

Spain: II Republic and Civil War

1 II Republic



[Portada Heraldo de Madrid 13 abril 1931](#)

(Dominio público)

On the 12th April 1931, there were local elections. In general, supporters of the monarchy won the elections but Republicans won in most of the provincial capitals, less dominated by local *caciques*, so they considered themselves the real winners.

Because of these results, Alfonso XIII went into exile.

A provisional government proclaimed the second republic, on the 14th April of 1931.

The Provisional Government and the 1931

Constitution. The new government was integrated by the political parties that signed the San Sebastian Pact, presided by **Alcalá Zamora**.

The government started some reforms and called elections that the Republicans won.

The new *Cortes* made a democratic Constitution (1931) where all the political parties could be represented.

The main features of the constitution were:

- Individual freedom of expression, meeting or association. Right to divorce was introduced.
- Universal suffrage (for men and women)
- A secular state, without an official religion. Everybody had the right to practise any religion and to receive secular education.
- Territorial decentralized organisation: the possibility of creating autonomous regions was open. Other languages, apart from official Spanish, were recognized.
- The importance of the welfare state; the state created public schools ...

This was the first democratic constitution in Spain. Part of the country did not accept it because of the parts of the constitution about religion and territorial autonomy

There were riots in the main cities and plots against the republic. Moderate Republicans left the government, unhappy because of the articles in the constitution that affected religion. **Azaña** was elected president of the government.

1.1 Bienio Reformista

Between 1931 and 1933, Azaña was the president of the government. There were several reforms during these years.

Agrarian reform: The aims were to improve the agrarian production and the life of the peasants so they planned to expropriate the uncultivated large estates and give the land to casual workers. The body in charge was the IRA (*Instituto de Reforma Agraria*), but they did not have enough money for their objectives.

Catalonia got its autonomy: The statute of Nuria (1932) was passed and the Generalitat was founded.

Military reform: Military commands had to swear loyalty to the republic

Labour reforms: such as minimum wage and casualty insurance.

Education reform: 10,000 primary schools were built in two years. The education budget increased 50%.

Civil marriages and divorce were regulated



[Eco Republicano. School and Republic](#)

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[Estatut de Catalunya](#)(Dominio público)

1.2 Opposition to these reforms

Wealthy landowners, high Church hierarchy and Army officers were against the reforms. They considered them radical.



[Casas Viejas 1933](#) (Dominio público)

Anarchists and trade unions were also against them, but because they considered them too light.

In August 1932, there was a *coup d'état* led by General Sanjurjo in Seville, but it failed.

Anarchists, on the other hand, occupied land, because they were unhappy because the agrarian reforms were too slow. In Casas Viejas (Cádiz) farmers held demonstrations in January 1933. Several people died.

In September 1933, following the unpopularity of the government and the economic crisis, Azaña resigned and new elections were called. The right political parties went together in a group called CEDA (*Confederación española de derechas autónomas*) led by **Gil Robles**.

1.3 Bienio conservador

The “*center-right*” political parties won the elections in 1933. The new government from the Radical party of

Lerroux, with the support of CEDA, stopped the reforms that the previous government had started.

In 1934, there were new ministers from the CEDA, the left-wing parties did not accept them and they decided to get the power in a non-democratic way so there was the **October revolution**:

1. The revolution succeeded in **Asturias**, where workers unions occupied the coal mining area, but General Franco, sent by the government put the revolt down.
2. In **Catalonia**: the autonomous government supported the revolt and Lluís Companys proclaimed the **Catalan Republic**. After the revolution failed, the *Generalitat* was dissolved and autonomous government leaders imprisoned.

After these problems the government started a crisis. The ideological differences and the corruption in the Radical party ended the “co-alliance” in the government. New elections were called in February 1936

1.4 The Popular Front

Left-wing parties socialist, communists, some nationalists and anarchists, formed **Popular Front** and went together to the elections.

Calvo Sotelo and José Antonio Primo de Rivera, leader of the fascist party *Falange Española*, were the most important political politicians of the **right-wing parties**.

The Popular Front won the elections. The new government restarted the reforms and gave freedom to the prisoners of the October revolution. **Azaña** became the president of the Republic.



[Eco Republicano.](#)

[Popular Front \(CC BY-SA\)](#)

Problems increased in the streets. There were strikes, churches were “burned”, and there were armed quarrels between “*falangistas*” and “*militantes de organizaciones obreras*” which, in a lot of cases, ended in murders. Some military commanders, led by General Mola, started plotting an end to the republic.

On the 12th July 1936, “*teniente*” Castillo, (left wing), was killed by people from the right. On the next day some Castillos’s friends killed **Calvo Sotelo**, the right-wing leader.

This gave way to the uprising of the Spanish army in the North of Africa, led by General Franco.

2 Spanish Civil War

2.1 The coup d'état and the division of Spain

The army rebelled in the Peninsula on the 18th July 1936. The *coup* was accepted by the church and followed by part of the army, *carlistas* political parties, monarchists, conservatives and *falangistas*, these called themselves *Nationalists*. The coup divided Spain in two parts. *Nationalists* controlled most part of both Castelas, Galicia, Cáceres, part of western Andalucía, Navarra, Baleares (except Menorca) and the Canary Islands.

To organize themselves, they founded the “Xunta de Defensa Nacional” in Burgos. A few months later Franco was named the leader of the government and all political forces formed one political party: “*Falange Española Tradicionalista e das Xuntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista* (FET e das XONS)”



[PACO. Spanish Civil War 1936 \(CC BY-SA\)](#)

The Republicans controlled most of Aragón, the North of Spain, except Navarre, Catalonia, Levante, Madrid and nearly all of Andalusia. After the *coup* the power of the government nearly disappeared. Trade Unions and some popular organizations “took the opportunity to have a social revolution expropriating land and factories. At the same time “*milicias populares*” were organized to defend the republic, but they were not coordinated and sometimes they quarreled among themselves. A few months later the popular Army was created. But anarchists and *Nationalists* disobedience to the government weakened the Republican side.

2.2 Spanish Civil War outside Spain

The Spanish Civil War divided public opinion everywhere. Britain and France convened a conference and afterwards they signed an agreement not to interfere. They were afraid that this war could become an international conflict.

But both sides had foreign help:

- The USSR supported the Republic
- The *Nationalists* received arms and soldiers from the fascist Italy and the Nazi Germany.

Lots intellectuals like Hemingway, Einstein, George Orwell... supported the Republicans, and also everybody from left parties all over the world. They saw the war as a battle against fascism. Thousands of foreign volunteers came to Spain from their countries to join the **International Brigades** (*brigadas internacionais*)



[Dabrowszczacy. Polish Internacional Brigades](#)
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Erstellt. [Nazi Legion Condor](#) (CC BY-SA)

Evolution of war

The war lasted nearly three years (1936–1939). There were three phases:

The Campaign Around Madrid (July 1936 – March 1937):

At the beginning of August, thanks to the help of Italian and German planes, the Moroccan army crossed the strait of Gibraltar and by the end of October they had already reached Madrid.

Recovering Madrid was the main objective of the *Nationalists*. The offensive lasted all winter. The Republican government left the capital and named a “*Xunta Militar*” to defend the city.

The Republicans were able to fight off the Nationalists with the help of the International Brigades, as well as Soviet planes and tanks.

The Republicans were defeated at the **battle of Jarama** (February 1937) and at the Battle of **Guadalajara** (March 1937).

After the defeat, the nationalists concentrated their effort in other fronts.

The North Front (April – October 1937)

Franco's army went to the North with the aim of invading industrial places along the **Cantabrian coast** on 26th April 1937. The Germany air force, the Condor legion, bombed Guernica. After this, the Basque Country was in the hands of the *Nationalists*. In August, Santander and Asturias became *Nationalists* (*Nationalists* got Santander and Asturias after this)

Republicans attacked **Brunete** (Madrid) and **Belchite** (Zaragoza) but they failed.

The End of the War (October 1937 – April 1939)

At the end of 1937, Franco went to the eastern front and conquered Teruel. Then he advanced to the Mediterranean coast leaving Catalonia isolated from the rest of the Republican area.

The Republican area was divided. To solve this problem, the Republicans crossed the Ebro river and attacked Franco's troops

from behind. This is called the **Battle of Ebro**. It lasted more than three months. The Republican army was nearly destroyed.

After this, the *Nationalists* advanced through **Barcelona** in January 1939. In March, Franco's troops seized Madrid and the war ended.

- 1) As a result of the civil war there were nearly 500,000 casualties.
- 2) A lot of people went into exile.
- 3) The country was devastated.



English: General map of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

Key

- Initial Nationalist zone - July 1936
- Nationalist advance until September 1936
- Nationalist advance until October 1937
- Nationalist advance until November 1938
- Nationalist advance until February 1939
- Last area under Republican control
- Main Nationalist centres
- Main Republican centres
- Land battles
- Naval battles
- Bombed cities
- Concentration camps
- Massacres
- Refugee camps

Webgrafía

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