

Spain

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Introduction

Contrary to the rest of Western Europe during the Interwar Period, Spain experienced democratic rule only in the 30s. A constitutional monarchy was overthrown in 1923 when Primo de Rivera, with the support of King Alfonso XIII, executed a military coup. Economic instability led to his resignation in 1930. With the Pact of San Sebastian, republican parties decided to collaborate to overthrow the monarchy. Municipal elections in April 1931 saw the members of the pact overwhelmingly winning in every major city, pushing Alfonso to leave in exile and leading to the proclamation of the republic. The Second Spanish Republic lasted from 1931 to 1939. In July 1936, General Franco led a nationalist armed rebellion against the young republic, crushing it after 3 years of civil war. In the 5 years before the "alzamiento", the republic had to fight against both nationalist and leftist forces that hoped to establish dictatorial rule and separatist parties that sought the independence of peripheral regions of Spain. This led to violent clashes in the streets, unstable governments, and violent crackdowns. The fall of the republic meant for Spain the end of democracy, until its restoration after the death of Franco in the 70s.

Elections

Spain held 3 elections in its 6 years as a democracy. In 1931, general elections were called to create a constitution for the new republic. They resulted in a landslide victory for the leftist coalition. After the collapse of the socialist-republican alliance, new elections were called in 1933, won by a right-wing coalition. President Alcalà-Zamora refused to allow the right-wing leader Gil-Robles to form a government, fearing he would undermine democracy. This led to almost three years of minority governments. In late 1935, Alcalà-Zamora dissolved parliament and called for snap- elections. These were narrowly won by a leftist coalition. In the next six months, the tensions between the two parties grew, culminating in the "alzamiento" and the civil war.

28 June 1931

Over 20 lists participated in the elections for the Constitutional Assembly in 1931. The electoral law divided Spain into districts that included provinces and major cities. Each district assigned a number of seats proportional to the population. The most voted list in each district obtained between 75% and 80% of the votes, with the remaining being assigned to the second most voted list. The system favored coalitions. The alliance between Republicans and Socialists won in a landslide, winning over 70% of the seats (368/460). The others were distributed between regional parties, right-wing parties, and other small groups. In particular, the biggest party in the Constitutional Assembly was the **Spanish Socialist Worker's Party** with 115 seats, followed by **Radical Republican Party** (90), the **Radical Socialist Republican Party** (59), the **Republican Left of Catalonia** (29), **Republican Action** (26), and the **Republican Liberal Right** (25). The election was considered a success for the forces that supported the republic, with monarchist factions gaining only 10% of the seats.

The resulting constitution of 1931 was strongly based on progressive and anticlerical principles, alienating the conservative and religious parts of society. After the establishment of the Constitution, tensions rose between the republicans and the socialists over policies that ultimately led to the breakdown of the government and elections.

19 November 1933

Following the new Constitution, in the 1933 elections, women were allowed to vote for the first time. The electoral system was close to the one for the 1931 elections, but a second round was introduced for the constituencies where the first list did not reach at least 40% of the votes. Every list with at least 8% of the votes could take part in the second round. While the right-wing parties generally ran in a common list (called **Union of the Right**), the left presented multiple lists, with the socialists running alone. The results were a disaster for the left, with the right-wing coalition winning a plurality of the seats. The **Union of the Right** obtained 138 seats, most of which (115) belonging to the newly-established **CEDA**, led by Gile-Robles. The second biggest party in parliament

was the **Radical Republican Party** of Lerroux, which ran with other centrist parties or inside the right-wing coalition according to the constituency. They were followed by the **Spanish Socialist Worker's Party** with 59 seats.

This meant the right-wing coalition and the centre-right republicans were able to have the majority in the Cortes. Despite **CEDA's** electoral success, President Alcalá-Zamora refused to nominate Gilez-Robles as prime minister, fearing he would use the office to undermine the Spanish republic. He instead nominated Lerroux, who led a minority government with **CEDA's** external support. Increased pressure from **CEDA** forced Alcalá-Zamora and Lerroux to reshuffle the government, including ministers from the right-wing party. This led to countrywide riots and strikes, that were especially severe in Catalonia and the Asturias. This rebellion was crushed by the army and was followed by the abolition of Catalonia's autonomy and hard counter-reforms. When in 1935, after a series of political scandals, **CEDA** made Lerroux's government fall, the President still refused to nominate Gilez-Robles Prime Minister and instead nominated Valladares and called for snap-elections.

16 February 1936

The 1936 elections were the last democratic elections before Franco's dictatorship. While Alcalá-Zamora hoped that Valladares created a strong centrist coalition, the elections were mainly contested by the leftist **Popular Front** and the **Right** coalition. Both sides created the widest possible coalitions to have the highest chance to win the majority in each constituency. Extreme polarization and widespread violence affected the electoral competition. The **Popular Front** managed to narrowly win the popular vote and the seats in parliament. This resulted in the **Spanish Socialist Worker's Party** being the strongest party in the Cortes with 99 seats, followed by **CEDA** (88 seats), and the **Republican Left** (87 seats). The debacle of the parliamentary right, the fear of left-wing repression, and a general discontent for democracy led to an attempted coup by General Franco in July 1936. The subsequent civil war ended democracy in Spain.

Parties

During its republican period, Spain experienced a very fragmented and polarized political system. We identified XXX parties that ran in the three separate elections held in 5 years. These parties tended to form coalitions to win double-round first-past-the-post seats. These coalitions

Spanish Socialist Party of the Workers

The **PSOE** was a socialist party. One of the oldest parties in Spain, it participated in the Republican front to overthrow the monarchy, called the "Pact of San Sebastian". After the establishment of the republic, the **PSOE** was by far the largest party in the elections for the Constitutional Assembly in 1931. Nevertheless, the prime minister was never socialist, since the party was considered too extremist to rule. Instead, the party supported radical republican governments. After the defeat in the 1933 elections, the party supported the failed insurrections of 1934. In 1936, it was the leader of the winning **Popular Front** coalition.

Radical Republican Party

The **PRR** was a liberal radical party. It led the majority of the governments in the Republican era, despite never holding the relative majority of the parliamentary seats. In 1931, it allied with the left but switched sides to the right in 1933. The failure of this collaboration led to the party's almost disappearance in the 1936 elections.

Radical Republican Socialist Party

The **PRRS** was another radical party. It formed as a leftist split from the **PRR**. It was the third-largest party in parliament after the 1931 elections. Its position between the left and the centre caused the party to be in constant internal tension and faced numerous split. Most notably, the **Partido Republicano Radical Socialista Indipendiente** will end up overgrowing its mother party. After an electoral defeat in 1933, the party

dissolved itself by merging with the **Partido Radical Demócrata** to form the **Unión Republicana**.

Republican Left of Catalonia

The **ECR** was a leftist independentist party in the region of Catalonia. The **ERC** was the largest party in the region. Its main goal was to achieve an independent Republic of Catalonia, with the intermediate step of a federal Spain. After the 1931 elections, the Constitutional Assembly granted Catalonia autonomy within the republic. The victory of **CEDA** in 1933 led to tensions and culminated with the declaration of independence in 1934. This was swiftly crushed by the Spanish authority that suspended Catalanian autonomy and arrested the leaders of the region. In 1936, the **ERC** participated in the elections with the **Popular Front**.

Republican Action

Acción Republicana was Prime Minister and later President Azaña's party. It was a liberal progressive party. After collapsing in the 1933 elections, the party dissolved in 1934 into the **Izquierda Republicana**.

Liberal Republican Right

The **DLR** was a liberal-conservative party led by Zamora, one of the founding fathers of the Spanish Republic. For the 1931 elections, it ran with the republican coalition. Disagreeing on some articles of the newly established republic, it switched sides and joined the opposition. In 1932, Maura left the party and created the **Partido Republicano Conservador**. This started the decline of the **DLR**, becoming increasingly less relevant and disappearing at the eve of the Civil War.

Republican Democratic Federal Party

The **PRDF** was born to reconstitute a historical liberal party from the XIX century.

Spanish Agrarian Party

The **PAE** was a right-wing agrarian party. It was one of the most important parties in the political right. It participated in the right-wing governments after the 1933 elections.

Galician Republican Federation

The **FRG**, also named **ORGA**, was a Galician party aiming at an autonomous Galicia inside a Republican Spain. It dissolved in 1934 when it joined Azaña in forming the **Izquierda Republicana**.

Grouping at the Service of the Republic

The **ASR** was a small party. It was progressive and republican. It dissolved in 1932.

Basque Nationalist Party

The **PNV** was a centre-right party, with Christian values. Its goal was to represent the Basque countries.

National Action

Also known as **Acción Popular**, it was a Christian right-wing party. It federated into **CEDA**, keeping a separate structure.

Galician Party

The **PG** was a party with the main goal of an independent Galicia. Compared to other independentist movements, they did not have a clear ideology. They decided to join the **Popular Front** in the 1936 elections.

Socialist Union of Catalonia

The **USC** originated from a secession from the **PSOE**, its member believed the **PSOE** was not giving enough attention to the Catalan question. It had a socialist ideology,

asking for Catalan independence.