

# The Spanish Civil War

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**SOURCE A**

A Republican poster criticising the Nationalists during the Civil War.



**SOURCE B**

The front page of the New York Times (16 April 1931) announces the end of the Spanish monarchy with the resignation of King Alfonso and the establishment of a temporary national government.

Although the events of 1936–39 in Spain are known as the Spanish Civil War, there are many people who believe this name is not correct. Some argue that as Spain's political history had always been turbulent, this was only one of several civil wars. Others have pointed out that, as so many different countries became involved in the war, it was a European rather than a Spanish war. Who were the different factions and what were their aims? Which nations participated and which abstained from involvement in the Spanish Civil War, and what was the motivation for their stances?

### Causes of conflict

In April 1931 the Second Spanish Republic was established. King Alfonso XIII abdicated following the election of 12 April 1931 (see Source B). The government that was established aimed to bring about social reform, political devolution (a move away from centralised government) and secularisation (a reduction in the role of the Church). Despite its democratic foundations, the Republican government faced much opposition, in particular from the conservative elements of society who wished to preserve the rights of the Church, the army and the property owners. Within days of the declaration of the Republic the Catholic newspaper *El Debate* was declaring 'Religion, Fatherland, Order, Family and Property'.

Not only did the Republic face opposition from the 'old order', but even within the Republican camp there was a range of opinions regarding the extent of change that

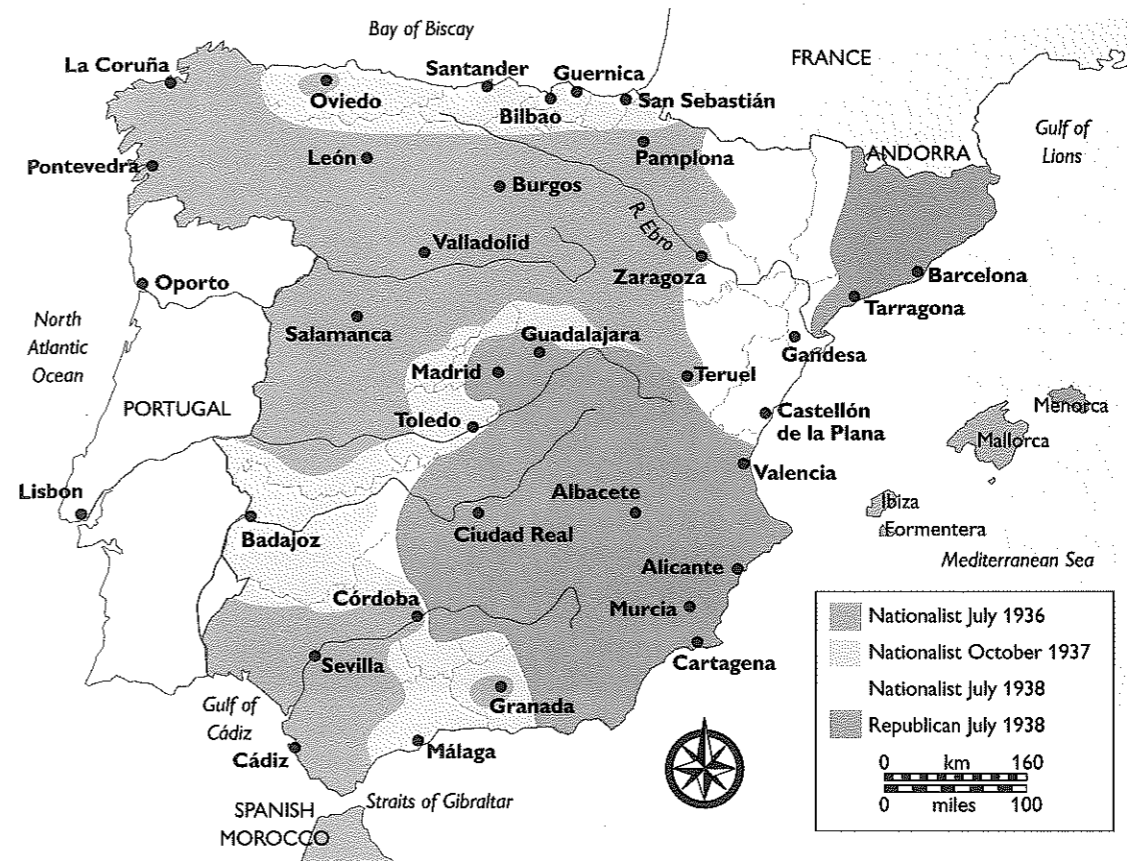
should take place. The prime minister was a Catholic who believed that the creation of the Republic was sufficient change in itself. Conversely, the minister of war, Manuel Azaña, wanted to remove the role of the Church in education and temporal (non-religious and governmental) matters. So, when a draft for a moderate constitution was proposed on 14 July 1931 it was rejected by the new parliament and a more radical constitution was approved in December of that year. The key points of the constitution were:

- a secular, democratic system
- equal rights for all citizens, including female suffrage
- regional autonomy (self-government)
- civil marriages and divorces
- free, obligatory secular education
- the banning of religious orders from teaching, even in private schools

**SOURCE D**

*Left against right; poor against rich; workers against troops; the laity against the church; republicans against monarchists; the landless against the aristocrats; democracy against fascism; all these confrontations played their part in the Spanish Civil War. And these confrontations are not peculiar to Spain. Thus before the war had gone on a fortnight, it had become a burning European question. The struggle between left and right in Spain seemed suggestive of a struggle between left and right throughout all Europe. And, facing the problem of intervention, Europe trembled.*

John Gunther, *Inside Europe*, 1937.



state expropriation (seizure) of private properties, supposedly for the benefit of the landless population

Discontent with this constitution manifested itself in an attempted military coup in August 1932. The formation in February 1933 of CEDA (Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas), a Fascist coalition, confirmed the unpopularity of the constitution among certain groups of Spanish society. In addition, the rural workers demanded that the Republic bring about the improvements in living and working conditions that they had been promised. Though their strikes were suppressed by the government, the right-wing parties saw the strikes as evidence of Republican incompetence. Thus, in the 1933 election CEDA, in coalition with the monarchists, won 11 seats while the socialists won only 58.

By October 1934 CEDA had three of its candidates as ministers for labour, agriculture and justice. The socialists believed that the Republic had failed to retain its desired identity. In Barcelona, Catalan Republicans declared independence. In Madrid, socialists revolted against the Republic. All these uprisings were easily quashed. Only in Asturias, in northern Spain, was the government obliged to involve the army under General Francisco Franco to quell the rebels.

### The battle lines are set

In February 1936, elections displayed a polarisation of opinion into two key groupings. On the left was the Popular Front, an amalgamation of Communists, socialists, anarchists and Republicans.

**SOURCE C**

Map to show the division of Spain between the Nationalists and Republicans in July 1936, October 1937 and July 1938.

1 Why do some people argue that the Spanish Civil War actually began in 1934?

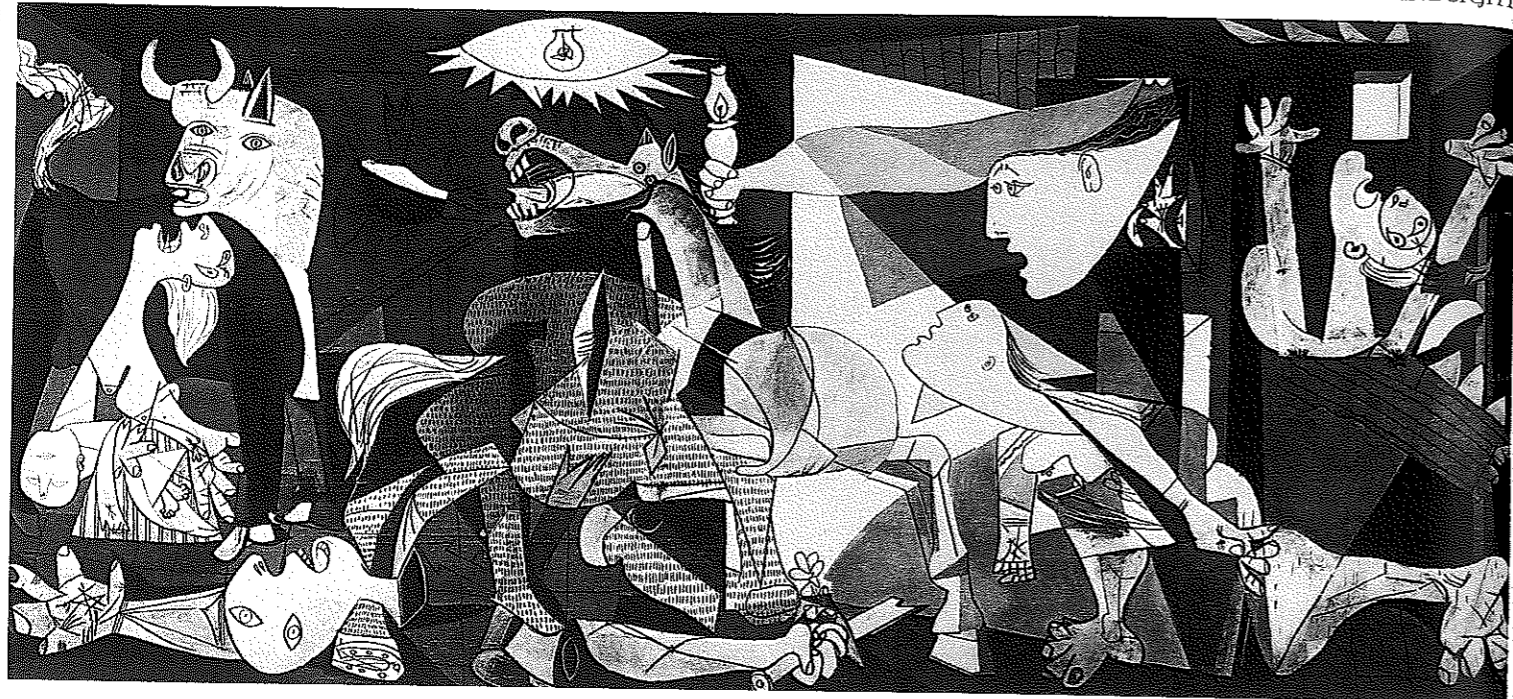
2 Look at Source A. On what grounds were the Republicans criticising the National Front?

3 Look at the newspaper front page (Source B). What clues in the headlines suggest that the transition from monarchy to republic was not smooth?

4 Look at the map (Source C). What can we learn about Nationalist tactics in gaining control of Spain? What other information would be useful to a historian wanting to know about the methods of the Nationalist Party?

5 In Source D John Gunther suggests that other nations became involved in the Spanish Civil War as a result of ideological conflict. Do you think that his view is correct? What does he mean when he writes that 'Europe trembled' at the problem of intervention?





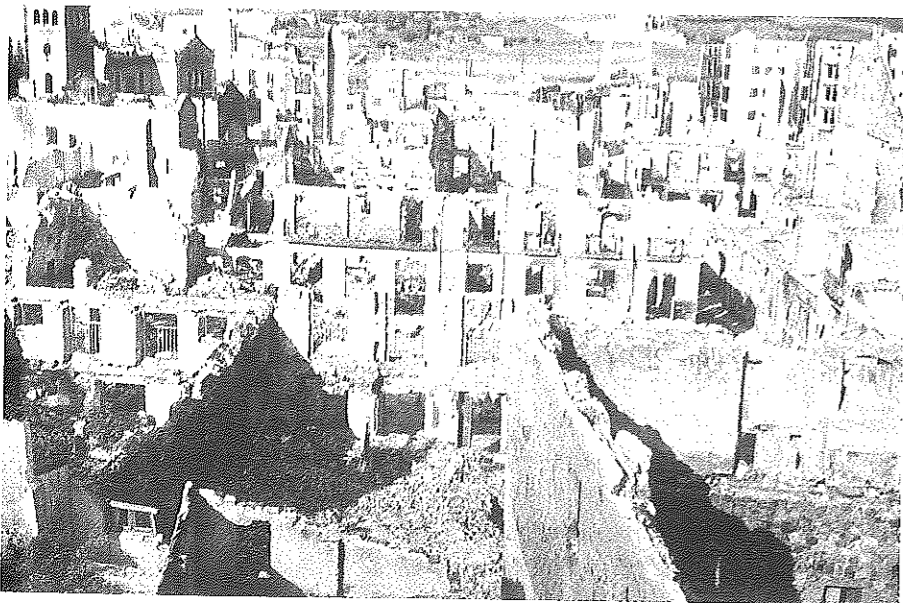
## SOURCE E

Picasso's painting Guernica, 1937.

- 6 Look at Source E. What was Picasso's intended message in painting Guernica for the Spanish Pavilion at the International Exhibition in Paris?

## SOURCE F

Guernica after the bombing, April 1937.



On the right was the National Front (or Nationalists), comprising the Fascist Party (Falange), monarchists and Landowners' Party. The Popular Front won the election with 256 seats on the promise of adopting the 1931 manifesto for reform. The National Front won only 143 seats. In July 1936, however, army rebels and local Fascists amalgamated under General Franco in a rebellion that was designed to overthrow the government. The government responded by arming the liberal and labouring classes. In August 1936 Franco made an appeal to Mussolini and Hitler, the leaders of other European Fascist states, for assistance. Hitler provided 16,000 soldiers, and men and planes from the German Air Force. Mussolini sent 50,000 troops, together with tanks and aircraft.

When the Republicans appealed for assistance from the League of Nations the League was too weak to help. Instead, the Republicans began to receive weapons from the Soviet Union. Furthermore, volunteers from those countries that remained neutral, such as Britain and France,

flocked to support the Republican cause and formed the International Brigades.

## The course of the war

1936

July

The army and the Nationalists rebelled against the Republican government. Wherever the rebellions succeeded, martial law was proclaimed.

Foreign equipment arrived to support the Fascists.

September

The National Front captured Toledo and on 29 September Franco was named both commander-in-chief of all Nationalist forces and head of government, so uniting military and civil authority.

October

Soviet equipment arrived to support the Popular Front.

Franco set up his headquarters in Burgos.

November Nationalist forces advanced on Madrid.

December The National Front controlled half of Spain.

1937

February

Italian troops attacked and defeated the Republicans in Málaga.

March

The Nationalists used blitzkrieg tactics in an attempt to gain Guadalajara but failed. Madrid remained in Republican hands.

April

Franco forced the different right-wing groups to submit to his leadership and he commanded the red beret of the Carlists, the Fascist salute, the blue shirts of the Falange and religious icons of the Catholic Church.

Guernica was destroyed by the German Air Force and troops (see Sources E and F).

May

The left-wing groups divided and fought among themselves in Barcelona until the

## SOURCE G

Spaniards! To whomsoever feels a sacred love for Spain; to those of you, who in the ranks of the Army and Navy have made a profession of your faith in the service of the Mother Country; to those of you who swore to resist your enemies even unto death; the nation calls to her defence.

The situation in Spain is becoming more critical with every day that passes; anarchy reigns in most of her villages and fields; government-appointed authorities preside over the revolts, when they are not actually fomenting them. Differences are settled by pistol-shots and with machine-guns among the mobs of towns-people, who traitorously and treacherously kill each other, without the public authorities imposing peace and justice... To the revolutionary and unheeding spirit of the masses hoaxed and exploited by the soviet agents who veil the bloody reality of that regime... are joined the maliciousness and negligence of authorities of all kinds...

Can we abandon Spain to the enemies of the Mother Country, handing her over without a struggle and without resistance, by our cowardly and traitorous behaviour? Justice and Equality before the law we offer you; peace and love between Spaniards... work for all. Social justice, accomplished without rancour or violence, and all equitable and progressive distribution of wealth without destroying or jeopardizing the Spanish economy.

Spaniards: Long live Spain!!!

Long live the honourable Spanish people!!!

The Manifesto of Las Palmas, delivered by Franco on 18 July 1936. Quoted in B. Crozier, Franco, 1967.

anarchists were defeated and the prime minister, Largo Caballero, was forced to resign.

September Franco controlled approximately two-thirds of the country.

1938

The Nationalists continued to take land, gaining control of Aragon and moving towards the Mediterranean coast.

July-

November

Republican troops made a surprise crossing of the River Ebro but failed to capture the town of Gandesa as the Nationalist air force bombarded them. After 3 months they were forced back across the Ebro.

November

The International Brigades were disbanded.

December

The Nationalists began a campaign to gain Catalonia.

1939

January

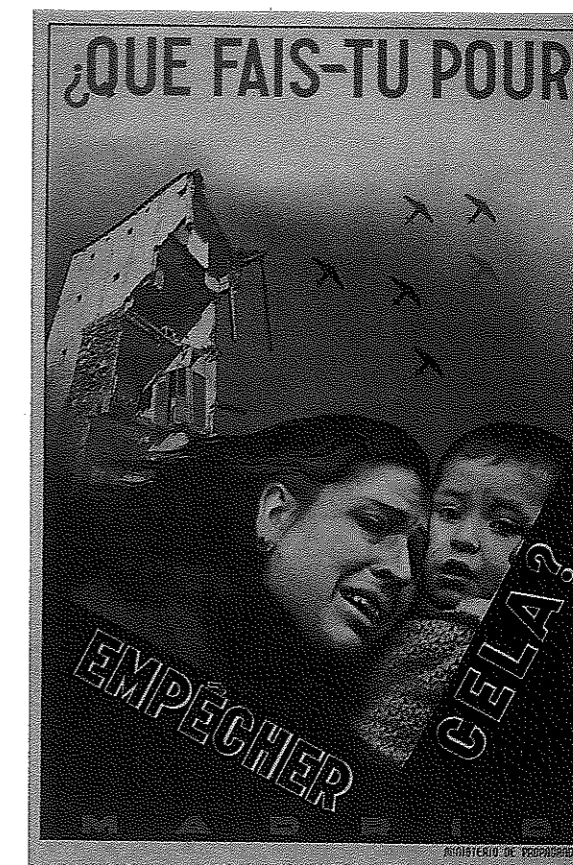
The Nationalists captured Barcelona. Over 2 weeks, more than 400,000 refugees from northern Spain, including President Manuel Azaña, sought help in France.

February

Britain and France recognised Franco's government on 27 February. The follow-

## SOURCE H

'What are you doing to prevent this?': a Republican poster produced after the bombing raids on cities.



- 7 In Source G, what are Franco's criticisms of the Republican government and what does he offer as an alternative?

- 8 Why are the words in Source H not written in Spanish?

ing day Azaña resigned. The Republicans still controlled Madrid.

March

The battles were concluded at the end of the month when Nationalists entered Madrid.

April

Franco announced the end of the war.

## The consequences of civil war

Out of a population of 24 million, about half a million people had been killed and a further quarter of a million were in exile. Thousands were wounded but only those who had expressed nationalist sentiments were given state aid and preferential treatment in finding employment. Republican families with members who had died were treated as outcasts, unlike the Nationalists, who were given accolades and treated as heroes.

The Spanish economy was hit by the costs of arms procurements on both sides and by the need to repair the physical damage caused by the fighting. Houses and industry and urban structures had all been bombarded and required rebuilding. Furthermore, Franco believed it was necessary to build up an image of a heroic Nationalist Party that had saved Spain from the chaos of a Republican leadership.

Arguably, the most significant ramification of the Spanish Civil War did not occur in Spain but across the rest of Europe as Hitler, having gained his experience in Spain, attacked the countries that he hoped to control. While it is true that the Spanish Civil War served as an arena for international squabbles, it was primarily a battle between the two opposing ideological and class-based groups within Spain. HS