, began to emerge. Matters came to a head when he was flown home injured from a lavish hunting trip to Botswana in the company of an aristocratic German millionairess in early 2012 – a time when many Spaniards were suffering severe economic hardship [5.1.3].

Meanwhile, the monarchy's problems had been accentuated by events surrounding the two eldest children of the royal couple (*los reyes*), the princesses (*Infantas*) Elena and Cristina. In 2009 Elena finally divorced her husband of fourteen years, Jaime de Marichalar, a singularly unsympathetic banker of aristocratic stock. By comparison, Cristina's choice of husband – Iñaki Urdangarín, a player with the national handball team – seemed a popular one. However, in 2011 he was revealed to have been abusing his position to divert public funds to private accounts outside Spain. The resultant Nóos affair [9.5.1] has not only led to Urdangarín being accused of various offences; in early 2015 his wife was also charged with tax evasion. On 2 June 2014, faced with this plethora of problems, Juan Carlos announced his intention to abdicate, officially confirmed sixteen days later. The event, and its circumstances, gave rise to a brief rise in republican feeling (*republicanismo*). However, for the moment at least, this has been blotted out by Juan Carlos's successor, his third child and only son. Previously the Prince of Asturias, as the official heir is known, he is now King Felipe VI.

For long a relatively low-profile figure, Felipe came into the public eye in 2004, when he married Letizia Ortiz, a commoner and divorcee already well-known as a TV journalist. Subsequently, and especially since ascending the throne, he has attempted to confirm the impression of greater closeness to ordinary Spaniards that his marriage suggested. In this he has been greatly assisted by his wife, and by the generally favourable, not to say fawning, coverage accorded to the royal couple in the Spanish media.

The reason that Felipe, rather than his eldest sister, inherited the throne is that the 1978 Constitution retains the historic precedence of sons in this regard – in direct contravention of the general gender equality guaranteed under its own Article 14. For some years there has been discussion about amending the relevant Article (57), which intensified when Queen Letizia gave birth to two daughters, Leonor (born 2005, the Princess of Asturias) and Sofía (2007). Doing so could entail a highly complex process, involving both a referendum and a general election, and would also bring pressure to deal with other, much more controversial changes to the Constitution at the same time. It has dimmed again as the prospects of further royal offspring have receded, but there does seem to be consensus that, should a son indeed be born, legislation would be introduced to ensure Leonor's succession.

1.2 Parliament

The subordinate nature of the monarchy's role in today's Spain is made clear in the oath of loyalty sworn both by the monarch and – on coming of age – by his or her official heir. The oath's wording explicitly acknowledges the Crown's subordination to the law of the land and, above all, to the Spanish people as a whole. They it is who wield sovereignty under the 1978 Constitution, which ascribes the central role in the state to the body that represents their common will; indeed, the political form of the Spanish state is defined not as a constitutional but as a 'parliamentary' monarchy.

1.2.1 Election, structure and composition

The key role of parliament (*Cortes Generales*) in securing the fundamentally democratic nature of the state derives from the fact that it is directly elected by the people. This takes place by means of a general election (*elecciones generales*), at which all Spaniards aged 18 and over may vote. The maximum period between elections is set by the Constitution at four years.

The Constitution also states that parliament shall be organized in the form of two chambers (*Cámaras*), or Houses. The official title of the Lower House (*Cámara Baja*) is the Congress (*Congreso de los Diputados*), its members being deputies (*diputados*). The Upper House (*Cámara Alta*) is known as the Senate (*Senado*), its members being senators (*senadores*). In line with British usage, deputies are sometimes referred to in English as MPs, but strictly speaking the term 'members of Parliament' (*parlamentarios*) applies to both Houses in the Spanish case.

As in the UK, the term 'Upper House' is misleading, since the Senate has little real power. Its impotence is reflected in the fact that there is no team of government ministers there, as exists in the British House of Lords. Effective parliamentary influence lies almost exclusively with the Lower House. In particular, Congress alone designates the Prime Minister, and hence indirectly the entire cabinet [1.3.2], and can effectively overrule the Senate if the two Houses disagree over proposed legislation.

According to the Constitution, Congress must have between 300 and 400 members; current legislation sets the total at 350. The constituencies (*circunscripciones*) are Spain's 50 provinces; the number of deputies for each province, which is subject to regular review, is broadly proportional to the size of the province's electorate. It is, however, subject to a constitutional minimum of two, which – especially as all