
Spanish Civil War

- The Spanish Civil War took place between 1936-39

Long-term Causes

- Spain was struggling to modernise at the beginning of the 20th century, with social and political structures rooted in tradition
- Spain had been in decline since after having been a great power in the 15th and 16th centuries, relinquishing its grip on most colonial territories which culminated in the humiliating loss to the USA in which Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico were transferred
- Spain was also a divided country marred by many problems, and as such many Spaniards called for national “regeneration”

Failings in the Political System

- Between 1875-1923 Spain was a constitutional monarchy under Alfonso XII (1865-85) and Alfonso XIII (1885-1931) of the House of Bourbon, which originally came to the Spanish throne in 1715
- Political power was largely monopolised by rich landowners and the electoral system was heavily rigged, so much so that the parties practised the **turno pacífico** in which elections were rigged through clientelism to rubber-stamp a predetermined change that had been agreed upon by the parties resulting in a peaceful alternation of government
- The two main political parties—the Conservatives and the Liberals—both represented the landowners, despite universal male suffrage being introduced, and as such elections made no real difference
- “[Spain] had major regional problems exploited or ignored but always exacerbated by unrepresentative and oligarchic politicians.” —Frances Lannon
- Between 1909-23, 34 successive governments held office

Political and Social Divisions

- After 1900, Socialist and Republican organisations began to appear in larger towns
- The 1851 concordat made Catholicism the state religion, mandated the teaching of Catholic doctrine in schools, recognised Church properties and granted salaries to be paid by the government to clergy members
- See Political Divisions document
- Power was in the hands of the *latifundia* (landowners), despite the *braceros* (workers) being the majority

Role of the Army

- Alongside the Church, the army was the other great institutional pillar of conservative Spain

- Having a very high ratio of officers to men, the army was a major financial drain on the country
- The army had a long tradition of political intervention, dating back to 1914, staging a number of *pronunciamientos* (military declarations) in which it had directly taken control of the government or brought about changes in government; sometimes these were leaning in a liberal direction, other times they were authoritarian

Events leading up to War

Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-30)

- By 1923, the Bourbon monarchy was fundamentally discredited and only survived a further seven years through the army's *pronunciamiento* which installed Captain General Miguel Primo de Rivera as Prime Minister
- At that time, confidence in the Spanish monarchy was greatly undermined by a military disaster in 1921 in which 12,000 Spanish troops were killed in Annual, Morocco, by Rifians during the Rif War
- In response a parliamentary inquiry was launched into the defeat, which threatened to expose major failings in the government and army
- Primo was intent on tackling Spain's troubled and often violent history of industrial disputes; early on, he was successful in winning qualified support from the Socialists and UGT (Socialist Trade Union) from having established an arbitration system for labour disputes and limited government subsidies for housing and healthcare, leading to a decrease in labour-related conflict
- Nevertheless, Primo's social justice-inspired fiscal reforms (including the taxation of both capital and wages) was met with robust resistance from the banking sector and ultimately defeated
- Primo instigated large-scale investment in infrastructure schemes, including dams, roads, bridges and irrigation projects
- An upturn in world trade between 1923-29 also aided Primo's dictatorship
- The dictatorship failed in 1930 for several reasons:
 - Primo had alienated many of Spain's intellectuals by, amongst other measures, censoring the press and attempting to extend the influence of the Church into higher education by awarding state accreditation to private, Catholic universities
 - Although intent on improving the conditions of industrial workers and prepared to introduce social reform to that end, Primo was highly conservative in other areas; above all, he was committed to Spanish indivisibility or unity, and as such was hostile towards Catalan and Basque demands for autonomy and banned the use of the Catalan language in religious services, thereby radicalising Catalan regionalism
 - Although Primo was opposed to fundamental land reform, the modest changes that he did introduce were still enough to antagonise landowners
 - Spanish nationalists were antagonised by Primo's failure to extend Spanish Morocco into Tangiers and gain a permanent seat on the League of Nations' Council

- o Primo also lost some support from the army due to his heavy-handed disbandment of the Artillery Corps following their complaints of loss of special privileges
- o Primo also gambled to fund his infrastructure projects—having failed to reform the taxation system—by borrowing heavily, a strategy which became totally unstuck when the Great Depression hit in 1929 (particularly due to its impact on Latin America, which was a vital trading area for Spain)
- o To counter the subsequent rising inflation, Primo disastrously insisted on overvaluing the peseta, before eventually obliging to its severe devaluation
- o The impact of the Great Depression of Spanish workers, compounded by Primo's actions, led the Socialists to end their cooperation with him
- o *"In trying to tackle the grievances of so many different groups simultaneously, he finished up satisfying none and arousing the animosity of most."* —Christopher Ross
- Primo resigned in January 1930
- King Alfonso appointed the elderly and ill General Berenguer as Primo's replacement, who proved very indecisive and ultimately provoked huge anger by initially promising a general election but then postponing them for over a year
- The appointment of Berenguer further undermined confidence in the monarchy and stimulated a growth in republicanism

The Establishment of Second Republic (1931)

- In August 1930 representatives of republican organisations signed the **Pact of San Sebastian**, with the intention of overthrowing the monarch, and in October the Communist Party joined the republicans to form a Revolutionary Committee
- King Alfonso called municipal election in April 1931, which turned into a referendum on the monarchy—although pro-monarchist candidates won more seats than republicans overall, the republicans still dominated urban areas, more accurately reflecting public opinion as rural elections were often rigged by the landowning elite.
- As a result of the election, Alfonso abdicated, and the Second Spanish Republic was established the same month (April)
- The new republic was met with both great excitement and anxiety amongst the population, e.g. many were fearful that institutions that had been associated with the monarchy, such as the Church and army, would come under attack, while Basque and Catalan nationalists saw a promise of greater autonomy or even outright independence
- *"'Republic' was a code that Spaniards knew how to read."* —Frances Lannon
- The Second Republic's political history was extremely turbulent and volatile, marked by dramatic swings from left to right to left again
- All three cases were unstable coalitions, with the electoral system contributing to this as small majorities in votes cast could translate to large majorities in the *Cortes* (Parliament)