



SPAIN

WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW

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THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY, 1975–1982

What happened when Franco died?

Franco, the chief protagonist of nearly half a century of Spanish history, died on November 20, 1975, at the age of 82. He was wired and plugged into a battery of medical machines, with the arm of Saint Teresa beside him and the mantle of the Virgin of the Pillar, Spain's female patron saint, on his bed. Tens of thousands of Spaniards queued to see the dictator as he lay in-state; some joked that they did so in order to ensure that he really was dead. The majority of the population had never known another political system. The 37-year-old Prince Juan Carlos had taken over as head of state three weeks earlier as Franco had named him his successor over the prince's father, Don Juan de Borbón, the pretender to the Spanish throne, whom the dictator regarded as a liberal.

In his first address to the parliament, Juan Carlos made it clear he wanted to be the “king of all Spaniards, without exception,” an oblique reference to his desire for national reconciliation. Franco had left his regime and its institutions “tied up and well tied up,” and it now fell to Juan Carlos to unravel the knots so that democracy could be restored. The king and his circles were acutely aware that to break with the regime too quickly might provoke a military coup and that to go too slowly would unleash the pent-up frustration of Spaniards impatient for democratic change and ready for it as a result of economic and social change. Either way, the monarchy, the only institution that was not identified with either side in the Civil War, and therefore the only one that could move the country forward, was at risk.

The king's limited general pardon, issued less than a week after Franco died, did not benefit many of the 2,000 political prisoners, although the most famous one, Marcelino Camacho, a well-known trade unionist, was released from Carabanchel prison in Madrid after serving three and a half years of a six-year sentence. He had been convicted of leading the Comisiones Obreras (CC OO, Workers' Commissions), an illegal Communist-controlled trade union. He had spent a total of 14 years in prison. Another immediate consequence of Franco's death was the showing in cinemas of Charlie Chaplin's film, *The Great Dictator*, 35 years after it was first released, and other banned films such as *Last Tango in Paris*. Spaniards flocked over the French border to see this film when it was released in 1972. It was seen in Perpignan, for example, by 110,000 viewers, while the town's population numbered only around 100,000.

The king kept the recalcitrant Francoist Carlos Arias Navarro, who had wept when he announced the dictator's death on television, as prime minister. The king also kept the three military ministers. He balanced this by appointing relatively liberal politicians to the Cabinet, including José María de Areilza as foreign minister. He also reshuffled familiar figures, many of them former ministers under Franco, including the authoritarian Manuel Fraga, who saw himself as leading a European-style conservative party, as prime minister. Arias's promise to change laws as "Franco would have wished" dismayed the reformist right and lost him what little credibility he had with the left, which mobilized massive demonstrations for an amnesty for political prisoners and exiles and the recognition of all political parties. Bishops also added their voices to the amnesty demand. Extreme right groups, such as Fuerza Nueva (New Force), took to the streets in much smaller numbers to defend the regime and condemn democracy. The mandate of members of Franco's last parliament was prolonged for a year to allow time to move the country along the road to democracy, but progress was very slow.

The government's timid course of liberalization exposed the profound contradictions in the cabinet between the inflexible old guard (collectively known as "the Bunker") and the handful of reformist ministers. In the Basque Country, for example, the nationalist flag was unfurled in December 1975 for the first time in public in 36 years without police intervention, while demonstrators calling for an amnesty were baton charged and arrested. In March 1976, a group of army officers who had formed the illegal Democratic Military Union were put on trial and imprisoned for between two and eight years. In another trial nine Communists were jailed for belonging to an illegal organization. The press was also intimidated, and torture of some political detainees continued. The magazine *Cuadernos para el Diálogo* withdrew a report on torture by the Civil Guard and the secret police after the editor was told the issue would be seized and he would be called to testify before a military court.

In this tense environment, the main left-wing opposition groups put aside their differences and formed an alliance called Democratic Coordination, also known as the *Platajunta*. It was the joint product of the Communist-founded Democratic Junta and the socialist-based Platform of Democratic Convergence, which pressed for a faster pace of democratic reforms. The left's chronic factionalism was one of the factors that plagued the Republic. The king, caught between the immovable Bunker and a left that was flexing its muscles, became increasingly impatient with Arias and in July provoked his resignation by telling the US magazine *Newsweek* that his prime minister was an "unmitigated disaster."

Who is King Juan Carlos?

Juan Carlos Víctor María de Borbón y Borbón was born in Rome in 1938 in the middle of the Spanish Civil War. The royal family had by then been seven years in exile after Juan Carlos's

grandfather, Alfonso XIII, left Spain on the eve of the proclamation of the Second Republic in 1931. Alfonso abdicated in favor of Juan Carlos's father, Don Juan, in 1941, six weeks before he died.

After the Civil War, in 1945, Don Juan called for General Franco to "recognize the failure of the totalitarian conception of the state" and to restore the monarchy. Franco ignored the call and snubbed Don Juan in the 1947 referendum when Spain was declared a "Catholic, social and representative monarchy," with Franco as the lifetime uncrowned monarch with the right to name his successor. Despite the deep rift, the two of them agreed that year to send Juan Carlos to Spain to be educated. Franco did not want to alienate the monarchy, which he wanted to use for his own ends and upon whom he relied to some extent for support, while Don Juan wished to leave the door open so that one day the monarchy might return under him or his son.

Juan Carlos was only 10 when he travelled from Lisbon to Madrid (the family was then living at nearby Estoril) and became over the years a pawn in the dispute between his father and the dictator. He was a sad-looking child, separated for long periods at a time from his parents and drawn into the cold bosom of Franco, who never had a son. His younger brother Alfonso died at the age of 14, while the two of them were playing with a loaded gun. Juan Carlos had a formidable team of private tutors and was set a rigorous schedule, beginning with mass before breakfast. After his secondary education, he attended the army, air force, and navy academies, where he gained many contacts that would prove to be useful during the transition to democracy. Franco liked to give him history lessons in what he saw as the errors made by various ancestors of Juan Carlos's.

In 1960, Juan Carlos married Sofia, the daughter of King Paul of Greece and brother of Constantine. Constantine succeeded his father in 1964 and was forced to flee the country in 1967

after a military coup that led to the abolition of the monarchy. In 1969, Franco named Juan Carlos the next head of state, causing him to be estranged from his father. Juan Carlos was so affected by the nomination and egged on by various Francoists to confront his father to abdicate that thinking about it made him cry. Juan Carlos realized that to have rejected the succession in favor of his father would probably have cost both of them the crown. This was because there was a risk at the time that the dictator would name Juan Carlos's cousin, Alfonso, as his successor. Alfonso later married Franco's granddaughter Carmen in 1971, after Juan Carlos's nomination. (Alfonso's father, Don Jaime, born deaf and dumb, had renounced his claim to the throne in favor of his younger brother, Don Juan.) Juan Carlos accepted the nomination in the only terms that he could by swearing allegiance to the regime and to the "political legitimacy which rose from July 18, 1936," the date of Franco's uprising against the Republic.

Juan Carlos's public statements were vague and vacuous, as they could only be. In private, however, Juan Carlos made it clear to those he trusted that he intended to be the symbol of reconciliation and restore democracy. As Franco's heir, he realized that firm support for democracy was the only way to gain legitimacy and win backing for the monarchy. The Communist leader Santiago Carrillo dubbed him "Juan Carlos the Brief" in the belief that as Franco's puppet his reign would be short lived.

A few months before Franco died, in November 1975, Don Juan was banned from setting foot in Spain after he said his son's nomination was "logically no use at all in bringing democratic change." Unlike his father, Juan Carlos believed democratization could be accomplished from inside the regime. The king's academic and military education had given him an intimate understanding of how the regime functioned and how it could be changed from within. History indicates that transitions from dictatorship to democracy tend to be more stable

and have a better chance of succeeding if they are engineered from above by elites from within the outgoing regime rather than from below. Juan Carlos maintained the reactionary Carlos Arias Navarro as prime minister in the first post-Franco government, which only lasted eight months, while actively encouraging the democratic forces. A total and sudden break with the regime was not possible as this would have deprived Juan Carlos of the only authority he enjoyed, which came from Francoist legislation. It might also have triggered a coup from those in the armed forces aligned against democracy, but they were loyal and obedient to the new head of state because he had been appointed by Franco.

The king bided his time and in July 1976 replaced Arias with Adolfo Suárez, the man chosen to unravel the regime. As the march to democracy finally began to progress Juan Carlos, more astute than he was given credit for, was hailed as the “pilot” of change and no longer called “Juan Carlos the Brief.” Carrillo said that but for the king, “the shooting would have already begun.”

In May 1977, shortly before the first democratic election in 41 years, Don Juan renounced his rights to the throne so that in the drafting of the new constitution the democratic parliament would face no question as to who was king. The constitution consolidated the monarchy and Juan Carlos secured it on February 23, 1981, when, as head of the armed forces and in full military regalia, he went on television to face down a coup staged by a nostalgic minority who aimed at turning back the clock. Juan Carlos ordered the perpetrators to surrender (see “Why was there an attempted coup in 1981?” below).

The monarchy is popular in Spain. According to an opinion poll conducted on the 80th anniversary of the proclamation of the Second Republic in 1931, 48 percent of respondents said the monarchy was a better political system than a republic compared to 39 percent who preferred

a republic. Several embarrassing incidents since then, however, tarnished the royal family's image and prestige. The World Wildlife Fund removed the king as its honorary president in 2012 for going on an elephant-hunting trip in Botswana, and his son-in-law, Iñaki Urdangarin, was under investigation for alleged fraud, tax evasion, and embezzlement of public funds related to Noos, the non-profit foundation he ran. The king's pricey African safari during a time of national hardship led him to publicly apologize and make the royal household's annual budget more transparent. At the end of 2012, 53 percent of respondents in a survey conducted by Metroscopia expressed support for a parliamentary monarchy as the best system for Spain compared to 72 percent in 1998. Over the same period support for the restoration of a republic increased from 11 percent to 37 percent.

How was the transition to democracy achieved?

The transition to democracy began in earnest with the resignation of Prime Minister Carlos Arias Navarro in July 1976 and his replacement by the much younger Adolfo Suárez, a former head of the state-run television channel (TVE) and minister of the National Movement, the only legal political organization in Arias's government. Suárez was from the same generation as the king (both of them were born during the 1930s) but was not tainted by the Civil War. His appointment initially delighted Francoists and horrified the opposition until it became clear that, unlike Arias, Suárez was serious about reform. His promotion was stage managed by Torcuato Fernández Miranda, the private law tutor of King Juan Carlos and head of the Cortes (parliament) and of the Consejo del Reino (Council of the Realm), the highest advisory body and the one responsible for selecting three people from which the king would choose the prime minister. Fernández Miranda slipped Suárez's name onto the list almost unnoticed; he was regarded as having no chance of

getting the job. In fact it was all part of a carefully crafted maneuver to use Francoist “legality” and a National Movement apparatchik to achieve democracy gradually rather than by engineering a swift break with the regime, which would have run the risk of provoking the old guard.

The transition was facilitated by a bureaucracy that was able to distinguish between service to the state and service to a particular government. Thus it did not require a prior or simultaneous transformation before the regime could move to democracy. Furthermore, as Franco’s regime was a dictatorship of a military man rather than a military dictatorship at the time of his death it was not necessary to dislodge the military from power. With the exception of those at either end of the political extremes, there was no desire to open up the divisions caused by the Civil War. The left realized that its push for a provisional government and a constituent parliament to decide on the form of regime was utopian and that it would have to negotiate patiently with the regime’s reformists. Consensus, after so polarized a past, was very much the watchword between the reformist right and the nonviolent left. This was epitomized by the *Pacto de Olvido* (literally, Pact of Forgetting), an unspoken agreement among political elites to look ahead and not rake over the past. Looking backward could have destabilized the transition, as happened in Argentina after military trials got underway. The pact was institutionalized by the 1977 Amnesty Law.

The big difference between Spain and other dictatorships that moved to democracy in the 20th century was that the Spanish one was born out of a devastating civil war. None of the parties had any interest in having the role they played during the Second Republic before the Civil War put under the microscope, as this would have opened a Pandora’s box of potentially violent consequences. There was nothing resembling a Truth and Reconciliation Commission

along the lines of the one Chile set up shortly after the end of the Pinochet dictatorship, in 1990. At the grassroots and local levels, however, the amnesty law did not prevent the early opening of mass graves of Republican supporters executed during and after the Civil War, nor the payment of pensions to former Republican military and police officers. Likewise it could not stem the publication of many memoirs and novels and serious historical research on the war and its aftermath.

The opposition's stance toward the transition was summed up by Enrique Tierno Galván, a Socialist professor and later a very popular mayor of Madrid. "If the government wants to construct a house (democratic Spain), furnish it and then invite us in it as tenants, then negotiation is not going to be possible. If, on the other hand, it invites the opposition to construct the house and furnish it, then negotiation is possible." The latter is what happened: in sharp contrast to the Franco regime, an inclusive political system was established.

Suárez was greatly aided by General Manuel Gutiérrez Mellado, the chief of the General Staff, who replaced the staunchly Francoist General Fernando de Santiago y Díaz de Mendivil as Suárez's deputy prime minister for defense when de Santiago resigned in September 1976, over a disagreement with the government's plan to abolish the Francoist trade union structure and allow free unions. De Santiago protested that the unions were "responsible for the outrages committed in the red zone (the area held by the Republicans in the Civil War)." Gutiérrez Mellado said he was a liberal "if you mean that I am opposed to fratricidal strife and that I believe Spain should belong to all Spaniards." He abolished the army, air force, and navy ministries and combined them in a new defense ministry, which he headed. He also tried to change the mindset of officers, particularly those who had fought in the Civil War on Franco's side. He retired the most Francoist ones and replaced them with moderate officers. The general

made the changes at great personal risk. He was regularly insulted and harassed by hardline officers.

Parliament approved the reform of the penal code, permitting political activity for the first time in 37 years except by the Communists, the most organized force, which remained banned under pressure from Francoist diehards. The king decreed a partial amnesty for political prisoners and exiles, but not for those convicted of crimes of blood, leaving 145 members of the Basque separatist group ETA in prison. Various people were also barred from returning to Spain, including the 82-year-old Dolores Ibárruri, the legendary Communist leader known as La Pasionaria, who was famous for her use of the expression “they shall not pass” (referring to Franco’s troops) during the Civil War. The continued ban on the Communists dented the credibility of the general election promised for 1977. Santiago Carrillo, the party’s exiled and veteran secretary-general, challenged the government’s sincerity by crossing into Spain from France wearing a wig so that he would not be recognized by police at the border. He was arrested in Madrid and imprisoned in December 1976, shortly after the Francoist parliament approved the political reform law, thereby voting itself out of office. This paved the way for parliamentary democracy and a constitutional monarchy. Only 59 hard-core members of Franco’s last parliament voted against the reforms; the 425 who amazingly voted in favor did so out of a mixture of obedience to authority, patriotism, and in some cases the promise of seats in the new senate. Voter turnout in the December 15, 1976, referendum on political reform was 78 percent, with 97 percent of voters supporting the reforms, despite a boycott campaign waged by the left. The Public Order Court for political offences was then abolished, enabling Carrillo to be freed after a week in prison and the Communist Party to be legalized on April 9, 1977, a week after the National Movement ended. Not to have authorized the party would have given the Communists

an importance they did not have. Carrillo had agreed in secret negotiations with Suárez to recognize the monarchy and the unity of Spain and cooperate in dealing with the economic crisis as it controlled the Comisiones Obreras (CC OO, Workers' Commissions), the main trade union. The Communist Party wanted to burnish its respectability. It was very disciplined and pragmatic; when four of its lawyers were murdered by ultra-right-wing terrorists, as part of a strategy of tension to derail the moves toward democracy, the leadership refused to be provoked and staged a massive silent march through Madrid. The party's legalization outraged reactionary officers in the armed forces and provoked the resignation of Admiral Gabriel Pita de Veiga, the navy minister. According to secret reports by the intelligence services of the armed forces, most officers above the rank of lieutenant colonel were opposed to the legalization of the Communists.

Spain held its first free general election since February 1936 (five months before Franco's military uprising) on June 15, 1977. A veritable alphabet soup of 70 political parties and 4,537 candidates ran for the 350-member parliament. The political situation in the village where I have a house mirrored that of the countryside as a whole. With very few telephones and the nearest place to buy newspapers 17km away, villagers' only link with the outside world was the state-run television. The secretary of the village's town hall, a Francoist, was the first to place his vote in the 100-year-old urn that held the ballots, so he could show the three election officials how the system worked. This was the first time that most of the electorate of the village (391 people) had voted in an election.

The Unión del Centro Democrático (UCD, the Union of the Democratic Center), a loose and hastily formed coalition of 12 groups including the more progressive segments of the Francoist bureaucracy—liberals, Christian Democrats, and social democrats headed by Suárez—won 34.4 percent of the vote and 166 of the 350 seats. The Partido Socialista Obrero Español

(PSOE, the Spanish Workers' Socialist Party), led by Felipe González, won 29.3 percent and 118 seats; the Partido Comunista Español (PCE, Spanish Communist Party), led by Carrillo, won 9.3 percent and 20 seats; and the neo-Francoist Alianza Popular (AP, Popular Alliance) of Manuel Fraga, a former information and tourism minister under the dictator and an authoritarian interior minister in the first government after Franco's death, obtained 8.2 percent and 16 seats. Fraga was seriously mistaken in his belief that the dictatorship had made a large part of the electorate conservative. The other 31 seats went to Catalan, Basque, and six other parties. Voter turnout was almost 80 percent. Franco's most ardent supporters, despite not believing in political parties, fielded several of them in the election and between them gained less than 1 percent of the total vote.

The results were a victory for the reformist right over the neo-Francoist right and for the moderate left over the radical left and clearly expressed Spaniards' desire to turn the page on the dictatorship. The UCD's victory prevented a polarization between the extremes of left and right, which would have been a dangerous climax to a transition period. The church's hierarchy in Spain also played a positive role by not using its considerable influence and power to openly back a Christian Democrat Party, as it did during the Second Republic (1931–1936) when it supported the CEDA. As a predominantly Catholic country, Spain was fertile soil for such a party along the lines of Germany and Italy, although the Christian Democrat movement in the country was very divided. Cardinal Vicente Enrique y Tarancón, the archbishop of Madrid and head of the Episcopal Conference (the bishops' organization), feared that a confessional party would revive the anticlericalism that beset the Republic and was one factor that led to the uprising of General Franco that sparked the Civil War.

La Pasionaria, in a symbolic act of reconciliation, presided over the inaugural meeting of the new parliament, and the king referred to himself for the first time in public as a “constitutional monarch.” The last time La Pasionaria had spoken in parliament was in 1936, when the country was on the brink of civil war. The first law approved by the new parliament in October 1977 granted an amnesty for those who had not benefited from the amnesty in 1976, including for crimes of bloodshed, and stipulated that political crimes committed before December of that year could not be prosecuted. This drew a line under the dictatorship and granted impunity. Since then, this law has been invoked to dismiss investigations into Franco-era crimes for which there were no Truth and Reconciliation Commissions or Depuration Committees along the lines of those introduced in countries like Chile, South Africa, or Uruguay (see the question in chapter 6 on the Law of Historical Memory).

Who is Adolfo Suárez?

Adolfo Suárez, the politician chosen by King Juan Carlos to dismantle the Franco regime, was born in Cebreros, a village in the province of Avila, in 1932, one year after the Second Republic was established and four years before the start of the Civil War. His father was a government lawyer and he, too, took a law degree. Strikingly handsome, Suárez came to the notice of Fernando Herrero Tejador, the civil governor and provincial head of the National Movement, the only legal political organization, in Avila, a province with a reputation for being conservative and staunchly Catholic. Suárez held various posts in the Movement, which was the only way for ambitious young men to advance politically. He became a member of Franco’s rubber-stamp parliament at the age of 35, and civil governor of Segovia and provincial head of the Movement a year later. He came to the attention of the king between 1969 and 1973, when he was head of

the state-run television, where he promoted the image of Juan Carlos and reportedly told him how the regime could be changed from within. In 1975, he was second in command of the Movement at the national level and head of it, with cabinet rank, in the first post-Franco government of the hardline Carlos Arias Navarro at the end of that year. Also that year he was one of the first of the regime's bureaucrats to take advantage of the law allowing political associations within the principles of the Movement, when he formed the Union of the Spanish People.

The knowledge, experience, and contacts that Suárez gained, coupled with the fact that he was not clearly identified with any of the currents of Francoism or associated with any of the regime's scandals, put him in an ideal position to reform the regime from within when the king got rid of Arias. The main political hurdle he faced was the legalization of the Communist Party. Although he had been a loyal servant of the Franco regime, and hence part of a caste that was generally out of touch with the extent to which society had changed during 36 years of one-party rule, Suárez had well-developed political antennae. This led him to declare, in one of his celebrated phrases, that "it is necessary to make politically real what is already real in the streets." Opinion polls showed there was wide support for legalizing the Communists. Suárez won the backing of the top military brass on the topic of the legalization of political parties by telling them the Communist Party would be excluded. At the same time he was engaging in long and secret negotiations with Santiago Carrillo, the party's leader, to allow the party to return in exchange for not rocking the monarchist boat. The party was legalized during Easter of 1977 when many Spaniards, including major figures in the armed forces, were on holiday. When outraged generals accused him of deceit he said his promise had been superseded by events as he had won concessions from the Communists.

The legalization of all political parties cleared the last hurdle for the general election in June 1977, the first free one in 41 years. Suárez needed a party to contest the election and maneuvered himself into a position as the leader of a centrist coalition of 12 groups, the Unión del Centro Democrático (UCD, Union of the Democratic Center), formed less than two months before Spaniards went to the polls. It was a catch-all alliance held together by personal ambition for power and not a common ideology. Some of the groups were so small that Spaniards joked at the time that all their members could fit into a taxi. The UCD's contradictions and infighting led to it imploding and virtually disappearing from the political scene as of the 1982 election, which Suárez contested as the head of a new party, the Centro Democrático y Social (CDS, Democratic and Social Center). The CDS won only two seats and 2.9 percent of the vote.

How important was grassroots mobilization and strike action in pressurizing the regime to change?

The transition to democracy was crafted from the top by King Juan Carlos and elite pacts between the reformist right and the left. However, there was intense bottom-up pressure for change, manifested through massive demonstrations and strikes in favor of an amnesty for political prisoners, the legalization of political parties and trade unions, and regional autonomy.

Thousands of grassroots associations emerged after the end of the dictatorship. The main trade unions in the years before the Civil War were the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT, General Union of Workers), founded in 1888 and historically affiliated with the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE, the Spanish Workers' Socialist Party), and the anarchist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT, National Confederation of Labor), established in

1910. The Franco regime had outlawed both, conveying the only legal authority to represent workers (and employers) on the official *sindicatos* (syndicates).

The Communist Party began to infiltrate trade unions during the 1960s and set up a parallel organization known as the Comisiones Obreras (CC OO, Workers' Commissions). They enjoyed semi-legal existence as they represented workers' interests better than the syndicates and were often the only means for resolving labor disputes, but were finally outlawed in 1969. Marcelino Camacho, a member of the Communist Party's central committee and the best-known leader of the CC OO during the dictatorship, spent a total of 14 years in prison, and after the death of General Franco in November 1975 became the first general secretary of the CC OO.

In the first six months of 1976, as the government of Carlos Arias Navarro dragged its feet over reform, Spain was rocked by a wave of strikes and sit-ins calling for democratic change and not just for better wages and working conditions. Trade unions were legalized in April 1977. Workers were particularly militant in the Basque Country and staged strikes and demonstrations after policemen fatally shot protestors and tortured suspected members of the violent Basque separatist group ETA. Nearly 17 million workdays were "lost" because of strike activity during 1977, compared to less than two million per year in the last years of the dictatorship.

What role did the Spanish media play in the transition to democracy?

In the twilight years of the regime, new weekly magazines appeared such as *Cambio 16*, *Doblón*, and *Triunfo*, all of which showed increasing boldness, even at the risk of fines and seizure of issues. When Franco died in November 1975 they and other publications constituted a kind of shadow government constantly calling for amnesty, democratic reforms, and, most important of all, a general election.

Some journalists were attacked for going about their business. José Antonio Martínez Soler, editor of *Doblón*, was seized in February 1976 and driven into the country where, bound and blindfolded, he was beaten on the head and soles of his feet. His crime was to have published a mild article about the Civil Guard in which he said that some were members of the banned Democratic Military Union. His kidnappers wanted a list citing names. But for the fact that he managed to break free after his kidnappers left him tied up, he would probably have frozen to death in the forest where he was dumped.

At the forefront of the call for democracy and shaping public opinion was the center-left newspaper *El País*, which was launched on May 4, 1976, with a former political prisoner and a former minister under Franco among its shareholders. Readers in the newspaper's early days who proudly tucked their copy under their arms were known as *sobacos ilustrados* (illustrated armpits). Today, *El País* is the country's largest-selling newspaper, with a circulation of more than 300,000. The minister was Manuel Fraga, who had been responsible, as information and tourism minister, for the 1966 Press Law, which did away with prior censorship. The prisoner was Ramón Tamames, an economics professor and member of the Spanish Communist Party's central committee. The newspaper's chief editorial writer and columnist was Javier Pradera (1934–2011), a Communist during the 1950s, whose father and grandfather, both of them part of the conservative establishment, were assassinated by anarchists at the beginning of the Civil War. *El País*, sympathetic to the Socialist Party, challenged the democratic credentials of the first post-Franco government, headed by Carlos Arias Navarro, on its very first day of publication and published the first-ever interview in a Spanish publication with Dolores Ibárruri, the octogenarian president of the Spanish Communist Party, then still in exile in Moscow. On October 18, another newspaper was launched, *Diario 16*, which came out with an editorial

demanding the dismantling of the Information Ministry: “The Ministry lives on as flagrant proof that censorship, though muted, still survives.” On November 18, Franco’s last parliament voted itself out of office by approving political reform and paving the way for a general election in June 1977. *Diario 16* reported the move on its front page with the striking headline, “Adiós Dictadura” (Goodbye dictatorship).

What were the main economic problems?

The 15-year period of strong economic growth during which the real GDP increased by close to 7 percent a year, albeit from a low starting point, came to an end after the oil price shock of 1973–1974. The higher prices were particularly damaging for Spain because of its heavy reliance on oil and gas, which supplied over two-thirds of its energy requirements. Industry was energy-intensive and despite the liberalization ushered in by the 1959 Stabilization Plan (see “What role did the 1959 Stabilization Plan play in creating a modern economy” in chapter 2) was still among the most protected and least competitive in Western Europe. The economy grew by only one percent in 1975, the year that Franco died.

Inflation rose from 17.4 percent in 1974 to 24.5 percent in 1977, fueled by a wage rise that had run ahead of the increase in consumer prices for several years. The current account, after years of being in surplus, went into deficit as earnings from tourism and remittances from workers abroad stopped offsetting the trade deficit. The number of unemployed more than doubled between 1973 and 1977, to 832,000 (6.3 percent of the labor force) as companies laid off workers to cope with the economic slump. The rise in the jobless rate was also pushed up by the return of emigrants who had lost their jobs. The shipbuilding sector, the world’s third largest in 1974, was hard hit by the collapse of the tanker market, and the steel industry, the world’s

13th largest, suffered from the worldwide glut in steelmaking capacity. The rise in world oil prices was not passed on to the Spanish consumer as quickly as it was in many other countries, out of fear of stoking inflation even more and intensifying social unrest in the last year of the dictatorship. Consumption of oil continued to grow as if nothing had happened; of the 10 leading western industrial countries, Spain was the only one in which oil consumption increased.

The public sector was also bloated, with around 1.5 million people on the state payroll, including 250,000 workers employed in more than 60 firms owned or controlled by the loss-making Instituto Nacional de Industria (INI), the state holding company, in sectors such as steel, shipbuilding, and coal.

The first post-Franco government largely ignored the economic problems as it had enough on its plate with political problems. The second and third governments, led by Adolfo Suárez of the Union of the Democratic Center, did little until the peseta was devalued in February 1976 (by 11 percent) and again in July 1977 (by 20 percent). But these measures did not tackle the roots of the problems, which were structural and required, like the pact between the reformist right and the left that achieved the transition to democracy, a consensus agreement among the political parties, trade unions, and employers. This consensus came in October 1977 with the Moncloa Pacts.

What were the 1977 Moncloa Pacts?

The Moncloa Pacts, named after the prime minister's official residence on the outskirts of Madrid, were an attempt to repeat in the economic field what had been achieved through consensus in the political sphere: essentially to agree on ways to control spiraling inflation and

balance-of-payments problems. The mounting economic crisis threatened to blow the march to democracy off course.

The left, which controlled the two main trade unions, agreed to limit wage increases to no more than the expected rate of inflation (previously raises were based on past inflation) in return for various benefits including better unemployment benefits and pensions; improvements in education, the health service, and housing programs; and a promise to return the assets of the trade unions confiscated after the Civil War.

The first step toward creating a modern tax system was taken when parliament unified the income tax system so that wage earners and non-wage earners were assessed according to the same rules and, for the first time, tax evasion was outlawed. Under Franco, tax avoidance was widespread—total tax revenue in 1975, including contributions to the social security system, represented 18 percent of the GDP, a smaller proportion than in any other OECD country except Turkey. Tax inspectors were recruited and computers employed. As a result of the reforms, the number of taxpayers almost tripled between 1977 and 1979, to 5.3 million.

The Moncloa Pacts' measures, coupled with the devaluation of the peseta in July 1977, lowered inflation to 15 percent over the next three years (still nearly twice the OECD average) and produced the first surplus in the balance of payments since 1973. But the measures were unable to stem the rise in unemployment, and more than one million jobs were lost between 1978 and 1982. The pacts were followed by other agreements between the government and social partners, including the Workers' Statute of 1980, which achieved a degree of social peace. In addition to their economic importance, the pacts were significant in that they showed Spaniards that politicians of different ideologies could come together to solve the country's problems.

What form did the 1978 Constitution take?

The 1978 Constitution, drawn up by a committee of representatives from all the main political parties and approved in a referendum by 88 percent of voters and a turnout of 67 percent, sealed the transition to democracy. It was the sixth constitution since 1812, including the one in 1834 (technically known as a royal statute) and Franco's seven Fundamental Laws, promulgated between 1938 and 1967. It was a kind of constitution, albeit a rather strange one. The average duration of the constitutions between 1812 and 1931 was 17 years. The longest was the constitution of 1876, established after the First Republic and the restoration of the Borbón monarchy under Alfonso XII. It lasted until 1923, when Alfonso XIII turned to General Miguel Primo de Rivera to head the government.

The 1978 Constitution took into account a wide spectrum of political opinion and as a result each new government since then did not feel the need to mould it to its particular interests. It was drawn up by a committee of seven politicians representing the Union of the Democratic Center (three members), the Socialists (one), the Communists (one), the neo-Francoist Popular Alliance (one) and Catalan and Basque nationalists (one, a Catalan politician). It has hardly been changed since it was approved.

The constitution consolidated the monarchy as reinstated by Franco and the parliamentary system that the Political Reform Law of November 1976 put into effect. This turned Franco's Cortes into a two-chamber parliament, with a 350-seat Congress elected by universal suffrage and a 250-member Senate chosen by a mixture of election and appointment (41 by King Juan Carlos). As regards basic human and social rights and the rule of law, the fathers of the constitution drew on its 1931 democratic precursor, produced by the Second Republic (1931–1936), though without directly referring to it as to avoid inflaming the right and

killing the carefully nurtured spirit of consensus. The constitution paved the way for a quasi-federal system with 17 autonomous communities, ending the very centralized state that Franco had created and that the military was charged with defending.

The other controversial issue in the writing of the constitution was the role of the powerful Catholic Church, a pillar of the Franco regime. Both the UCD government, with the support of the left-wing opposition parties, and the church's hierarchy, led by the liberal Cardinal Vicente Enrique y Tarancón, the archbishop of Madrid and head of the Episcopal Conference (the bishops' organization), adopted a moderate strategy of consensus. No one wanted to evoke the conflicts that afflicted the Republic. Anticlericalism was one of the factors that inspired Franco's uprising in 1936, which the church blessed as a "crusade." Whereas the 1931 Constitution declared that Spain had no official religion, the 1978 Constitution stated that "there shall be no state religion," and Article 16:3 declared: "the public authorities shall take the religious beliefs of Spanish society into account and shall in consequence maintain appropriate cooperation with the Catholic Church and the other confessions." No other religious group is mentioned by name. The Socialists saw this as introducing "covert confessionality" and voted against it in the committee that drafted the text.

A small minority of conservative bishops, led by Cardinal Marcelo González Martín, who issued a pastoral letter, criticized the final text of the constitution because it took a position of neutrality on Catholic values, instead of embodying them. The constitution did not combat divorce, birth control, and abortion, all of which were more prevalent in society after the end of the Franco regime. The letter foreshadowed conflicts that would surface during the Socialist governments (see the questions on the church in chapters 4 and 6). In 1979, agreements between the Spanish state and the Holy See, taking the status of international treaties, were signed. The

government agreed to continue to pay clerical salaries, while the church promised to pay its own way within three years—a condition still not fulfilled in 2013. State funding of the church's extensive network of schools remained in force, as did religious instruction in public schools, given by teachers chosen by bishops. However, the principle of liberty of conscience for students in public schools was recognized, which meant pupils could no longer be obligated to attend religion classes. The church also received tax benefits.

How and why was the system of regional autonomy created?

A constant theme in Spanish history, and one still not resolved, has been the center-periphery tension between Madrid and the more nationalist regions, particularly the Basque Country and Catalonia. The British author Gerald Brenan (1894–1987), who lived most of his life in Spain, observed that a Spaniard's allegiance was “first of all to his native place, or to his family or social group in it, and only secondly to his country and government.” The 1978 Constitution sought to defuse antagonism in the politically charged post-Franco years by creating a system of 17 *comunidades autónomas* (autonomous communities), which turned Spain into a quasi-federal state.

A significant part of the pressure for change during the transition to democracy came from the Basque Country (comprising administratively the provinces of Guipuzcoa, Vizcaya, and Alava) and Catalonia. During the Second Republic (1931–1939) both enjoyed a measure of self-rule that was suppressed when General Franco won the Civil War in 1939 and created one of the most rigidly centralized states in Europe. Galicia also had a statute of autonomy but it could not be implemented because of the conflict.

Adolfo Suárez, the prime minister between 1976 and 1981, started the devolution process in 1977 when he invited Josep Tarradellas, the 78-year-old head of the Catalan government-in-exile, back to Spain to assume the presidency of the reestablished Generalitat, the traditional government of Catalonia dating back to the 13th century, in which he had served during the Civil War. Tarradellas, in return, promised to recognize the monarchy and the unity of Spain.

The 1978 Constitution acknowledged the existence of “nationalities” and “regions,” but preferred not to list them for fear of upsetting sensibilities. Varying degrees of power were gradually devolved to the communities and the North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla between 1979 and 1983, while maintaining, in the words of the constitution, the “indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation.” The central government retained control of foreign policy, trade, defense, and macroeconomic policy, while the communities were gradually given responsibility for education, housing, health, and justice. This widespread devolution was known as *café para todos* (coffee for everyone) and led to the creation of bloated regional bureaucracies and around 5,000 companies owned by regions or town halls, from TV channels to garbage collectors and foundations, that caused Spain’s budget deficit and public debt to balloon. The fiscal model for the regions was flawed from the start: revenue is essentially in the hands of the central government and spending in those of the 17 regional governments.

The Basque Country, where the violent separatist group ETA continued to fight for independence, was not directly represented in the seven-man committee that drafted the 1978 Constitution. All the regions were represented by a Catalan. All of the amendments of the center-right Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV, Basque Nationalist Party) to the constitutional text were rejected. Among other things, the PNV wanted recognition of the Basque Country’s *foral* (historical) rights. This led to the party’s withdrawal from the larger parliamentary body

overseeing the constitution and an abstention rate of 46 percent in the Basque Country when the constitution was put to a nationwide referendum in December 1978 compared to a rate of 33 percent for the whole of Spain. The combined Basque “no” vote and abstentions totaled 57 percent. To this day, the PNV, and radical Basque nationalist parties even more so, declare no allegiance to the constitution. The reasons invoked for the rejection lay in the non-recognition of the right to self-determination and assignment of the role of guarantor of the territorial integrity of Spain to the army.

In July 1979, Adolfo Suárez, the prime minister, reached an agreement with the PNV on a system of self-government for the provinces of Guipuzcoa, Vizcaya, and Alava, which became the autonomous community of the Basque Country. Suarez gave the Basques a greater degree of self-government than they received through the 1936 statute and more than that of any other Spanish region. The Basques received their own tax system (they transfer a pre-arranged amount to the central government every year) and police force. Suárez hoped this would pacify the region. The Basques approved the deal in a referendum in October 1979. A similar status was agreed for the adjoining region of Navarre. The ETA, however, carried on killing until October 2011, when it declared a “definitive” ceasefire, but did not lay down its arms (see “Why was a ‘dirty war’ waged against the Basque terrorist group ETA?” in chapter 4).

How different are the regions?

The 17 regions vary considerably in size, economic structure, and wealth. Andalusia, with a population of 8.5 million (almost one-fifth of Spain’s), is the largest region and, along with Extremadura, which borders Portugal, the poorest. Unemployment rates in these two regions were more than 30 percent in 2013 compared to a national average of over 25 percent. There

were lower levels of unemployment in the northern regions, accentuating the country's north-south divide.

The predominant economic activity in Andalusia is tourism, particularly on its Costa del Sol, and in Extremadura it is agriculture. Madrid is the seat of the central government, the headquarters of many Spanish and foreign companies and the nation's capital; Catalonia in the northeast is an economic powerhouse and accounts for one-quarter of exports (its economy is the size of Portugal's); La Rioja in the north is famous for its wines; Galicia in the northwest is legendary for its rain; and the Canary Islands are closer to Africa than to the rest of Europe.

Regional stereotypes abound: the people of Madrid are viewed as flashy, Andalusians as revelers, the Catalans as stingy, and Galicians are so enigmatic that if met on a staircase "you can't tell if they are going up or down," according to a popular saying. The Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia have their own languages.

Spaniards in the wealthier northern regions tend to look down on their compatriots in the south for being lazy and too dependent on transfers of funds from Madrid under the so-called solidarity system to level out regional income disparities. This is particularly the case of Catalans, who resent the amount of transfers they must pay to the central government for distribution to the poorer regions. Following a snap election in the region in November 2012, parties in favor of a referendum on independence (declared illegal by the central government) won a majority of the seats in the regional parliament and began to push for the creation of a Catalan state.

Nationalism was on the rise, and not just in Catalonia. The 12 nationalist parties (i.e., those that only ran candidates in their regions) captured 12.3 percent of the vote in the November 2011 general election and 43 of the 350 seats, up from 8.6 percent and 27, respectively, by the 10

nationalist parties in the 2008 election. If one adds the Partido Socialista de Catalunya (Catalan Socialist Party, PSC), affiliated to the Socialist party, and the Unión del Pueblo Navarro (Navarrese People's Union, UPN), allied to the PP, both of which only ran candidates in their regions, these parties gained 16.1 percent of the vote and 59 seats in 2011 (15.6 percent and 54 in 2008).

Why did the ETA continue its violent campaign for an independent Basque state?

The October 1979 autonomy statute for the Basque Country, approved in a referendum, and the formation of a nationalist government in 1980 in the region did not stop the ETA from continuing to kill in the name of an independent Basque state. The group killed 92 people in 1980, its bloodiest year, compared to 70 between 1968 and 1977. The Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV, Basque Nationalist Party) and Herri Batasuna, the ETA's political wing, won between them a majority of the parliamentary seats in the 1980 election. As far as the ETA's gunmen were concerned, democracy was nothing but a cosmetic change in the authoritarian nature of the Spanish state. The group still regarded the state as an occupying force. Its victims were not just representatives of the state, but also some businessmen and politicians. The ETA's cause was aided by the extreme brutality of the Civil Guard during the dictatorship, which, according to Amnesty International, changed very little in the first years of democracy. Many Basques with no connections to terrorism who were arrested after the death of Franco emerged from prison bearing the marks of torture. Some ETA suspects, such as José Arregui in 1981, died in custody. His death triggered a strike in the Basque Country.

The ETA's legitimacy was also boosted by the "dirty war" that elements in the Socialist government of Felipe González waged against it between 1983 and 1987. The war erupted when a group called GAL (Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación, Anti-Terrorist Liberation Groups) killed 27 people, including 10 whose connections to the ETA were unclear or did not exist (see "Why was a 'dirty war' waged against the Basque terrorist group ETA?" in chapter 4).

Why was there an attempted coup in 1981?

The legalization of the Communist Party, the creation of a quasi-federal system for the regions, the mounting violence of the Basque separatist group ETA that killed more than 240 people between 1977 and 1981, and a growing economic crisis was too much for recalcitrant Francoists to swallow. On February 23, 1981, a group of Civil Guards, led by an officer with a bushy moustache and wearing the tricorne (three-cornered hat), seized the parliament during the televised process of Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo's election to replace Adolfo Suárez as prime minister. Suárez had resigned as a result of divisions within the Union of the Democratic Center, a disparate coalition.

During the coup Lt. Col. Antonio Tejero burst into the parliament firing shots into the air, while in Valencia the captain-general of the Valencia military region, Jaime Milans del Bosch, declared a state of emergency and sent tanks into the city. General Manuel Gutiérrez Mellado, the deputy prime minister for defense, confronted Tejero, a known plotter against democracy, but was manhandled back into his seat by him. All the members of parliament dived under their desks for cover except Suárez, Gutiérrez Mellado, and the Communist leader Santiago Carrillo, key protagonists of the transition to democracy. Civil Guardsmen escorted Carrillo to a back room and threatened him with execution. Javier Cercas analyzes this defining moment in his

brilliant book *The Anatomy of a Moment*. Images of the coup flashed on televisions around the country, and within hours those leading members of the opposition not stuck in parliament went into hiding. Thousands of Spaniards, fearing the worst, headed in their cars for France and Portugal.

Tejero, involved in Operation Galaxia, the codename given to an earlier coup plan in 1978, which was revealed to the authorities and for which he served only seven months' detention, believed he had the support of King Juan Carlos, but this was not the case. The plotters included General Alfonso Armada, a former secretary-general of the royal household. The coup collapsed the next day after the king, wearing the full regalia of commander-in-chief of the armed forces, denounced it in a nationwide broadcast on television. "The crown . . . cannot tolerate in any form actions or attitudes of persons who try to interrupt the democratic process of the Constitution." Had he not done otherwise, it would have been the end of the monarchy and even that of the new democracy. Millions of people around Spain celebrated the failed coup. The bullet holes in the parliament's ceiling were kept as a chilling reminder of how perilously close Spain had come to turning back the clock.

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William Chislett is a writer who has lived in Madrid since 1986. He covered Spain's transition to democracy (1975-78) for *The Times of London* and was later the Mexico correspondent for the *Financial Times* (1978-84). He writes about Spain for the Elcano Royal Institute and has a weekly column in the online newspaper *El Imparcial*.

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