

Spanish Civil War 1936–9

The Spanish Civil War 1936–9 was a struggle between the forces of the political left and the political right in Spain. The forces of the left were a disparate group led by the socialist Republican government against whom a group of right-wing military rebels and their supporters launched a military uprising in July 1936. This developed into civil war which, like many civil conflicts, quickly acquired an international dimension that was to play a decisive role in the ultimate victory of the right. The victory of the right-wing forces led to the establishment of a military dictatorship in Spain under the leadership of General Franco, which would last until his death in 1975.

The following key questions will be addressed in this chapter:

- ★ To what extent was the Spanish Civil War caused by long-term social divisions within Spanish society?
- ★ To what extent should the Republican governments between 1931 and 1936 be blamed for the failure to prevent civil war?
- ★ Why did civil war break out?
- ★ Why did the Republican government lose the Spanish Civil War?
- ★ To what extent was Spain fundamentally changed by the civil war?

1 The long-term causes of the Spanish Civil War

▶ **Key question:** *To what extent was the Spanish Civil War caused by long-term social divisions within Spanish society?*

KEY TERM

Spanish Morocco Refers to the significant proportion of Morocco that was controlled by Spain as a colony from 1906.

The Spanish Civil War began on 17 July 1936 when significant numbers of military garrisons throughout Spain and **Spanish Morocco**, led by senior army officers, revolted against the left-wing Republican government. The conspirators were joined by various groups hostile to the Republican government including monarchists, conservatives and fascist paramilitaries. The rebels also received assistance from the right-wing governments of Germany and Italy.

Most of north-west Spain quickly came under army, or Nationalist, control, but the rising was not universally successful. The military rebels failed to take the key cities of Madrid and Barcelona and most of rural southern and eastern Spain. The outcome was that Spain was divided and civil war began (see the map on page 89).

The Spanish Civil War was fundamentally rooted in, but not exclusively caused by, profound social divisions between the wealthy, privileged few and the masses of poor rural and industrial workers. The desire to improve the conditions of the workers, through political action and demonstrations, led to conflict with those who were opposed to such change. But the civil war was a war of multiple conflicts, with long-term **separatist** and anti-clerical agendas also provoking considerable tension and fuelling political conflict. This first section examines these long-term causes of the war.

Economic and social problems 1900–31

Rural poverty

There existed extreme polarization of wealth in many rural areas of Spain between the landlords and the landless labourers. This was particularly so in southern Spain where the agricultural system consisted of huge estates, called *latifundia*, which were owned by a few wealthy landlords and worked by labourers hired by the day. This system kept the labourers poor because:

- the hiring of labour by the day gave no financial security and unemployment was common
- the operation of one-crop farming meant that the availability of work was highly seasonal, often representing only 200 days' work per year
- wages were low.

Most rural unrest took place in southern Spain where rural hardships were most severe. Left-wing unions, which organized strikes and demonstrations against exploitative landlords, appealed to the labourers. Particularly popular was the socialist union, the **Union General de Trabajadores** (UGT), and the **anarcho-syndicalist Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo** (CNT), the latter of which, by 1918, had over 700,000 members. Attempts to improve conditions through strike action, however, were rarely successful, not least because landlords frequently brought in alternative labourers from outside the region to do the farm work instead.

Agricultural issues had a significant impact on national politics. Agricultural employment constituted 45.5 per cent of the workforce by 1930 and the growth in rural unrest presented a problem for central government. The different possible solutions to the agrarian problems frequently caused serious divisions between left- and right-wing politicians.

Urban poverty

The percentage of the workforce employed in industry increased in the early twentieth century, from 21.9 per cent in 1923, to 25.6 per cent in 1930. Urban centres grew as a consequence, with over a million people migrating to the cities in this period. By 1930, 42 per cent of Spain's population lived in towns of over 10,000 inhabitants. Spain's main industrial regions were:

- the Basque country, for iron and steel

← What was the nature of the economic and social problems in Spain?

KEY TERM

Separatist Favouring a degree of political independence or autonomy for a particular region.

Union General de Trabajadores General Union of Labourers, the main union of the Socialist Party.

Anarcho-syndicalist An anarchic belief in which proponents desire the central authority of the state to be replaced by the operation of control by trade unions.

Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo National Labour Confederation, an anarcho-syndicalist trade union.

KEY TERM

Trade union An organization of workers which pursues improvements in pay and working conditions for its members.

Bolshevik Revolution The successful communist revolution in Russia in October 1917 led by the Bolshevik Party.

What were Spain's political problems?

KEY TERM

Lliga Regionalista Regionalist League, a separatist Catalan political party.

Partido Nacionalista Vasco Basque Nationalist Party, a Basque separatist political party.

Cortes Elected parliament.

Universal male suffrage When all adult males are entitled to vote in elections.

Caciques Influential local 'bosses', usually wealthy landlords or industrialists.

- the Asturias, for coal mining
- Catalonia, for textile industries.

Industrial workers were frequently housed in inner-city slums where rents were high and living conditions overcrowded and insanitary. There was no social legislation, so there was no minimum wage, no maximum working hours or protection from dangerous working conditions.

The concentration of dissatisfied workers in Spain's cities led to the growth of **trade unions** and strikes. For the more privileged, the increase in unrest was frequently seen as evidence of the growing threat of social revolution following the successful **Bolshevik Revolution** in Russia. Urban issues, as with agrarian problems, therefore contributed to political polarization in Spain.

Political instability

Separatism in Spain 1900–31

Spain was a unified country, but there was a strong tradition of separatism in Catalonia and the Basque country. Both regions prized their distinctive culture, language and history, and sought a significant degree of political autonomy. This separatism was centuries old, but its popularity increased with the growth in the economic importance of Catalonia and the Basque country in the twentieth century. Separatists argued that the significant economic contributions made by their regions were not sufficiently valued by the central government; separatists in Catalonia pointed out that only one-twentieth of Catalan contributions to state revenue were returned in public spending in the region. Separatist parties like the Catalan **Lliga Regionalista** and the Basque **Partido Nacionalista Vasco** (PNV) grew in popularity. The separatist agenda proved to be another divisive issue in Spanish politics with leftist groups prepared to concede some degree of autonomy and rightists determined to preserve the unity of Spain.

The collapse of the monarchy

Instability characterized Spanish politics in the early twentieth century. Until 1923, Spain was governed by a constitutional monarchy, although matters of government were largely carried out by the elected **cortes** or parliament. Despite the operation of **universal male suffrage** the system was not really democratic since elections were strongly influenced by local **caciques**. This political system was unpopular with ordinary people, not least because it failed to introduce reforms to improve their lives. As protests increased, those on the political right, alarmed by the prospect of left-wing government, turned to Miguel Primo de Rivera, a military official who promised to end the unrest in Spain.

SOURCE A

A map showing the main regions and political groups within Spain.



What does this map show about the political groupings within Spain before the civil war?

The dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, September 1923 to January 1930

Miguel Primo de Rivera came to power as the result of a military coup. He established himself as a dictator, although a virtually powerless monarch, King Alfonso XIII, remained the head of state.

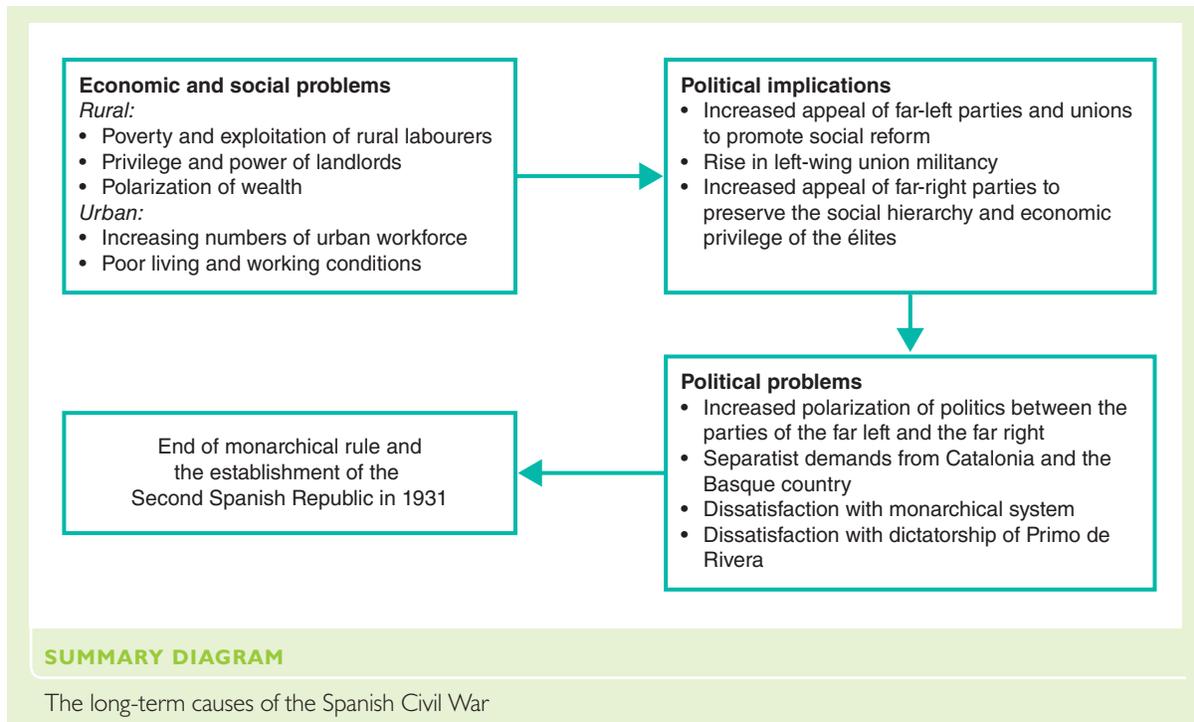
Primo de Rivera was unable to heal the deep divisions in Spanish society despite introducing a number of reforms. In fact, the reforms themselves proved divisive; they were simultaneously too much for the right and too little for the left. These reforms included:

- Arbitration committees to manage disputes between industrial workers and their employers.
- Government investment in a programme of public works to increase job opportunities. These included the construction of the first trans-Pyrenees rail link between Spain and France.
- Proposals to reform the army and a reduction of the army budget.

The reforms fell far short of what was necessary to resolve Spain's serious socioeconomic problems, but were also costly, alienating both reformers and the conservative élites who resented the increased financial burden. Primo de Rivera became increasingly unpopular, prompting King Alfonso XIII to request his retirement. Primo de Rivera stepped down on 28 January 1930.

The end of the monarchy, April 1931

After the end of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, King Alfonso XIII hoped to gain popular support for a continuation of monarchical rule. He arranged for an election to be held on this issue. Contrary to his expectations, the results were an endorsement for a democratic republic. Although he refused to abdicate, he did leave Spain.



2 The short-term causes of the Spanish Civil War

► **Key question:** To what extent should the Republican governments between 1931 and 1936 be blamed for the failure to prevent civil war?

In 1931, Spain became a republic. The new republican government faced a number of serious social, economic and political problems. The failure of successive governments to provide a satisfactory solution to these problems led to the outbreak of civil war in 1936. This failure was not solely due to the weaknesses of the governments themselves; the problems they faced and the context in which they were operating made the provision of stable government extremely difficult.

The governments of the Second Spanish Republic 1931–6

The short-lived Spanish Republic underwent significant changes in governments between 1931 and 1936. The three major elections held in this period resulted in dramatic swings between left- and right-wing governments, all of which were **coalitions**:

- left-wing coalition government (June 1931 to November 1933)
- right-wing coalition government (November 1933 to February 1936)
- left-wing coalition government, known as the Popular Front (February 1936 to July 1936).

Substantial problems confronted the government of the Spanish Republic in 1931. These problems included:

- the lack of a tradition of working democracy
- opposition from monarchists hostile to the Republic
- opposition from extreme right-wing groups, like the **Falange**, who did not believe democracy could solve Spain's problems
- serious socioeconomic divisions which meant that any reforming action would leave at least one section of society dissatisfied
- the rise of political extremism in Europe, evident in the establishment of right-wing dictatorships in Italy and Germany
- the fear of communist revolution, encouraged by the USSR; many conservatives in Spain interpreted any social reforms as a step towards communism.

In addition, the Great Depression had just begun. This profoundly disrupted the world economy and worsened the socioeconomic crisis in Spain. During the Great Depression in Spain:

- imports and exports dropped significantly, the former halving by 1935 from 1929 levels; exports were reduced by only slightly less
- industrial productivity decreased, with **gross domestic product** decreasing by 20 per cent in the 1930s
- unemployment rates rose to 12.9 per cent in 1934
- government investment decreased.

The left-wing government's reforms 1931–3

The June 1931 elections were a resounding triumph for the left-wing parties. Of the 470 seats in the parliament, the Spanish Socialist Party, the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE), won 116, making them the largest party represented. This, however, was insufficient to ensure the passage of legislation, necessitating they form a coalition government. They joined other left-wing parties including the second largest party, the **Radical Party** led by Alejandro Lerroux, to form a government. The moderate Niceto Alcalá-Zamora was chosen as President. The right-wing parties held only 41 seats.

← Why was the Second Republic unable to provide long-term political stability?

KEY TERM

Coalition Government formed of a combination of political parties.

Falange Fascist political party established in February 1933 by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the son of Miguel Primo de Rivera.

Gross domestic product The market value of all goods and services produced in a country in a given time period.

Radical Party Spanish political party founded by Alejandro Lerroux. Its political ideology represented the centre ground, favouring moderate social reform.

← How popular were the reforms of the left-wing government?

The new parliament passed a series of reforms which aimed to address the problems of rural inequality, unemployment and the exploitation of labour. These are shown in the table below.

The left-wing government's reforms 1931–3

<p>Agrarian reforms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law of Municipal Boundaries of 28 April 1931 which prohibited employers from bringing in workers from outside a given region until all those within the locality had jobs, preventing landlords from breaking strikes • Law of Obligatory Cultivation of 7 May 1931 which aimed to increase employment by forcing landlords to farm their lands to employ more workers • Extension of arbitration committees (see page 77) to the countryside • Introduction of an eight-hour working day on 1 July 1931 • Agrarian Reform Law passed on 9 September 1932 which aimed at dismantling <i>latifundia</i> estates through the redistribution of land by expropriating land from landlords whose estates exceeded 300 hectares of arable land or whose yield amounted to over 10,000 pesetas a year • Institute of Agrarian Reform was established to implement the process of redistribution, which included the payment of compensation to landlords 	<p>Anti-clerical reforms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching by religious orders banned in an attempt to end the Church's traditional monopoly in education • Prohibition of the display of religious images in public buildings, including classrooms • Definition of Spain as a secular state • An end to state financial support to the Church after a period of two years' transition • Legalization of divorce and civil marriage • An obligation to acquire the state's approval for official religious displays <p>These reforms encouraged a spate of violent attacks against Church property throughout Spain in May 1931 in which over 100 buildings were vandalized or looted.</p>
<p>Urban worker reforms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An entitlement to seven days' paid leave per annum • An eight-hour working day, unless overtime was paid • Some social security benefits, although these were restricted to maternity, retirement and insurance against accidents in the workplace • Freedom to strike without the fear of dismissal 	<p>Military reforms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Army officer numbers were reduced • An investigation of promotions of officers during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera was established • The conservative military academy at Zaragoza was closed • Top military positions awarded to those with strong pro-Republican credentials • All officers were required to swear an oath of loyalty to the Republic or face discharge • Some right-wing officers were moved to minor posts <p>Separatist reforms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catalan Statute of September 1932 gave limited autonomy to Catalonia • Established a Catalan Parliament, the <i>Generalitat</i>, with legislative power over agriculture, transport, public health and poor relief in Catalonia; other issues remained the preserve of the central government in Madrid • One-third of Catalan taxation was under the control of the Catalan Parliament

Limitations of the reforms 1931–3

Although the reforms achieved much, they fell short of solving many of the problems they set out to address. The Agrarian Reform Law in its first year only succeeded in resettling 10 per cent of the 60,000 families it had aimed to help. In large part this was because the Institute of Agrarian Reform was allocated an inadequate 50 million pesetas (one per cent of the annual budget) with which to carry out the reform, including the compensation payouts. The Law of Obligatory Cultivation was frequently ignored by

landlords, in part because they only incurred minimal fines (frequently not exceeding 500 pesetas) for so doing. Rural labourers continued to suffer considerable hardship, and by the early 1930s, 72 per cent of those registered unemployed were from agricultural regions. Unemployment also remained a substantial problem in urban areas. Social security benefits provided only limited assistance to industrial workers, and did not cover those who were out of work. The concessions to separatist demands were also highly limited. Catalonia was granted only a very restricted degree of independence, and no provision was made for the Basque country.

Political reactions to the reforms 1931–3

The reforms generated criticism from both the extreme left and the conservative right. The government became isolated and weakened as Spain's politics polarized and it was abandoned by the extreme left and attacked by a strengthened conservative right. In the general election of November 1933, the left-wing coalition government was voted out of power.

Opposition from the extreme left

The government's defeat in the November 1933 elections was in significant part due to the loss of support from elements of the more extreme left that had formerly backed the government. These included anarchists and the left-wing faction of the PSOE, which was led by Largo Caballero. To these groups, the government's reforms did not go far enough to address Spain's socioeconomic problems. In consequence, their opposition grew. Anarchists abstained from voting rather than give the left-wing parties of the coalition their vote. The PSOE was weakened by divisions caused by criticisms from Largo Caballero's left-wing faction, many of whom refused to co-operate with other left-wing parties in the November 1933 elections, dividing the left-wing vote.

One of the main reasons why the November general elections were called at all was because of a breakdown in co-operation between, and within, the coalition parties which made effective, stable government almost impossible. This persuaded President Alcalá-Zamora to use his power to dissolve the parliament and call new elections. The breakdown of the coalition was prompted by the reform programme, in particular the agrarian reforms. The Radical Party favoured more gradual reform and the defence of property rights, law and order. They employed blocking tactics in the parliament to slow the passage of the reforms. This angered members of the PSOE, especially Largo Caballero's more extreme left-wing faction who demanded an even more radical programme of reforms. Anti-clerical reform also caused difficulties within the leftist coalition government. Some key government ministers were opposed to what was perceived as a radical programme including, crucially, the strongly Catholic President, Alcalá-Zamora.

Many ordinary labourers and workers were dissatisfied with the effects of the reform programme, expressing this not only in their electoral support for the more extreme left-wing parties, but also through participation in street


 **KEY TERM**

Federación Anarquista Ibérica Iberian Anarchist Federation.

Assault Guards An armed police force, similar to the Civil Guard, established by the Republican government.

Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rightist Parties.

demonstrations. Many of these protests and strikes were organized by the unions of the far-left parties such as the anarchist *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* (FAI) and the anarcho-syndicalist union, the CNT, which grew in popularity. One of the most serious uprisings, organized by FAI, occurred in January 1933. Although it was crushed by government forces, in the village of Casas Viejas in Cadiz, 19 peasants were killed when the government's **Assault Guards** opened fire. This was part of the government's increasingly firm stance against militant demonstrations which included the passing of the Law for the Defence of the Republic in October 1931. This banned spontaneous strikes and allowed for the arrest and deportation of suspected instigators. Such repression and violence increased disillusionment towards the government from those on the far left, while doing little to halt the demonstrations.

Opposition from the conservative right

The reforms also provoked hostility from the conservative right on the opposite end of the political spectrum. From their perspective, many of the reforms represented an assault on the traditional social and religious order in Spain, which they fiercely defended, and an undesirable increase in the intervention of the state in economic and social affairs. They feared that both marked first steps towards more radical, socialist reform. These anxieties were given credence by the increase in far-left militant protest that seemed to accompany the reforms. It appeared to the conservative right that the left-wing coalition government had unleashed forces of social revolution that it could not control which would lead to communism. There was also widespread hostility to the perceived fragmentation of the unity of the state through the granting of concessions to Catalonia.

The growth of conservative right opposition was manifested in the formation, and popularity, of the *Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas* (CEDA), a right-wing party established in February 1933 by José María Gil-Robles. It was essentially a union of right-wing opposition groups whose proclaimed agenda was the defence of law, order, property and the Catholic Christian religion. Increased support for CEDA was strikingly apparent in the November 1933 elections when they took 115 seats, making them the single largest party in the parliament.

The conservative right opposition included a significant number of military officers. Their affiliation with right-wing groups was in large part due to the socioeconomic background of many of Spain's high-ranking military, who came predominantly from landowning classes. The military also opposed many of the recent reforms. They feared these were a prelude to a more substantial purge of the traditional military hierarchy. However, there was only one, abortive, military coup in the period 1931–3, led by General José Sanjurjo in August 1932.

Right-wing Republican government, November 1933 to February 1936

In the November 1933 elections, CEDA became the largest party in the parliament with 115 deputies. They worked closely with the second largest party, the Radicals, who had shifted considerably to the right since 1931.

Reforms of the right-wing Republic 1933–6

The period of right-wing government saw the reversal of much of the legislation passed by the earlier left-wing government. Their actions included:

- the repeal of the Law of Municipal Boundaries (see page 80) in May 1934
- a refusal to enforce most of the agrarian and industrial reforms, including undermining arbitration committees (see page 77), which led to the eviction of peasant farmers who had recently received land from the reforms
- police searches of trade union premises
- the authorization of force to break up strikes
- a refusal to enforce laws that separated the Catholic Church from the state, allowing it to take control of education.

The Asturias Uprising, October 1934

The left-wing parties and their supporters were alarmed by the reforms of the right-wing government. Left-wing protests against the government increased. The most serious uprising took place in the Asturias in October 1934. The revolt was intended to be part of a larger national socialist uprising to remove the government, but poor planning meant that the one in Asturias was the only one of significance.

The Asturias was predominantly a mining region that had suffered severely from the effects of the Great Depression. Hundreds of mines had been closed in the 1920s, resulting in high unemployment. The agenda of the far left therefore held significant appeal. During the revolt of October 1934, many of the workers succeeded in establishing an independent workers' republic exercising control over one-third of the province and 80 per cent of its population. There was violence, with revolutionaries burning 58 churches as well as taking hostages, 31 of whom they killed.

The reaction of the right-wing government was brutal and within two weeks the revolt was ended with 1335 killed and almost 3000 wounded; most of these were from the Asturias. Government suppression continued, and broadened, even after the surrender of the Asturian rebels on 19 October 1934. Catalan autonomy was suspended and thousands of left-wing activists were arrested throughout the region.

← How did the policies of the right-wing Republican government contribute to unrest in Spain?



The end of the right-wing government, January 1936

The right-wing government came to an end when President Alcalá-Zamora dissolved the parliament and called a general election for February 1936. His decision was precipitated by the virtual collapse of co-operation between the Radical and the CEDA partnership, a situation that made government almost unworkable. The breakdown in this partnership was in large part over policy since the Radical Party became increasingly unsupportive of the CEDA's more extreme right-wing position.

Popular Front government, February–July 1936

The general election of February 1936 resulted in another left-wing government. The victorious coalition, known as the Popular Front, was a broad union of left-wing parties including republicans, socialists and communists. The Popular Front held a substantial majority in the parliament with 286 seats, in comparison to the 132 seats held by the right. However, this distribution of seats, which was in accordance with the rules of the electoral system, obscured the closer split of opinion in Spain. This split was revealed in the division of actual votes cast, which was 4,654,116 for the left, 4,503,524 for the right.

Reforms of the Popular Front government

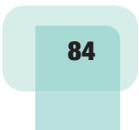
The Popular Front government resumed the left-wing reformist agenda:

- the restoration of Catalan autonomy
- discussion of granting autonomy to the Basque country
- the resumption of agrarian and military reforms.

Opposition from the conservative right

These reforms were opposed by the conservative right and there was an almost immediate escalation in right-wing inspired violent protest. Many of the more extreme elements of the conservative right expressed frustration with the democratic system and began to advocate a more militant approach to gaining power. Indeed, there was an abortive right-wing plot involving Gil-Robles, the leader of the CEDA Party, to prevent the Popular Front government from even taking power at all. Further evidence of the rightist drift to extremism was the significant increase in membership to the explicitly anti-democratic and fascist Falange Party from 1936.

The conservative right were encouraged into greater opposition by the increasingly radical rhetoric of the extreme left. Conservative politicians claimed a right-wing government was the only way to restore and preserve order in Spain. On the streets, right-wing militants provoked left-wing groups to violence to justify claims that they were needed to prevent lawlessness. The assassination of the right-wing monarchist leader José Calvo Sotelo on 13 July 1936 by government troops confirmed for many that left-wing violence needed to be stopped, by force if necessary.



SOURCE B

Excerpt of a speech by Gil-Robles in parliament on 15 April 1936 in *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War* by Paul Preston, published by Taylor & Francis, London, 2004, page 254.

Civil War is being brought by those who seek the revolutionary conquest of power and it is being sustained and weaned by the apathy of a government which does not turn on its supporters ... when civil war breaks out in Spain, let it be known that the weapons have been loaded by the negligence of a government which has not been able to fulfil its duty towards groups which have stayed within the strictest legality.

According to Source B, what was the cause of civil war in Spain?



Opposition from the extreme left

The Popular Front government faced opposition from increasingly extreme left-wing militancy. This was motivated in part by what these groups saw as an opportunity to exact vengeance on landlords and employers who had used the previous two years of right-wing government to exploit workers and peasants. Extreme left-wing unions encouraged labourers who had been the victims of eviction to take undertake illegal occupations to reclaim land, resulting in mass land seizures which were later made legal by the government. The increased militancy of the left was also a consequence of worsening conditions due to poor harvests and unemployment. The rhetoric of the leader of the left-wing faction of the PSOE, Largo Caballero, became increasingly extreme, speaking of a social revolution.

The government's ability to provide stable rule was weakened by political divisions within its ranks. The rift within the PSOE became so serious that the left-wing faction led by Caballero refused to participate in the government on the grounds that any coalition would dilute the social reform agenda they wished to pursue. In addition, animosity between the leaders of the competing PSOE factions, Caballero and Indalecio Prieto, resulted in Caballero's supporters vetoing Prieto's appointment as prime minister in May 1936. The new Prime Minister Santiago Casares Quiroga underestimated the seriousness of the political situation and failed to save the fragmenting Popular Front.

The military uprising, July 1936

Throughout 1936, both the extreme left and extreme right had spoken increasingly of revolution as the only solution to Spain's crisis. But it was the conservative right who decisively abandoned the path of legality when members of the military launched an uprising against the Popular Front government in July 1936. The revolt had its roots primarily in the army and was chiefly planned by General Emilio Mola. Most colonels and middle-ranking officers supported the revolt, bringing their garrisons with them. The Spanish Military Union (*Unión Militar Española*, UME) was a secretive organization of over 3500 officers that played a key role in the establishment of cells of conspirators throughout the country. General Mola also



recognized the importance of civilian support and established links with monarchists and CEDA to ensure their participation.

The revolt began with troops in Morocco on 17 July 1936 and soon spread to military units throughout Spain. This action met with armed resistance from left-wing unions, particularly in the rural south and in the key cities of Barcelona and Madrid. These unions quickly mobilized civilians into **militia** units and joined with troops loyal to the Republic. The result was that rebellious garrisons were only able to take control of parts of Spain. Civil war had begun.

KEY TERM

Militia A military force using civilians as opposed to professional soldiers.

Left		Centre		Right
Socialist Party (PSOE)		Radical Party (– by 1933 →)		CEDA
FAI	FNTT	UGT		Falange
CNT				
Anarchists: in favour of radical social reform		Socialists: in favour of social reforms to achieve a greater fairness and distribution of wealth in society		Radicals: in favour of moderate reforms, moved increasingly to the right from 1931
				CEDA: in favour of the defence of the social hierarchy, religion. Their commitment to democracy was questionable
				FALANGE: fascist, anti-democratic
Year	Government	Key policies	Reactions	
1931–3	Left-wing coalition (Primarily PSOE and Radicals)	Agrarian reform Urban reform Anti-clerical reforms Military reform Separatist concessions	Rise of right-wing opposition, e.g. formation of CEDA Left-wing opposition, e.g. FAI and CNT uprisings and PSOE split	
1933–6	Right-wing coalition (Primarily CEDA and Radicals)	Reversal of left-wing reforms	Increase in left-wing protest: Asturias Uprising	
1936	Left-wing Popular Front coalition	Revival of left-wing reforms	Left-wing militancy: land seizures, strikes Increase of right-wing opposition Military uprising (July 1937)	

SUMMARY DIAGRAM

The short-term causes of the Spanish Civil War

3 Key debate

▶ **Key question:** *Why did civil war break out?*

The extent to which the left or the right was more responsible for the abandonment of democracy chiefly characterized early accounts about the causes of the Spanish Civil War.

Nationalist interpretations

Naturally, pro-nationalist interpretations, such as those written in the 1960s by Ricardo de la Cierva, a former priest and official in the Ministry of Information, blamed the left. They emphasized left-wing lawlessness, such as the Asturias Uprising and growth of militant unionism, which *forced* the right to take decisive action to safeguard order, property, law and religion against the spectre of social revolution.

Nationalist accounts, such as Joaquin Arraras' *Historia de la Cruzada Espanola* (1943), particularly emphasized the importance of the anti-Church reforms of the left-wing Republic in leading to civil war. These accounts accorded with Nationalist wartime propaganda that presented the civil war as a crusade in which the conservative right fought to preserve traditional Christian values against a godless left-wing Republic. While it was certainly the case that religion had the power to mobilize and inflame opinion, its importance may have been exaggerated by the conservative right, who wanted to present the civil war as a religious crusade instead of a battle to preserve wealth and privilege. Overall, it is difficult to determine to what extent religious conviction contributed to the outbreak of civil war.

Republican interpretations

Pro-Republican interpretations stressed that it was the extreme right who decisively went against the democratic system in launching the military uprising in 1936. They also questioned the extent to which the conservative right had ever really supported the democratic Republic. They presented examples of the Falange and the autocratic CEDA, whose commitment to democracy had always been doubted by their opponents.

Other interpretations

Accounts written by less politically involved historians have tended to emphasize the socioeconomic roots of the conflict. In particular, they highlight the difficulties caused by the long-term agrarian problems. This was evident in Gerald Brenan's *The Spanish Labyrinth* published in 1943, and more recently in the work of historian Paul Preston. They see agrarian issues as at the root of much of the conflict. Agrarian problems increased the growth of left-wing strikes and militancy and influenced the social reform

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Photography, both still and motion pictures, was used by the Nationalists and the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War to affect public opinion outside Spain. How would visual imagery of the conflict affect people's understanding of the war? (Perception and Emotion.)

programme of the left-wing governments, both of which antagonized the conservative right and played a key role in causing fractures in the left-wing coalitions.

Ultimately, if the war was most profoundly rooted in social and political divisions caused by agrarian problems, it was also a war of multiple conflicts, with separatism, religion and political factors all playing a role.

4 The course of the Spanish Civil War 1936–9

▶ **Key question:** *Why did the Republican government lose the Spanish Civil War?*

The right-wing military uprising against the Republican government quickly developed into civil war. The forces of the conservative right were known as the Nationalists, while those who fought to defend the left-wing Republican government were the Republicans. The civil war quickly acquired an important international dimension with both sides reliant on foreign supplies of weapons. Ultimately, the Nationalists triumphed, leading to the establishment of a right-wing military dictatorship. The role of strategy, tactics, technology and the effective management of the material requirements of war were all important in determining the outcome.

Were the Nationalists stronger than the Republicans at the outset of the civil war?

→ July 1936: Republican and Nationalist Spain

The revolt of military garrisons throughout Spain led rapidly to the division of Spain into Nationalist and Republican areas. The Nationalists controlled the agricultural north-west, except the most northerly regions of the Basque country and the Asturias with its mining and industrial resources. Their area of western control bordered Portugal, whose dictator, António de Oliveira Salazar, was sympathetic to them. The Nationalists also held a small segment of territory in southern Spain around Seville, where 1500 troops from the Spanish **Army of Africa** were airlifted by Germany from Spanish Morocco to bolster Nationalist forces from 29 July 1936. More troops followed, ferried in convoys in co-operation with Italian and German militaries. This army was to prove decisive in the fortunes of the military rebels and was led by General Francisco Franco, who emerged by September 1936 as the leader of the Nationalists.

KEY TERM

Army of Africa Spanish and Spanish Moroccan troops stationed in Spanish Morocco.

SOURCE C

A map showing the geographical division of Spain between the Nationalists and the Republicans by the end of July 1936.



What does Source C suggest about how far the Nationalists or the Republicans held the advantage in the civil war in July 1936?

SOURCE D

General Francisco Franco (centre) in 1936.



What does the photo in Source D suggest about Francisco Franco?



Republican-controlled territory in July 1936 centred on southern and eastern Spain, and included Spain's two major cities: Madrid and Barcelona, each with a population of over a million. This, along with the Republican control of the Basque country and the Asturias, meant that the Republic possessed the majority of Spain's industries and raw materials, as well as the areas of greatest population density. These included the territories producing Spain's primary agricultural exports, olive oil and citrus fruit, as well as control over Spain's gold reserves. The Republic also retained the loyalty of Spain's small navy and air force as well as a considerable proportion of the army and Civil Guard.

Why did the Nationalists fail to take Madrid in 1936?

→ The Nationalist advance to Madrid 1936

The initial strategic priority for the Nationalists in 1936 was to gain the capital city, Madrid, which was held by the Republic. The battle for Madrid led to fierce fighting throughout much of 1936.

Nationalist advance on Madrid, August–October 1936

The Nationalist Army of Africa advanced rapidly through Extremadura in August 1936, heading for Madrid. The troops were transported in trucks, with air cover provided by Italian and German aircraft, ensuring that they had reached the key Republican-held city of Merida, some 320 km from Seville, within a week. The cities of Merida and Badajoz were captured by 15 August 1936 after fierce battles. In what became known as the Massacre of Badajoz, some 2000 people were shot by order of the Army of Africa leader General Yagüe. Nationalist forces were barely delayed by Republican resistance, which was primarily composed of inexperienced and ill-equipped Republican militiamen. The town of Talavera de la Reina, for example, fell to the Army of Africa in a single day despite being defended by several thousand militiamen.

Fortress of Alcázar, September 1936

To the south of Madrid, near Toledo, stood Alcázar, a medieval fortress where 2000 Nationalist troops were besieged by Republicans. General Franco, determined to gain a symbolic victory, was anxious to relieve the fortress and ordered the Army of Africa to divert to Toledo instead of proceeding directly to Madrid. The siege was broken on 27 September, but this diversion meant Republicans had more time to improve Madrid's defences and receive a shipment of military equipment from the USSR.

KEY TERM

Casa de Campo A large urban park to the west of Madrid.

Battle for Madrid, October–December 1936

In October 1936, Nationalists began a heavy artillery bombardment of Madrid, supplemented by German aircraft. The Republican government moved to Valencia although the Nationalist advance into Madrid from the west was halted at the **Casa de Campo**.

Republican fighters in Madrid were helped by the arrival of weapons from the USSR and Mexico on 4 October. These included Soviet tanks and aircraft (see page 101), which proved superior to the German and Italian aircraft available at that stage to the Nationalists. Republicans also had the advantage in manpower with regular troops, militiamen and the non-Spanish **International Brigades** who arrived on 8 November, providing an additional 3500 men for the defence of Madrid. By the end of November, stalemate had set in to the west of Madrid.

 **KEY TERM**

International Brigades
Military units composed of volunteers from a range of countries.

Technology of the war: aircraft

Aircraft played a crucial role in the Spanish Civil War and were used in a wide variety of capacities including reconnaissance, ground attack and strategic bombing. Foreign-supplied aircraft played the most significant role, with Germany and Italy providing the Nationalists a combined 1253 and the USSR supplying 648 to the Republic. Soviet-supplied Polikarpov I-15 and I-16 fighters were superior to aircraft used by the Nationalists in the first year of the war, helping the Republicans to achieve aerial supremacy in the war's early months. The arrival of more advanced German Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighters in early 1937 gave the Nationalists the advantage. Although the Soviet Tupolev SB-2 bomber was, on paper, the most powerful bomber aircraft in Spain, there were few deployed and they performed poorly; the German Heinkel 111 bomber was superior. Bombers were used for strategic bombing on an unprecedented scale.

A comparison of the main aircraft in the Spanish Civil War

	Republican		Nationalist			
Overall number of aircraft of all types supplied by the USSR, Italy and Germany to Spain	648*		1253			
Type of aircraft	Polikarpov I-15 (from 1936)	Polikarpov I-16 (from 1936)	Fiat CR.32 (from 1936)	Heinkel He 51 (from 1936)	Messerschmitt Bf 109 (from spring 1937)	Heinkel He 111 (from spring 1937)
Country of origin	USSR	USSR	Italy	Germany	Germany	Germany
Maximum speed	350 km/h	489 km/h	360 km/h	330 km/h	640 km/h	310 km/h
Range	300 km	700 km	781 km	570 km	850 km	2400 km
Armaments	Four fixed forward firing machine guns	Two fixed forward firing machine guns, two 20 mm cannon in wings	Two machine guns	Two machine guns in nose	Two machine guns in wings, two 20 mm cannon in the wings, a 20 mm cannon in the nose	2000 kg as main bomb load, cannon and machine guns
Number of each type supplied to Spain	161*	276*	477	93	139	95

*Inconsistencies in the Soviet statistics mean that there can be variations in citations of the numbers of aircraft supplied.

Why did the Nationalists make substantial gains during 1937?

→ Madrid and northern Spain 1937

The Nationalists made significant territorial gains in 1937, which would prove a decisive year in the conflict. By the end of the year, Nationalists controlled two-thirds of the country, and the ability of the Republic to win the war was in serious doubt.

The Málaga Campaign, February 1937

Nationalists attempted to extend their control over southern Spain in early 1937 with a campaign focused on gaining the southern coastal city of Málaga, which was surrounded by Nationalist troops. Nationalists were joined by 10,000 Italian troops in a co-ordinated attack on the city. The Italians employed *guerra celere* (rapid war) tactics which relied on speed through the use of armoured vehicles and tanks supported by aircraft. Weakened Republicans, cut off in Málaga with only 12,000 militiamen and 16 artillery units, were defeated by 8 February 1937.

SOURCE E

Excerpt from *I Helped to Build an Army* by José Martin Blázquez, published by Secker & Warburg, London, 1939, page 307.

On February 8 [1937] a rebel army, consisting of motorised Italian units, entered Malaga ... No ammunition was sent [by the Republicans] to Malaga for the simple reason that there was no ammunition to send. Our forces at Malaga were still less organised than those on other fronts, and they asked not for thousands of shells, but simply for rifle ammunition. We had had three weeks warning of the attack at Malaga. We knew the Italian troops had landed at Cadiz for the purpose, and we knew of the concentration of sixty German bombers. But we could do nothing to avoid the disaster. We hoped that a shipload of munitions might arrive to save us at the last moment. Our forces in Malaga were behind schedule in the transformation from a militia into a regular army, and were worse off than other fronts both in the quantity and quality of war material. Nevertheless I am convinced that if they had had ammunition, the 'glory' of taking Malaga of which Italy boasts would have been less glorious. Indeed, it is doubtful if they ever would have taken it at all.



What reasons does Source E give for the defeat of the Republicans at Málaga?

Battle for Madrid, January–March 1937

A new series of Nationalist attempts to encircle and subdue Madrid were launched from January 1937. These included an attack at Guadalajara, north-east of the city in March.

The Guadalajara campaign, March 1937

The Guadalajara campaign aimed to take Madrid from the city's north-east. Like previous attempts to capture Madrid, infantry was supported by limited numbers of tanks, artillery and aircraft. Guadalajara, like previous Nationalist campaigns around Madrid, resulted in a defensive victory for the Republicans. Republicans benefited from greater manpower and superior

quality, although not quantity, of weaponry at this stage of the war, such as Soviet tanks. The Nationalist advance was halted and stalemate once again prevailed around Madrid.

Technology of the war: tanks

The full potential of motorized combat vehicles in military combat was not realized in the Spanish Civil War. At the beginning of the civil war neither the Republicans nor the Nationalists possessed more than a handful of small tanks, although foreign-supplied machines increased these numbers rapidly. The Soviet T-26 tank proved superior to the German Panzer I and Italian CV.33 and CV.35 tanks (see the table below).

A comparison of the main tanks used in the Spanish Civil War

	Republican	Nationalist		
Overall number of tanks and armoured vehicles of <i>all types</i> supplied by the USSR, Italy and Germany to Spain	407	400		
Type of tank	T-26	Panzer I	CV.33	CV.35
Country of origin	USSR	Germany	Italy	Italy
Weight	9.4 tonnes	5.4 tonnes	3.15 tonnes	2.3 tonnes
Gun	45 mm cannon, one machine gun	Two machine guns	One 8 mm machine gun	Two 8 mm machine guns
Armour	7–16 mm	7–13 mm	5–15 mm	5–14 mm
Speed	28 km/h	40 km/h (depending on terrain)	42 km/h	42 km/h
Range	175 km	175 km	110 km	125 km/h
Number of type supplied to Spain	281	122	155	

Tanks were primarily used in the war to support infantry, with tanks spread in small numbers across multiple infantry divisions. This usage certainly helped to bolster an infantry advance, as was evident in the Republican defence around Madrid in the early months of the war. This tactic, however, failed to use tanks to their full potential; tanks were better used in mass formations to quickly overrun enemy infantry. New tank tactics were developed later in the conflict by German officers who used tanks concentrated together and supported their rapid attacks with aircraft.



The Vizcaya Campaign, March–June 1937

The repeated failure of Nationalists to take Madrid precipitated a change in strategic focus. Franco shifted his attention to northern Spain, notably the far northern regions of the Basque country and the Asturias, which remained outside of Nationalist control. Franco calculated that these would be easier to take than Madrid and their valuable resources and industries would add to Nationalist strength.

 **KEY TERM**

Condor Legion Units of Germany’s air force that fought with the Nationalists.

Incendiary bombs Bombs designed to start fires.

Nationalist use of airpower was crucial in this campaign. Nationalists achieved air supremacy through the support of the German **Condor Legion**. From 1937, this included increased numbers of newly developed aircraft which proved superior to those of the Republicans. The Vizcaya campaign began with aerial bombing raids on the cities of Ochandiano and Durango which were devastated in March 1937, with hundreds of civilians killed. Shortly afterwards Nationalist troops occupied the towns, encountering little resistance.

Guernica, April 1937

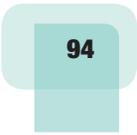
Guernica was a provincial Basque town with a population of 7000. It was of limited military significance, containing an armaments factory and occupying one of the main routes to the north. On 26 April 1937 it was targeted by Italian and German bomber and fighter aircraft. Bombers released 27,000 kg of **incendiary bombs**, while German fighters strafed roads full of fleeing

SOURCE F

The destruction of Guernica, April 1937.



? How much can be learned from Source F about the Nationalist assault on Guernica?



civilians. Guernica was left devastated. Over 1500 people were killed, with many more wounded. The bombing of Guernica was one of the first significant examples of the deliberate targeting of a primarily civilian area and the devastation that could be wrought by aerial bombs. This destruction was widely exploited in Republican propaganda within Spain and abroad (see page 102). Three days after the bombings, Nationalist ground troops, facing very little resistance, captured Guernica.

Nationalist conquest of the north, May–October 1937

Rapid progress made by Nationalists through the Basque region culminated in their assault on the regional capital: highly industrialized Bilbao. Nationalists breached the city's fortress defences following heavy artillery and aerial bombardment, while also blockading by sea, which starved the city of supplies (see page 104). Bilbao surrendered on 19 June 1937. Conquest of the north was completed with the capture of Gijón on 22 October 1937. The success of the Nationalist advance was primarily the result of Nationalist air superiority which enormously aided advancing infantry.

Technology of the war: warships

Naval warfare played a peripheral role in the Spanish Civil War. There were no major sea battles, and most naval engagements were blockade and counter-blockade operations. Nationalist blockades were more successful, but even these were never thorough enough to completely disrupt supplies to the Republic.

Republican divisions: Barcelona, May 1937

The Republican war effort was hampered by internal divisions about the war's conduct. In May 1937, differences in opinion manifested themselves in open conflict in Barcelona as troops from the militias of the extreme left (predominantly the anarchists and left-socialists) fought against militiamen from the more moderate left (socialists and communists). The extreme left believed that far-reaching social reform was being neglected by the moderate left, who dominated the Republican government, and that the war effort was too reliant on conventional tactics. They believed that the Republic should instead use guerrilla tactics and national labour strikes. Divisions culminated in what was effectively a civil war within a civil war in Barcelona in May 1937, resulting in the defeat of far-left extremists. Thereafter, the more moderate left dominated. The prime minister from September 1936, Largo Cabellero, was forced to resign. His successor, from May 1937, Dr Juan Negrín, acted to strengthen ties with the Soviet Union and communist militias in Spain, who became an increasingly influential force in the Republican **Popular Army**, which continued to fight conventional battles. Neither Nationalists nor Republicans used guerrilla tactics to any significant degree.

TOK

Terror bombings such as those at Guernica (see Source F) were to be tragically repeated in many future twentieth-century wars, despite international outcry and their arguable failure to impact on the morale of the targeted side. Such examples have encouraged speculation about what, if anything, can be learned from history.

- 'The only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.' G.W.F. Hegel, 1770–1831.
- 'Those who don't study the past are condemned to repeat it.' G. Santayana, 1863–1952.

In the light of these two quotations, what, if anything, is the value of historical knowledge? Try to use specific historical examples in your discussion. (History, Reason, Emotion, Social Sciences.)

KEY TERM

Popular Army Republican regular army organized in September 1937.



Brunete, July 1937

With Nationalist forces making considerable advances in northern Spain during the summer of 1937, Republicans launched their first major offensive of the war at Brunete, east of Madrid. The objective was to help relieve Madrid's siege.

Initial Republican manoeuvres, in which infantry were supported by artillery, tanks and aircraft, were, in the main, successful; Brunete was captured in two days. Republicans, however, quickly ran into problems. Many of the tanks used to support the infantry were halted by anti-tank weapons. Republicans also lost their dominance of the skies following the arrival of German fighters and bombers from the Condor Legion. Republican troops were subjected to air attack and communications broke down, making it difficult to co-ordinate a renewed offensive. Republicans consequently entrenched themselves but this failed to protect them from air attack. The Nationalists counterattacked and regained Brunete soon afterwards.

Teruel, December 1937 to January 1938

With Nationalist conquest of the north complete by the autumn of 1937, Franco turned his attention again to Madrid. Republicans were determined to divert Nationalist troops away from Madrid by launching another offensive 320 km east near the town of Teruel.

An initially successful Republican offensive captured Teruel and then failed to advance further. A Nationalist counterattack trapped Republican forces inside the town, where they were subjected to heavy artillery and aerial bombardment. After running short of supplies, Republicans abandoned the town to the Nationalists on 22 February 1938.

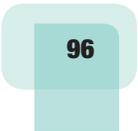
How effective were Republican counter-attacks in 1938?

→ The war in 1938: the Nationalist advance into Catalonia

By the beginning of 1938, the majority of Spain was under Nationalist control, with the exception of Madrid, the south-east and Catalonia. The Nationalist Army now numbered 600,000; a third larger than that of the Republicans. Nationalist troops, supported by tanks and aircraft, launched an offensive into Catalonia, taking only six weeks to cut a swathe through Catalonia to reach the Mediterranean Sea. The Republicans sought to halt this advance with a counterattack at the Ebro River.

The Ebro Offensive, July–November 1938

The strategic aim of the Republicans' Ebro offensive was to force the Nationalists to divert troops north and away from Valencia in Catalonia. It was part of Prime Minister Juan Negrín's strategic objective to prolong the war. He believed that a general European war would soon break out between fascist and democratic states into which the Spanish conflict would be subsumed. In such a war, he hoped that Britain and France, who had not



helped the Republicans, partly for fear of provoking the outbreak of a broader conflict, might be more amenable to lending assistance to the Republic, or at least that Germany and Italy would lessen aid to Franco as this would be needed to defend their own immediate interests. At any rate, the Spanish conflict would become part of the wider conflict between fascism and democracy which Negrín believed the democratic states would win.

The initial Republican advance across the Ebro River into Nationalist territory progressed rapidly and within a week they had gained nearly 40 km. The advance demonstrated improvements in the organization and discipline of the Popular Army, although the tactical use of tanks, in particular, continued to be poor. It soon became apparent that Republicans could not sustain the momentum of the advance as their troops were slowed by strong Nationalist resistance that was aided enormously by aircraft. Republican troops were slowly pushed back over the next three and a half months until by 16 November they had lost all the territory that they had gained. In retreat, the Popular Army maintained its discipline and organization to a greater extent than it had previously, but the loss of 75,000 troops killed, missing or wounded, as well as huge amounts of equipment, meant that Negrín's hopes of prolonging the conflict were unrealistic.

The war in 1939: the fall of Barcelona and Madrid

By the beginning of 1939 the war was effectively won by the Nationalists, despite the key cities of Barcelona and Madrid remaining Republican. These cities soon fell to the Nationalists.

Barcelona, February 1939

Nationalists encountered relatively little resistance in their assault on Barcelona. Two million people in the city were cut off from what remained of Republican Spain and demoralized by food shortages and relentless aerial bombardment. Nationalists occupied the city on 26 January, almost without a fight.

SOURCE G

Vicente Rojo, Chief of the General Staff of the Republican forces, writing in 1939, as quoted in *The Spanish Civil War* by G. Ranzato, published by Interlink Books, New York, 1999, page 114.

On January 26 1939, Barcelona fell to the enemy ... resistance was scarce, not to say null ... one cannot help but note a tremendous contrast [to] the situation of Madrid in November 1936 and Barcelona in 1936 ... what enthusiasm then! What a feverish desire to fight, two years before and what discouragement now! Barcelona was a dead city ... it is no exaggeration to say that Barcelona was lost simply because there was no will to resist.

← Why did Barcelona and Madrid finally fall to the Nationalists in 1939?

According to Source G, why did Barcelona fall in January 1939?





Madrid, February–March 1939

After the fall of Barcelona, Republican resistance rapidly dissipated. The president resigned and went into exile on 6 February. An even more devastating blow came on 27 February when the British and French governments recognized Franco as the legitimate head of the Spanish government. With only 500,000 Republican troops remaining within the Republican zone, Negrín’s strategy of prolonging the war was futile. Politicians and military leaders who opposed Negrín’s strategy, and his communist-dominated government, rebelled in Madrid on 5 March 1939. The rebels established an anti-communist **junta**, called the National Defence Council, which attempted to open negotiations with Franco for a **conditional surrender**. Another internal civil conflict broke out within the Republican zone, leaving nearly 230 dead and almost 600 wounded; Negrín fled to France. Franco was not interested in overtures for conditional surrender and occupied Madrid on 27 March. Spain was finally fully under Nationalist control.

 **KEY TERM**

Junta Military-led government.

Conditional surrender Surrender in which terms have been agreed between the sides beforehand.

To what extent were the Nationalists or the Republicans better able to organize the war?

Managing the war

The management of the war involved maintaining a sufficient supply of manpower, weapons and food. Responsibility for the war’s management within Nationalist zones lay with the military’s Defence Council, which had complete authority over all aspects of life, both civilian and military. In the Republican zones, government remained in the hands of elected politicians whose commitment to democracy sometimes made the organization less effective due to internal divisions and lengthy debate. The failure of the Republicans to be sufficiently supplied with weapons, however, explains their defeat more than their disorganization.

Military personnel

In numerical terms, Nationalist forces were initially at a disadvantage, with forces approximately one-third smaller than those of the Republic, which also controlled most of Spain’s small navy and air force. However, the numerical balance of forces was to change significantly as the war progressed. Nationalist forces expanded as they gained control over more territory, while Republican manpower reserves diminished. By the beginning of 1938, the Nationalist Army was approximately one-third larger than that of the Republicans. In early 1939 the Republican Popular Army was half the size of Nationalist forces, which had over a million troops.

Both sides relied heavily on conscription. Initially, the Republic had greater access to manpower since it controlled larger, more densely populated areas of Spain, although this was soon reversed. Nationalist conscripts received better training, which helped to prevent evasion from service; evasion was a significant problem for the Republic.

International troops contributed significant manpower to both sides in the form of pilots, tank commanders, military advisors and ordinary troops. Foreign forces played a particularly important role on the Republican side, participating in the militias and in the International Brigades. In total, approximately 35,000 men fought in the International Brigades until they disbanded in 1938.

In terms of experience and skill of troops, the Nationalists had a clear advantage from the outset with two-thirds of army officers siding with the rebels. The Republic lacked experienced, professional officers. In Nationalist territory, 28 military academies provided basic training for lower ranking commanders; there was no equivalent level of training in the Republican zones.

Militias

A significant proportion of the manpower of both sides came from the militias. On the Republican side, militia units of **labour unions** and leftist political groups formed in the wake of the July 1936 revolt. They were civilian volunteers and organized according to left-wing ideas of equality and freedom of discussion, often rejecting traditional military hierarchies; this was especially true in the radical anarchist militias. Militias were therefore often difficult to command and manage, although this did not necessarily mean they were ill-disciplined and ineffective. Many militia units preferred to operate independently and did not always co-operate with each other or the regular Republican Popular Army. The Republican government attempted to co-ordinate the militias by announcing on 30 September 1936 the incorporation of the militias into the regular army structure, but in reality assimilation did not occur until much later in the war.

What the militias lacked in experience and discipline they made up for in enthusiasm and bravery. Indeed, the military contribution of the Republican militias was crucial. The very survival of the Republic in the early days in many areas was due to the actions of local militias. This was most strikingly illustrated in Madrid and Barcelona in 1936. However, their lack of experience and training all too often showed, as was evident in their failure to halt the advance of the Army of Africa through Extremadura in the early months of the war.

SOURCE H

Excerpt from *Homage to Catalonia* by George Orwell, published by Penguin, London, 1938, pages 28–9. Orwell was a British journalist and writer who fought in Spain as a volunteer.

The essential point of the [militia] system was social equality between officers and men. Everyone from general to private drew the same pay, ate the same food and wore the same clothes, and mingled on terms of complete equality ... in theory at any rate each militia was a democracy and not a hierarchy ... I admit that at first sight the state of affairs at the front horrified me. How on earth could the war be won by an army of this type, it was what everyone was saying at the

KEY TERM

Labour unions

Organizations for workers that negotiate with business owners to improve working conditions.

According to Source H, how were militias organized?



time, and although it was true, it was also unreasonable ... Later it became the fashion to decry the militias, and therefore to pretend that their faults, which were due to the lack of training and weapons, were the result of the egalitarian system.

The Nationalist militias included monarchists, known as the *requetes*, and the paramilitary forces of the fascist Falange. These militias, like those of the Republic, had a strong sense of their own identities, although their right-wing ideologies made them more accepting of military hierarchy. Franco forced their incorporation into the regular military structure from 20 December 1936. This meant that Nationalist militias were more easily controlled than those in Republican zones.

War supplies

War supplies, specifically munitions and technological equipment, were vital for both sides, in both quantity and quality. The limited ability of Spain to produce armaments meant that access to war supplies ultimately came to depend on access to foreign producers.

Domestic production of armaments

Domestic production constituted only a tiny proportion of the armaments used by each side. Access to the industrial and mining regions of the Basque country and the Asturias was central to domestic production, an advantage held by the Nationalists after 1937. Although the Republic continued to control the industrial centre of Barcelona, the lack of raw materials meant that by the end of the war its industrial output was only one-third of what it had been in 1936.

The Republic's ability to produce armaments was also largely hampered by the establishment of **collectives** in many industries in the early days of the war. Many factory workers established collective control over their factories in 1936, which meant that workers decided as a group what and how much was produced. Not only did such fundamental organizational changes frequently result in a fall in production, but it was more difficult for the government to impose central controls over the economy, which was critical for war production. This was in marked contrast to industrial controls in Nationalist territory, where central control over the supply and distribution of war materials was more efficient.

International supply of armaments

Both sides depended overwhelmingly on foreign supplies, access to which was determined by the attitude of foreign powers.

Non-Intervention Agreement

The Republican government looked naturally to the left-wing Popular Front government in France for assistance, and initially it seemed the French Prime Minister, the socialist Léon Blum, was favourable, agreeing on 20 July 1936 to

KEY TERM

Collectives Factories, businesses or farms that are run collectively by workers for their own interests.

send a shipment of armaments. However, on 9 August 1936 the French government prohibited the export of all war supplies to Spain, prompted by French anxieties that assisting Spain would imperil co-operation between France and Britain, which France regarded as vital to its security interests. This was because by the mid-1930s, the French had become increasingly concerned by German foreign policy and wanted British support against German hostility. Britain disapproved of intervention in Spain largely due to fears that assistance would prolong a war in Spain that might develop into a more general European war. In addition, anti-Republican sentiment was strong in the British government, who believed the Republic was too closely connected to communism, which they vehemently opposed.

The French government, anxious to assist the Spanish Republic but unwilling to intervene directly, proposed an agreement of non-intervention to be signed by all the major European powers. The French hoped that right-wing dictatorships in Europe, such as Germany and Italy, would commit to non-intervention and not supply the Nationalists. This would make the Spanish Civil War a purely Spanish affair and, with the early advantages held by the Republicans, hopefully lead to a Republican victory. The efforts of France and Britain to gain widespread agreement for non-intervention were realized in the Non-Intervention Agreement, which by the end of August 1936 had been signed by 27 European countries, including the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy.

Non-intervention, however, was far from helpful for the Republic. Indeed, it was a great hindrance to their military effectiveness. This was because not all the signatories adhered to the Non-Intervention Agreement. While Britain and France, who might have helped the Republic, remained committed to the principles of non-intervention, Italy and Germany violated the agreement by providing enormous amounts of aid to the Nationalists. Non-intervention therefore left the Republic unable to gain official international assistance, except from the Soviet Union, which also violated its promise not to assist any warring faction in Spain.

International assistance

The Republic relied predominantly on the Soviet Union for munitions and military equipment and the Nationalists on Italy and Germany. In total, the Nationalists received a far greater volume of aid than the Republicans (see Source I, page 102). The quantities of Nationalist aid increased during the course of the war, while Soviet supplies to the Republic diminished (see Source J, page 102). German aircraft were particularly helpful for the Nationalists in allowing them to gain and maintain control of the air after 1937. The quality of the Soviet equipment has been much debated. Soviet-supplied small firearms, such as rifles and machine guns, were of poor quality, with nearly 25 per cent of rifles dating from the 1880s. Many of the Soviet tank and aircraft models, in contrast, were of excellent quality, helping the Republic to achieve air supremacy in the first year of the war.



What can be learned from Source I about international involvement in the Spanish Civil War?

SOURCE I

Military equipment supplied to Spain by the USSR, Germany and Italy during the civil war.

Equipment type	Republicans	Nationalists	
	USSR	Germany	Italy
Aircraft of all types	648	621	632
Tanks and armoured vehicles	407	250	150
Artillery units	1,186	700	1,930
Machine guns	20,486	31,000	3,436
Rifles	497,813	157,309	240,747
Ammunition (rounds)	862,000,000	250,000,000	324,900,000
Submarines	0	0	4



What can be learned from Source J about how much Soviet assistance was of help to the Republic in the Spanish Civil War?

SOURCE J

Military supplies delivered by the USSR to the Spanish Republican government, October 1936 to January 1974, according to official 1974 Soviet figures.

Equipment type	Period			Total
	1936–7	1937–8	1938–9	
Aircraft of all types	496	152	0	648
Tanks	322	25	0	347
Artillery guns	714	469	3	1,186
Machine guns	12,804	4,910	2,772	20,486
Rifles	337,793	125,020	35,000	497,813

Morale

The maintenance of morale among troops and civilians was particularly crucial during the civil war.

Propaganda and censorship

Propaganda was a weapon used by both sides, and frequently the intended audience was as much international as Spanish. The Republic was keen to exploit the atrocities perpetrated by Nationalist troops in the hopes of gaining international sympathy and consequently assistance. As such, after the bombing of Guernica, eyewitness accounts and images of the horrors of the attack were widely disseminated by the Republic in the international press (see Source K). Sympathy and horror were forthcoming, but material assistance less so.

Nationalist propaganda focused on detailing the chaos, anarchy and terror in Republican zones and described assaults on property and the Catholic Church in order to legitimize the military's revolt (see Source L). Numerous pamphlets were produced purportedly compiled by 'fact-finding' committees detailing atrocities committed by Republican troops.

SOURCE K

A Republican poster appealing to international opinion after the bombing of civilians in Madrid 1937.



According to Source K, why should the international community become involved in the Spanish Civil War?

**SOURCE L**

Excerpt from 'A Preliminary Official Report on the Atrocities Committed in Southern Spain in July and August, 1936, by the Communist Forces of the Madrid Government', 1936 as quoted in *The Spanish Civil War: A Modern Tragedy* by George R. Esenwein, published by Routledge, London, 2005.

Puente Genil (Province of Cordova)

One hundred and fifty-four citizens were murdered here between July 24 and August 18 by the Communists, who also burnt seven churches, twenty-eight private houses, an almshouse for old men, and the barracks of the Civil Guard. Seventeen of the murdered men were forced to remain with their arms raised above their heads for several hours – a boy of sixteen among them fainted from the pain – and they were then shot dead on the railway line near the station.

According to Source L, what actions were communists accused of by Nationalists?





Both sides vehemently denied allegations of terror. The Nationalists denied, for example, the bombing of Guernica. The head of Franco's foreign press bureau spread the explanation that Guernica had been destroyed by Basque saboteurs and retreating communist troops.

Rationing and food supplies

The ability of each side to access and ensure the fair distribution of food supplies proved more crucial than propaganda in sustaining morale. Nationalists had the advantage from the outset by controlling the major agricultural regions of Spain. The rapid expansion of Nationalist territory added to the volume of food available. The military Defence Council (see page 98), with control of all civilian and military life, strictly controlled food distribution and gave the military priority.

The Republic faced increasing difficulties in accessing sufficient food supplies from its diminishing territories. The Republic's problems of production and distribution were made more difficult by the establishment of agricultural collectives in the early months of the war, largely by anarchist groups keen to achieve profound social reform. By the autumn of 1936, 2500 agricultural collectives had been established, run on the principles of collective ownership by the peasantry. Although agricultural production levels were largely maintained, the existence of these often fiercely independent self-governing communities made the co-ordination of food production more difficult for the Republican government. Some collectives, for example, were prepared to distribute food to their particular militia companies, but not to the regular army. The abolition of money in many of the collectives, where a **barter economy** prevailed, also caused problems in negotiations with the government. The result of this was severely rationed food in Republican-held cities, and soldiers who were often hungry.

The Republic also faced difficulties in transporting essential food supplies to key cities, frequently held under siege by the Nationalists, as was the case with Madrid, Barcelona and Bilbao. In consequence, food shortages and prices became highly inflated. In Barcelona food prices rose 200 per cent during the war.

 **KEY TERM**

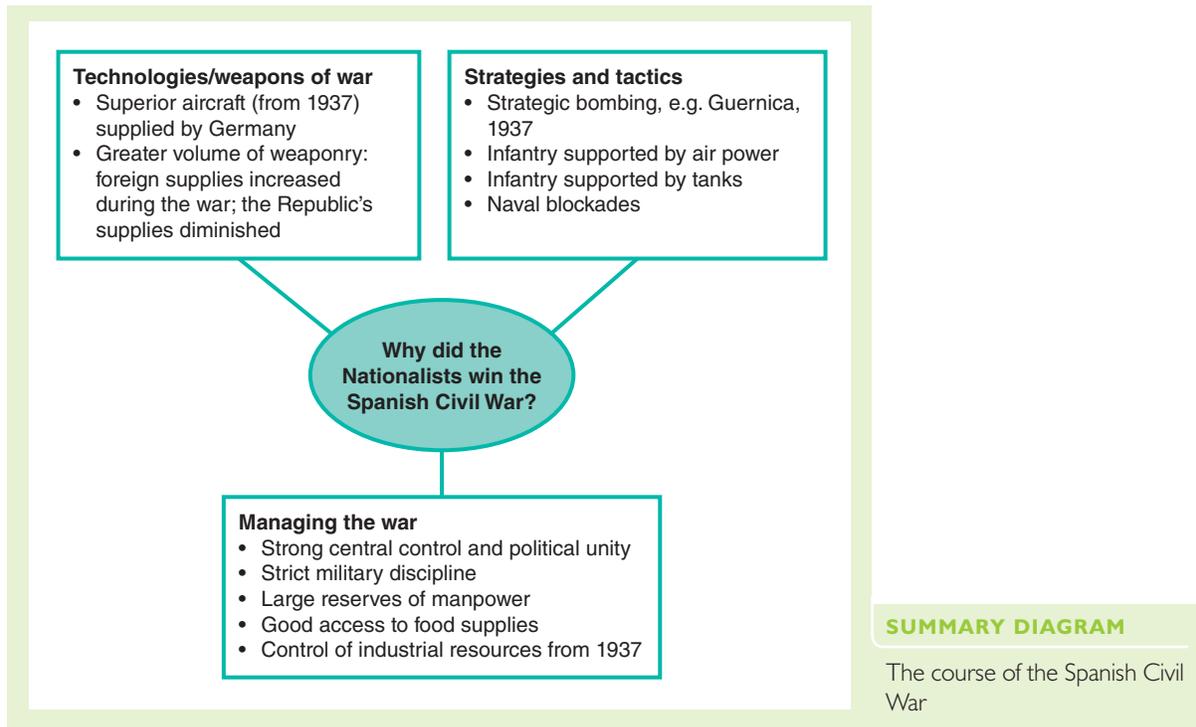
Barter economy The exchange of goods or services without the use of money.

Why did the Nationalists win the Spanish Civil War?

Reasons for defeat and victory

The Nationalists won the war primarily because they benefited from access to superior modern military technology than the Republicans, and in greater quantities. Modern weaponry played a crucial role and in the conflict as the importance of air power demonstrated; it was a key component in all the successful Nationalist campaigns after 1937. It was no coincidence that Nationalist supplies of modern equipment and military successes both increased as the war progressed, while Republican supplies and military performance both diminished. Nationalists were also better able to manage the manpower and supplies demanded during a long civil war through strict central control, while the Republic was more divided. Tactics were less

significant in determining the outcome of the war. The tactics of both sides were for the most part conventional, using sieges, stalemate and limited trench warfare. There were few examples of stunning and skilful breakthroughs achieved by superb tactical planning.



5 The effects of the Spanish Civil War

► **Key question:** *To what extent was Spain fundamentally changed by the civil war?*

On the eve of the war, Spain had been in the process of creating a state in accordance with left-wing ideals. Greater political freedom had been allowed for ordinary Spaniards, including women, the social role of the Catholic Church had been minimized in favour of the promotion of a more progressive, secular state, and there were attempts to dismantle the power of the traditional rural landowning class. The experience of civil war disrupted this process, but its impact is hard to generalize, not least because of the very different experiences in the Nationalist and Republican zones.

How significant was the social and economic impact of the civil war?

The social impact of the war

The social and economic impact of the war was substantial. Casualties were high, the economy was devastated, and the legacy of bitterness and mistrust between the sides was long lasting.

Casualties and social divisions

The estimates for those killed during the civil war, including battle casualties, those murdered behind the lines and those killed in the immediate post-war repression, vary between 350,000 and 500,000, about two per cent of Spain's 24 million people. Several hundred thousand were permanently wounded.

In the aftermath of the war, the Nationalist wounded were given preferential access to jobs; there was no such special provision or pensions for those who had been injured fighting for the Republic, perpetuating divisions within Spain. Around 400,000 people initially fled Spain out of fear of the Nationalist government; 250,000 permanently remained outside the country.

Impact of the civil war on women

The experience of women during the civil war varied greatly.

Women in Nationalist Spain

In Nationalist-held areas of Spain women were expected to conform to traditional roles as housewives and mothers. The prominent position given to the Catholic Church in Nationalist zones during the war also served to reinforce this model. There were strict expectations about women's dress and appearance. This conservative view of women was enshrined in decrees passed by the ruling Defence Council. These included:

- the prohibition of divorce and **civil marriage**
- prohibition on mixed-gender classrooms
- education for girls focused on domestic work and motherhood.

KEY TERM

Civil marriage Marriage in which the ceremony is not performed by a religious official.



According to Source M, what actions caused women to be traitors?

SOURCE M

Excerpt from the pamphlet 'Spanish Woman' issued by the Catholic Union of Women of Seville in Abella, quoted in *Spanish Civil War: A Modern Tragedy* by George R. Esenwein, published by Routledge, London, 2005.

While our soldiers and volunteers working for God and our country are sacrificing their lives in the fields of battle, you, the woman of Spain who is dedicating yourself to personal pleasures, to flirting and falling into bad habits, you are: a traitor to your country, a traitor to your faith, contemptible to all and deserving of our repulsion. Spanish woman ... your place ... is in the church and at home ... your dresses should be ... in the modest and retiring style of the moral Christian ... you should devote yourself to assuaging those suffering in the hospitals and homes. Your duty now is not to procure for yourself an easy life, but to educate your children, to sacrifice your pleasures in order to help Spain.

Even with the increased needs of the war economy, women's participation in the war effort in Nationalist zones remained largely confined to traditionally acceptable female spheres such health services and food preparation for public distribution. Paid work, especially for married women, was discouraged, indeed the Labour Charter passed in March 1938 promised to 'liberate' married women from work in workshops and factories.

Women in Republican Spain

Women living within the Republican zones had more freedom. Politically, there was greater theoretical equality with men. In Catalonia, a marriage code was passed which gave women equal rights with men in issues of marriage and divorce. Republican Spain became the first country in Europe where a woman occupied a cabinet position in the national government when Federica Montseny became Minister for Public Health and Assistance in 1936. Other women exercised significant political influence, such as the high-ranking Communist Party member Dolores Ibárruri, who became famed for her speeches and leadership of organizations promoting welfare provision for victims of the war. However, even these women, although occupying a world of politics which was usually the preserve of men, operated within the spheres usually primarily associated with traditional female issues such as welfare provision and public health.

Some women in Republican Spain participated in militias and were referred to as *milicianas*. Republican propaganda posters from early in the war showed male and female volunteers fighting alongside each other. A handful of these women fighters became famous, such as Lina Odena, leader of the communist youth movement, who was killed near Granada. Women's participation in combat was not the norm and in September 1936 the Republican government passed a decree call for women to be withdrawn from combat and banning their admission into the Popular Army.

Women in Republican areas began working in factories and war-related industries, filling the positions of men who were absent fighting. Working women were frequently confronted by hostility from male employees who continued to believe women should remain at home. Most women did remain in the home, struggling to find food for their families.

Economic impact of the war

The Spanish Civil War was hugely destructive, with homes, businesses, agricultural land and industry severely damaged in war zones. Spain also emerged from the war less financially capable of paying for rebuilding.

Destruction

The scale of destruction was immense. Aerial bombardments reduced many towns to rubble and Spain's industrial infrastructure was severely damaged. Industrial production by 1939 was only 25 per cent of 1929 levels. Only half

← **What was the economic impact of the war?**



of the Spanish railway stock remained operational and livestock numbers were 33 per cent less than pre-war figures.

Financial difficulties

Spain's financial position was significantly undermined. Spanish gold reserves were spent by the Republican government in their desperation to procure armaments from the Soviet Union. Nationalists amassed huge debts abroad, ending the war owing \$700 million for war goods. Most post-war repayments were made in food shipments and industrial raw materials, which represented a considerable drain on the Spanish economy for decades, repayments to Italy continued into the 1960s. In addition, with industrial and agricultural production reduced from pre-war levels and with the labour force losing over half a million men and women, the regeneration of Spanish industry and agriculture was slow.

Was Spain fundamentally changed by civil war?

→ Political impact of the war

As a result of the Nationalist victory, Franco established a right-wing, conservative dictatorship in Spain which lasted until his death in 1975. Franco's government:

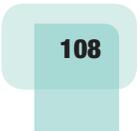
- promoted him as saviour of the nation, creating a cult of personality
- emphasized nationalism and ended regional autonomy
- encouraged economic self-sufficiency
- promoted conservative attitudes and policies towards women and family structures
- re-established the Catholic Church to power and influence.

Franco's power rested on the power of the army, not on his leadership of a political party. Republicans were persecuted and many executed in a terror campaign unleashed immediately after the Nationalist victory. Hundreds of thousands were imprisoned and society was further divided as a result of persecution.

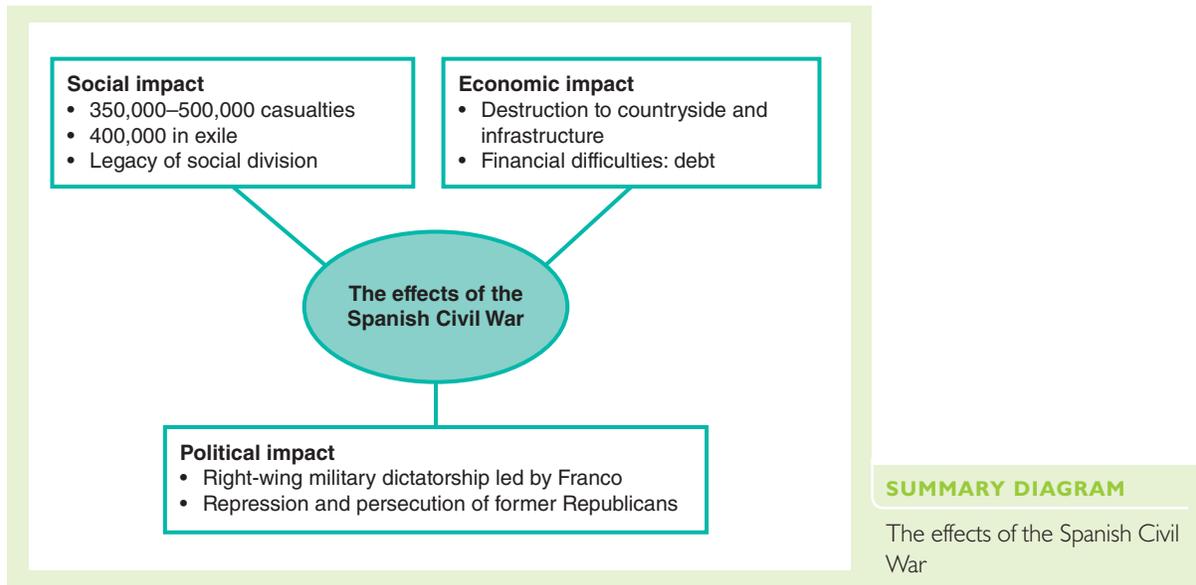
The impact of the civil war on international politics was more limited. Even during the Spanish Civil War, many of the major powers of Europe limited their involvement in the conflict. Spain, for them, remained on the periphery of Europe. They were more concerned with events surrounding an increasingly assertive Germany, which challenged the democratic European powers.

Conclusions

Spain emerged from the civil war a very different nation from that promised by the Republican experiment of the early 1930s. Exhausted, divided and destroyed by years of civil conflict, the scars of the Spanish Civil War were long lasting. Its people were among the first to experience the horrors of modern terror bombing in Europe and the privations of civil war were lengthy. In some ways, however, it was Republican Spain that was the



aberration, with Franco's Spain displaying continuity with a more traditional Spain in which the Catholic Church was accorded a prominent place and in which social hierarchy and authoritarian rule were emphasized.



Chapter summary

Spanish Civil War 1936–9

The Spanish Civil War began when forces of the conservative right launched a military uprising against the left-wing Republican government in July 1936. The rebels succeeded in establishing substantial, but not total, control over Spain. This meant control of Spain was divided between the rebels, known as the Nationalists, and government forces, known as the Republicans, who then fought for control of the country.

Republican rule in Spain in the early 1930s proved unstable, with the left-wing political parties alternating in power with right-wing groups, each attempting to reform the nation or undo those reforms. Leftists attempted to reduce the power of conservative landowners and the Catholic Church, while rightists

undermined these efforts when in power. Agricultural reform has been blamed by many historians as the most important factor leading to a military-led revolt against the Republicans which occurred in 1936.

The victory of the Nationalists in the civil war was not a foregone conclusion. Indeed, in the early months of the war many of the advantages lay with the Republicans. The decisive factor in determining victory was access to supplies of modern weaponry from abroad. In this, the Nationalists held a considerable advantage, which grew as the war progressed. They benefited from consignments of weapons from Italy and Germany, which were not only overall more numerous, but also technically superior to the weapons at the Republic's disposal. The importance of this modern weaponry, especially aircraft, was evident in nearly all campaigns after 1937.

The Spanish Civil War left a legacy of devastation and bitterness in Spain. Republicans were persecuted during Franco's rule, which continued until 1975.