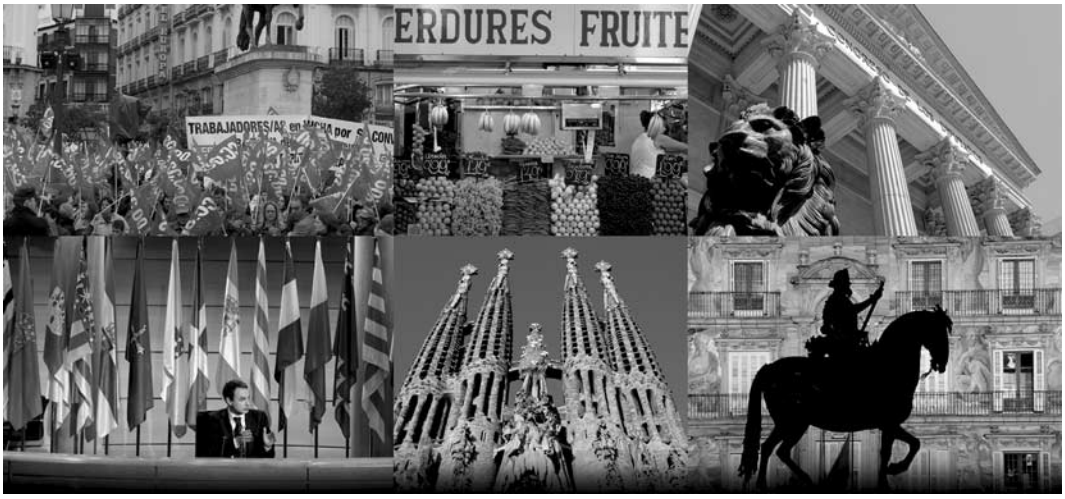


1 The state and democracy in Spain: a historical overview

Spain's democratic regime today is a stable, consolidated system that fits well within the mainstream of West European **democracies**. As we will see in the following chapters, it does have some distinguishing characteristics, but several of these (such as its high level of cabinet stability) represent achievements that have enhanced the quality and performance of democracy in Spain.

Democracy A democracy is a political system whose leaders are elected in competitive multi-party and multi-candidate processes in which opposition parties have a fair chance of electing representatives to legislative bodies and attaining executive power. These elections must be held at regular intervals, and must allow all members of the political community to express their preferences through the use of basic freedoms of association, information, and communication.

Consolidated democracy A consolidated democracy is a political regime which is fully democratic (see Key Term 1.1), whose key political institutions are regarded as legitimate by all politically significant groups, which accept and adhere to democratic "rules of the game."

This success story is not to be taken for granted. Prior to 1977, Spain had never experienced governance within a stable and fully democratic system. The Restoration Monarchy of 1875–1931 was not fully democratic, and while the Second Republic (1931–36) was a democratic system it was so polarized and unstable that it came to an end with the outbreak of a devastating civil war (1936–39). Over the course of the following four decades, Spain was governed by an authoritarian dictatorship under Generalísimo Francisco Franco. When he died in 1975, it was not at all clear that a **consolidated democracy** would emerge within a country that completely lacked a tradition of stable democratic rule, and which was still divided

Map 1.1 The regions of Spain since 1980

Social cleavages are deep and persistent differences in society where (1) objective social differences (class, religion, race, language, or region) are aligned with (2) subjective awareness of these differences (different cultures, ideologies, and orientations), and are (3) organized by political parties, groups, or movements. Cleavages are often the basis of political conflict.

along the lines of historically disruptive **social** and political **cleavages**.

In this chapter, we will analyze the successful democratic transition in Spain initiated by Franco's death and largely completed with the ratification of a democratic constitution in December 1978. In order to appreciate the significance of this successful democratization process,

however, we will briefly examine Spain's political history, beginning with the very founding of the Spanish state. This historical overview is particularly important insofar as it will enable us to understand the origins of several divisive cleavages that have contributed to conflict and political instability over several centuries, including the outbreak of six civil wars. These cleavages include:

- **Center–periphery conflicts**. Throughout Spanish history (including the present democratic era) there have been tensions over the proper structure of the state. Particularly following the instauration of the Borbón dynasty in the eighteenth century, some political leaders favored a centralized state governed from Madrid, while others have demanded the preservation or restoration of regional self-government rights. These conflicts were most intense where nationalist movements sought to preserve regional languages and cultural traditions, and to defend historic self-government rights.
- **Regionalist or regional-nationalist identities**. Most of the population of Spain speaks Castilian Spanish as a first language, but in Catalonia, Valencia, the Balearic Islands, Galicia, Navarra, and the Basque Country people also speak different languages, and have their own distinctive cultural traditions. Many residents of these regions have strong regionalist identities (in Galicia, Valencia, the Balearic Islands, and Navarra) or regard themselves as constituting a nation (in Catalonia and the Basque Country).
- **Conflicts over religion**. Since the early nineteenth century, Spaniards have been divided into one camp which strongly identifies with traditional or conservative Roman Catholicism, which favors close ties between Church and state, and a second camp that includes more secularist individuals who favor a separation between Church and state. These conflicts originated in the mid eighteenth century as disputes within the intellectual and political elite over the proper role of the Church in society, but by the 1830s they had spread to the mass level and involved considerable violence.
- **Class conflicts**. While all societies are characterized by varying degrees of socioeconomic inequality, class conflict was particularly intense in Spain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries due to extreme inequality (especially in the agrarian south) and to the embrace of extremist ideologies in several regions (including anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, and revolutionary socialism).
- **Monarchy vs. republic**. The monarchy served as a stable, unifying force in Spanish politics throughout the first several centuries of the country's history, but the restoration of a reactionary king (Fernando VII) following the War of Independence (1808–14) against the Napoleonic occupation (during which the **liberal** 1812 constitution was written) triggered see-saw struggles pitting supporters of the legimitate, Borbón dynasty against a rival royal line, and ultimately pitting those favoring the monarchy against republican forms of government. In this historical context, the restoration of the

Borbón monarchy in 1975 and the overwhelming and virtually universal support for King Juan Carlos I since then must be regarded as a remarkable achievement.

Liberalism emerged in the late eighteenth century in reaction against several aspects of Western European society during the era of absolutism. It stressed the autonomy and dignity of the individual in several domains of social and political life. It demanded more equal civil liberties in contrast with aristocratic privilege, religious freedom rather than subservience to an established state religion, and individual initiative and the free market instead of state-dominated mercantilist economies, and, eventually, it led to democracy in lieu of monarchical authoritarianism. In Spain and some other Western European countries (e.g., France), protracted conflict with the Church infused anticlerical sentiments into "continental" versions of liberalism, but American and English liberalism was largely devoid of hostility toward the Church or religion in general. It should be noted that in the United States the term "liberalism" took on entirely new meanings in the twentieth century.

As we shall see in this chapter, some of these sources of political conflict emerged in the earliest stages of Spain's history as a single country and as a state. These divisions became particularly disruptive in the early twentieth century and contributed to the collapse of its only truly democratic political regime, the Second Republic. But in establishing the current democratic system, some of them were laid to rest as sources of political conflict, others were satisfactorily "regulated," while the center–periphery cleavage remains an ongoing source of political conflict.

Spain's success in navigating over or around these historically disruptive social and political cleavages on its way to a consolidated, democratic political system is, to some extent, the product of social changes, some of which we will examine in this chapter. But to a considerable degree, it is also the product of the particular way that the founding elites of this new democracy interacted with one another during the crucial stages of the transition. These patterns of behavior have been referred to by Spaniards as "the politics of consensus." Outside observers have called them "the Spanish model" of democratic transitions. This model has helped to guide other democratizing political leaders in their respective regime transitions (e.g., in Poland, Hungary, and Korea). In the concluding section of this chapter, we will analyze "the politics of consensus" in some detail.

Box 1.1

The Cortes of Cádiz and the first constitution

During the occupation of Spain by Napoleon's forces – ostensibly ruled by Napoleon's brother, Joseph Bonaparte, who had been installed as King of Spain – there was incessant Spanish resistance in the form of guerrilla warfare (with occasional intervention by units of the British army), and not all parts of the country were effectively under the control of the French. A heterogeneous assembly of aristocrats, clergy, and the bourgeoisie met in Cádiz in 1808 and wrote what was the first liberal constitution in Europe. While it was initially respected by Fernando VII following his restoration to the throne after the defeat of Napoleon, his subsequent embrace of reactionary absolutism in 1823 led to its suppression.

State-building in Spain

The Spanish **state** is one of the oldest in the world. The Hispanic Monarchy established control over almost all of the present country of Spain by 1492, under King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella (*los Reyes Católicos*, Fernando V and Isabel I) with the last piece (Navarra) falling into place just two decades later. Only the neighboring country of Portugal preceded Spain in establishing governmental authority throughout its current mainland territories, and most other European countries – let alone almost all of those in other world regions – achieved this status centuries later: Great Britain and France, for example, in the eighteenth century, Germany and Italy in the mid nineteenth century, and most Central and East European countries following World War I.

The state is a set of sovereign governmental institutions which controls a well-defined, contiguous territory, which imposes a single legal code over all persons residing in that territory, and which ultimately or potentially possesses a monopoly over the right to use force to implement that legal code.

Nonetheless, the Spanish **state-building** process was incomplete, and no fewer than six civil wars erupted over differing views regarding the proper form of the state, the most recent in 1936–39. As we will see in the following chapter, disagreements over the proper structure of the state continue to serve as the basis of political conflict in Spain, and since the late 1960s have culminated in over 800 deaths resulting from acts of terrorist violence. These political struggles have pitted proponents of a centralized governmental structure against those demanding that certain regions retain or regain considerable self-government rights and privileges.

State-building in the Middle Ages involved two processes. One is the acquisition of territory (typically by war or marriage), and the other involves the establishment of a common set of government institutions and laws.

Reinforcing these incompatibilities, and further contributing to their capacity to serve as bases of conflict, was linguistic and cultural diversity. Over 10 million people (about a quarter of Spain's population) speak languages other than Spanish as either a first or second tongue. These differences in language, culture, and political tradition are the long-term product of the way the Spanish state was created.

A proper understanding of this important characteristic of politics in Spain today therefore requires a brief overview of that state-building process.

The creation and evolution of the Spanish state

The political evolution of **Iberia** following the collapse of the Roman Empire (which converted most of the population to Christianity following its proclamation as the official religion of the Empire in AD 312) was similar to that of most other parts of continental Western Europe. The conquering Visigoths (a Germanic tribe that terminated Roman control of Iberia in AD 476)

Iberia includes the mainland parts of Spain (that is, all except the North African territories of Ceuta and Melilla) and Portugal (except for the Azores and Madeira islands). It is bounded on the north by the Bay of Biscay and the Pyrenees, on the west by the Atlantic Ocean, on the east by the Mediterranean, and on the south by the Straits of Gibraltar.

Table 1.1 Timeline: Spain, from the Romans to 1808

From the Romans to the Moorish invasion
(210 BC–AD 711)

Roman governance of Iberia (218 BC–AD 409)
Roman Senate declares Hispania a Roman province (218 BC)
Division of Hispania into three provinces, Tarraconense, Betica and Lusitania (27 BC)
Pacification of Hispania completed under Augustus (19 BC)
Arrival of Christianity (AD 58)
Hispanic emperors of Rome: Trajan (98), Hadrian (117), Marcus Aurelius (161), and Theodosius (364)
Roman control of Hispania ends (409)

Invasion by "Barbarian" tribes (fifth century)
The *Suevi* (from the Elba and Oder regions) occupy Galicia, the *Vandals* (East Germania) reach Betica (now Andalucía), and the *Alans* (Caspian Sea) occupy the rest of Hispania
King Recaredo imposes Catholicism as an official religion in the 3rd Toledo Concillium (589)
Moorish invasion (711)
Rodrigo, last Visigoth king, defeated at Guadalete by Tarik (711)

Middle Ages
(AD 711–1500)

Evolution of Al-Andalus
Emirate dependent on Damascus (711–56)
Ummayyad Emirate (758–912)
Independent Caliphate of Córdoba (912–1031)
Taifas kingdoms (1031–90)
The Almoravid dynasty (1090–1172)
The Almohad dynasty (1172–1224)
Kingdom of Granada (1238–1492)

Reconquest
Reconquista begins in Asturias led by King Pelayo I, founder of the Kingdom of Asturias (718)
Count of Barcelona establishes Christian kingdom (873–98)
The County of Castilla established (850)
Conquest of Toledo (1085)
El Cid conquers Valencia (1094)
Portugal officially independent (1143)
Alfonso III inflicts serious defeat on Moors at Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212)
King Fernando III conquers Córdoba (1236), Jaén (1246), Sevilla (1248), Jerez, and Cádiz (1250)
Isabel wins Granada (1492) for Castile. End of the Reconquista

Isabella and Ferdinand, the Catholic Kings (1474–1517)
Royal marriage between the kingdoms of Castilla and Aragón (1469)
Creation of the Spanish Inquisition (1478)
Colombus reaches America (1492)

Table 1.1 (*cont.*)

Modern age (1500–1808)
The expansion of the Spanish Empire in America
Mexico (1519–21) administered by the Virreinato de la Nueva España (1535)
Peru (1531–3) administered by the Virreinato del Perú (1543)
The Philippines (1569)
The Spanish Habsburgs
Carlos I King of Spain and Charles V Emperor of Habsburg Empire (1517–56)
Felipe II (1556–98)
The *Armada Invencible* is defeated by England (1558)
Portugal inherited by Felipe II and becomes part of Spain (1580–1640)
Felipe III (1598–1621)
Felipe IV (1621–65)
Carlos II (1665–1700), leaves no direct heir
The War of Succession (1701–13), and arrival of the French Borbón dynasty
Spain loses its Italian provinces
Gibraltar occupied by England (1704)
The Borbón monarchs
Felipe V (1700–46)
Luis I (1724)
Fernando VI (1746–59)
Carlos III (1759–88)
Carlos IV (1788–1808)

embraced Christianity and established a monarchy and an aristocracy that appeared to be drifting towards the same kinds of **feudal** social, economic, and political control as was emerging elsewhere in Europe.

Feudalism is a geographically decentralized sociopolitical order in which the strongest political authority is possessed by aristocrats who own massive tracts of land (and, in the case of serfdom, the peasants residing on it) and function as the principal law-makers, law-enforcers, and law-adjudicators. While they are nominally subservient to a monarch, the king's authority is sharply limited, most commonly consisting of the right to call upon the aristocracy to provide military services temporarily in time of war.

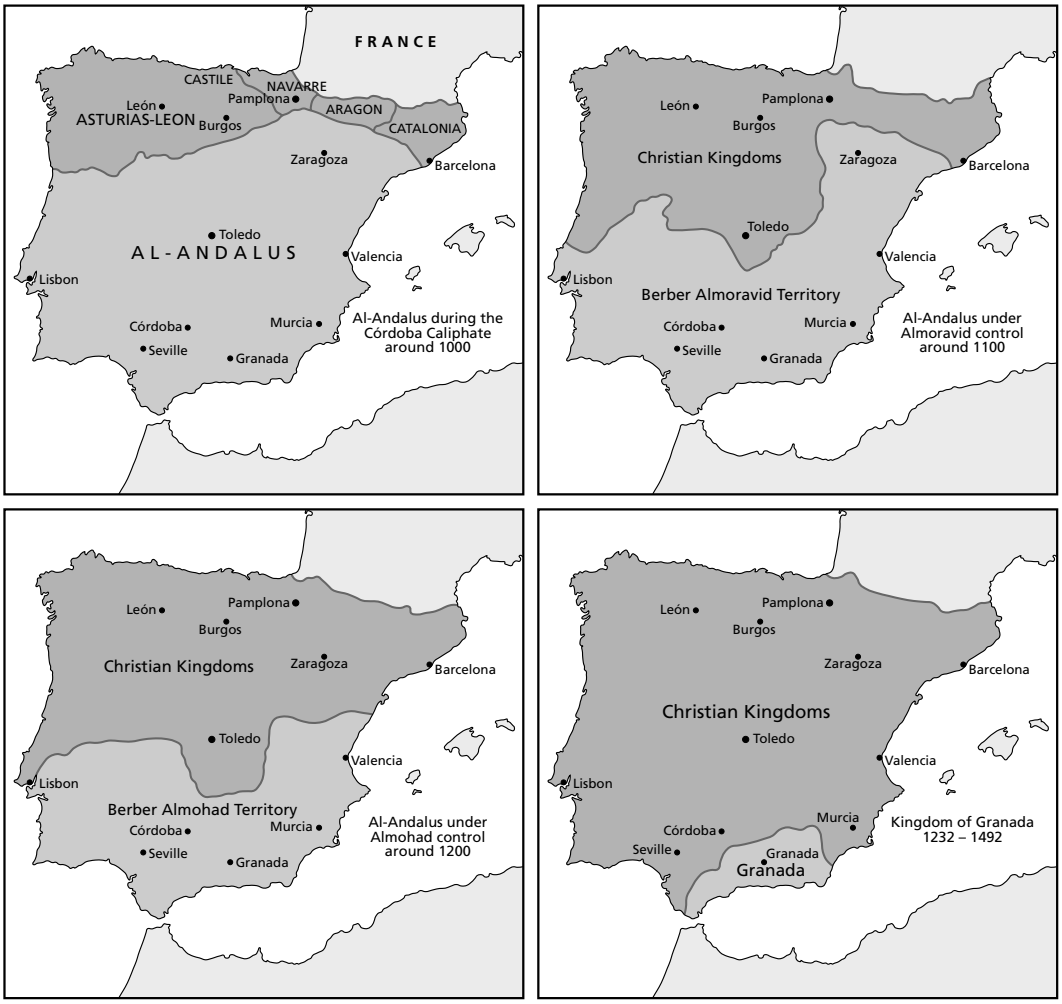
In 711, however, social and political developments took a decidedly different turn. Iberia was invaded and quickly conquered by the Moors, an ethnically mixed group of Muslims who surged across the Straits of Gibraltar from North Africa. In the prosperous Moorish kingdoms that ruled various parts of Iberia over the next seven centuries there were considerable advances in science, technology, economic activity, and philosophy. Among other things, they preserved and analyzed the works of Aristotle and other classical Greek philosophers at a time when most of Europe was mired in the depths of the Middle Ages. Moreover, Christians and a sizable Jewish population were allowed to practice their own religions, although there were some periods of repression and intolerance.

Figure 1.1 The cathedral of Sevilla (the largest Gothic cathedral in Europe) was once a mosque, whose minaret was converted into the bell tower, now called La Giralda

The Reconquista *and the origins of linguistic and cultural diversity*

Beginning in the mid eighth century, a *Reconquista* (reconquest) led to the expulsion of the Moors from Iberia by linguistically, culturally, and politically diverse groups of Christians, who swept from the north to the south over the course of seven centuries (see map 1.2). This was the territorial-acquisition phase of the Spanish state-building process. It began with the proclamation of the Christian Kingdom of Asturias in 739, and the last step in the *Reconquista* was the defeat and absorption of the Kingdom of Granada in 1492.

What made the population of Spain so diverse was that the *Reconquista* was not undertaken by one homogeneous people, but rather by several distinct groups, each with its own language, culture, and political traditions. One wave of the reconquest pushed south along the Atlantic coast, beginning in Galicia.



Map 1.2 Evolution of the Reconquest, 1000–1492

This particular thrust culminated in the establishment of present-day Portugal. Accordingly, the language of Galicia is Galego, a dialect of Portuguese, and the population of the region shares many cultural traits with that of northern Portugal. Somewhat surprisingly, Galicia remained an integral part of the Kingdom of Castilla-León, even after the establishment of an independent Portuguese state in the twelfth century, and the region lacks a tradition of political autonomy that might have served as the basis of a nationalist movement challenging the Spanish state.

Elsewhere throughout the territories conquered by the Kingdom of Castilla-León (Cantabria, Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura, Andalucía, Murcia, and

Box 1.2

Use of regional languages in Spain

In the mid 1990s, virtually everybody in Spain was able to understand and speak Castilian Spanish, but in several regions distinctly different languages are also used extensively. In the far northwest region of Galicia, about 2.5 million persons (89% of the region's total population) speak Galego, a dialect of Portuguese. In the northeast corner of the country, just under 5 million residents of Catalonia (79% of the total population) speak Catalan, whose origins can be traced back to medieval Occitan, a regional French dialect. Closely related to Catalan are the languages spoken in the Balearic Islands (by 72% of the population, or about 0.5 million persons) and the Valencian region (55%, or just over 2 million persons). The Basque language, Euskera – which is not an Indo-European language – is spoken by about a quarter of those residing in the Basque Country and by 16% of the population of Navarra.

Madrid) a language was spread that developed into present-day Castilian Spanish. Linguistic and cultural homogeneity across these interior regions facilitated the emergence of a centralized form of governance.

The reconquest of the northeastern territories that became the Kingdom of Aragón (Catalonia, Aragón, Valencia, and the Balearic Islands) originated in the Languedoc region of France, pushing down the Mediterranean coast as far as Alicante, and on to the Balearic Islands. Thus, the languages and dialects of the northeastern quarter of Spain (Catalan, Valenciano, Alicantino, Mallorquín, etc.) had their roots in the regional medieval dialect of French, Occitan (the "*langue d'Oc*"), mixed with some local dialects. And the cultural values of these regions were more cosmopolitan and linked to the rest of Western Europe than were those of the more isolated regions of Castilla-León.

The linguistic and cultural diversity that characterizes Spain today, and clashes over the proper structure of the state that have spanned over four centuries, were the result of the merger of the two kingdoms of Castilla-León and Aragón. In 1469, the Castilian Crown Princess Isabel (Isabella in English) married Fernando (Ferdinand), then Prince of Aragón. Their two kingdoms were quite different from each other, particularly in their dissimilar institutional structures and decision-making processes.

Differing political traditions

The Castilian monarchy ruled territories that make up the present regions of Cantabria, Canary Islands, Asturias, Galicia, Castilla-León, Madrid, Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura, Murcia, and Andalucía (see map 1.3). It had a tradition of centralized government and comparatively strong monarchical powers over