The Odyssey of the Democratic Right in Post-Franco Spain

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Unlike their counterparts in most other Western countries, Spanish conservatives have found little success in recent years. Since Spain returned to democracy in 1977, rightist political parties have not won a majority in the Cortes in any election. Instead, the reins of power have been held by, first, the moderate Union de Centro Democratico (UCD), and later by the left-of-center Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol (PSOE). The Right has been hurt by its perceived links to the Franco regime, by its controversial longtime leader, Manuel Fraga Iribarne, and by the PSOE's increasing centrism. The difficulty that conservatives have had in Spain can be symbolized by the multiplicity of names given to the political groupings supported by Fraga and his heirs: Reforma Democratica (RD), Alianza Popular (AP), Coalicion Democratica (CD), Coalicion Popular (CP) and finally, Partido Popular (PP). Coalitions were formed with other parties, and then fell apart. Conservative leaders tried numerous campaign strategies without success throughout the late 1970s and 1980s.

But in the 1990s, the conservatives have at last become serious contenders for power. A new leader, Jose Maria Aznar, has helped the PP shed its old authoritarian image. A new generation without memories of Franco is more interested in ethics and governmental performance than in ideological pedigrees. Scandals and recession have destroyed the PSOE's credibility. And voters may be simply have grown tired of Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez after nearly thirteen years in power.

Whatever the reason, the PP has fared well in recent elections. In 1991, the PP ran well in local and regional elections, winning control of several major cities. Two years later, the PP nearly defeated the PSOE in the national elections, forcing the Socialists
into coalition with the Catalan nationalist (and rather conservative) Convergencia i Unio (CiU). The 1994 European elections and 1995 local and regional contests produced thumping victories for the PP. The virtual collapse of the Centro Democratico y Social (CDS) has left the PP without a significant national competitor for anti-Marxist voters. With the current government damaged by scandal and weakened by the CiU's withdrawal, the PP seems likely to come to power in the near future.

The Nature of the Problem

Spanish conservatives have faced several difficulties in trying to build a political party capable of governing. One of the most serious has been the perception that the parties of the right are out of the political perception. Alianza Popular was long handicapped by its founders' backgrounds as officials in the Franco regime. It did not help that Fraga and other AP leaders often used authoritarian-sounding rhetoric and that AP Senate candidate (and Franquist prime minister) Carlos Arias Navarro repeatedly invoked the Caudillo's name during the 1977 election. The militant tone of many AP rallies added to Spaniards' perception that conservatives were hostile to democracy and nostalgic for the old dictatorship (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 91). Coalicion Democratica's slogan for the 1979 elections -- "Para Ordenar bien las Cosas" ("To Arrange Things Well") -- "provoked fits of sniggering throughout the country, because ... it had a distinctly authoritarian air about it that was precisely what the new coalition was trying to avoid" (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 291). Even in the 1990s, Gonzalez and other PSOE politicians such as Alfonso Guerra have invoked Franco's name in order to discredit the PP -- a tactic which has produced diminishing returns, especially
among younger voters without memories of the dictatorship. It may be that Spanish conservatives could not hope to gain power until the passage of time had dulled recollections of the old regime and an new generation had matured under democracy.

Spanish conservatives were not the first of their ilk to suffer this predicament. Their West German and Italian counterparts faced a similar problem after World War II. Mintzel (1982) notes: Conservatism in Germany emerged from the Second World War as a totally discredited force. The Conservative parties in the Weimar Republic had either acquiesced in or positively contributed to the success of the Nazis and those who collaborated with Hitler discredited the rest. There was some Conservative opposition to Hitler, especially towards the end of the war when the disastrous consequences of his policies were becoming clear, but the failure of the conservative opposition led to the situation where, although particular conservatives might be highly respected as individuals in the resistance, on the whole to be conservative was to be regarded as reactionary, fascist and anti-democratic (p. 131).

Similarly in Italy, the collapse of Fascism left the Right with a less-than-respectable status. Christian Democratic leader Alcide De Gasperi once defined his party as a "party of the center moving towards the left," despite its generally accepted identification with the center-right (Caciagli 1982, p. 264). Nevertheless, the collapse of the traditional Right left an opening for a party that defended capitalism, that was pro-American, and that appealed to religious believers. In both countries, Christian Democrats filled that role. In West Germany, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) was able to expand beyond the Catholic base of the defunct Zentrum by appealing to politically homeless conservative Protestants. The loss of the heavily Protestant East to the Communists eased the CDU's task.
While the CDU was clearly the more conservative of the two parties, it refused to narrowly define its political identity (Mintzel 1988, p. 131-134). In Italy, even more so than in Germany, Christian Democracy was defined as a socially progressive movement and one with an "inter-class appeal." While the DC was militantly anti-Communist, its leaders took care not to define it as a conservative party (Caciagli 1988, p. 264-268).

Conservatives in France and the Low Countries had similar problems establishing their position in the postwar mainstream. The British Conservative party had no such problems, but then Great Britain was never occupied, and the leader of its battle against Hitler was, of course, an upper-class Tory.

Much like Spain, Portugal emerged from decades of right-wing dictatorship in the 1970s. But unlike the case in Spain, the Portuguese Right was utterly destroyed, not merely tainted by association. Most of the officials of the old regime were driven into exile during the revolution of 1975, and the left-wing government that briefly succeeded it sought to crush all conservative opinion. As in West Germany and Italy, a powerful Christian Democratic party (the Social Democratic Center, or CDS) has emerged to fill this gap. In all three countries, the Catholic church played a significant role in the creation of a party sympathetic to its views. In Spain, the Church refused to give aid either to the AP or an abortive Christian Democratic party. Both Italy and Portugal had Communist parties significantly stronger than Spain's. While Communists were never a significant factor in West Germany, the Federal Republic's front-line position during the Cold War gave the CDU a potent issue to woo center-right voters.

In Spain, conservatives survived the transition but suffered
similar difficulty in establishing respectability. Garcia Cotarelo and Lopez Nieto (1988) note that:
The Spanish right's lack of legitimation, stemming from its collaboration with Francoism, is so evident that even today the term 'right' is never used on its own, except in the political discourse of what we would call the "extreme right." In conservative circles, the term is always accompanied by that of "Centre" (p. 81).

The founders of the AP sought to develop a mainstream image for their party. Gunther, Sani and Shabad (1988) quote an AP official as saying that the founders' intention was to unite the factions of the "center and center-right, and lay down the bases of a future party like the British Conservatives and the American Republicans." The official said that the AP was meant to be a great, modern liberal-conservative party -- that is, a sui generis centrism, clearly polarized on (matters of) order and security, but, at the same time, clearly reformist in social matters and clearly democratic (p. 80).

This decision to seek a moderate image was wise since, as a 1979 survey showed, over half of Spanish voters placed themselves in the political center, although the center-left surpassed the center-right in popularity by a considerable margin. Unfortunately for conservatives, most voters placed Alianza Popular and its partners in Coalicion Democratica well to the right of the spectrum, in political space occupied by only a handful of Spaniards (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 263). Garcia Cotarelo and Lopez Nieto (1988) note a "diffuse leftism" prevalent in Spain, a basic disdain for the values of the "neo-conservative revolution" that makes it difficult for right-of-center political forces to flourish (p. 91). While the elections of the 1990s may indicate a weakening of this tendency, this belief system seemed to predominate during the first dozen years of
restored democracy.

Perhaps the single most important factor behind the difficulties faced by the AP during the first few years of democracy was its founders' close ties to the Franco regime. All seven of the individuals who founded the AP in October 1976 were former high-level Franquist officials. Fraga himself was widely viewed as being authoritarian and inflexible. He tried and failed to build a broadly based party of the center-right. He instead found himself allied with some of the most reactionary forces in Spain and with local notables who often appeared to have stepped out of another century. Fraga's links to these figures thwarted his attempts to bring centrists such as Jose Maria de Areilza and Pio Cabanillas into the AP and caused the membership of one Christian democratic party to revolt when their leader tried to bring their organization into the AP. The selection of ultraconservative candidates such as Carlos Arias Navarro further pushed the AP's image rightward (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 82-92). One of Fraga's associates later commented on the AP leader's actions:

During the summer (of 1976) he moved precipitously, instead of waiting. He moved precipitously and created a political party rooted fundamentally in the essences of Franquismo -- when he himself was not like that. He was a man of the center. He had invented "the center" and had always spoken of the center. He had, of course, collaborated with Franco, but from a centrist position.... The birth of Alianza Popular had its original sin (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 92).

Another key problem for Spanish conservatives has been the nature of their political opposition. The UCD filled the center and center-right of the political spectrum during its brief existence, denying the AP access to the only constituency that could have possibly
made it a party capable of governing. In addition, the UCD was led by Adolfo Suarez, who was hailed as the father of the restoration of Spanish democracy, while the AP had the Franco-tarred Fraga. While Suarez had also been a Franquist official, his prominent role in democratization seemed to free him from the specter of the Caudillo that seemed to haunt the AP. It is not surprising that the AP only became a viable political force after the UCD collapsed in 1982. Suarez's successor party, the CDS, was a significant competitor for the AP during the 1980s, but has virtually disintegrated in recent years.

While the PSOE ran on a decidedly radical platform in 1977, its image was never as extreme as the AP's. Under the leadership of the young and attractive Felipe Gonzalez, the Socialists moderated their views and came to power in 1982. The Gonzalez government presided over an economic boom during the 1980s, and eventually embraced such onetime Socialist bugaboos as NATO membership and free-market economics. This left conservatives with little room to attack the PSOE in the 1986 and 1989 elections. The 1990s saw an economic downturn and numerous Socialist scandals, and hence have been more fertile ground for the right. In addition, the PP now has a young and attractive leader of its own in Jose Maria Aznar, although he clearly lacks Gonzalez's charisma.

The AP and its successors have also suffered from not being the only conservative parties in Spain. There were various Christian democratic and liberal groupings during the early years of democracy, and the AP joined with some of them in the Coalicion Democratica in 1979 and the Coalicion Popular in 1986. But more importantly, the AP and the PP have mostly been shut out of politics in the Basque Country
and in Catalunya. This has partly been due to the centralist heritage of the Spanish right. But just as important has been the presence of local right-of-center parties. The Partido Nacional Vasco (PNV) has a Christian democratic heritage, and the Catalan nationalist CiU has similar roots, despite its participation in a PSOE-led coalition.

Conservatively inclined voters in these areas may therefore support local center-right parties who are moderately regionalist rather than the PP with its stigma of centralism. The other historic region, Galicia, has shown little interest in the mostly left-wing regionalist parties, and has instead been a bastion of AP/PP conservatism, even electing Fraga to the presidency.

The Birth of the AP

The Alianza Popular was founded on October 9, 1976 by the so-called "Magnificent Seven" -- all of them former Franquist officials who had founded their own small political parties. In their manifesto, the founders of the AP declared themselves to be "a group of citizens who represent various political tendencies and who, setting aside personal preferences, think it their duty to establish a personal and electoral alliance" (Lopez-Pintor 1985a, p. 189). But, to paraphrase Dorothy Parker's remarks about Katharine Hepburn, the new federation's founders ran the political gamut from A to B.

Fraga was certainly the most prominent, and probably the most moderate, of the "Magnificent Seven." He had served as minister of information and tourism and later as ambassador to the United Kingdom during various Franquist governments of the 1960s and 1970s. He served as interior minister under Carlos Arias Navarro, the first prime minister appointed by King Juan Carlos, but did not serve in the Suarez government that began in June 1976. In all these positions, Fraga
gained a reputation as a moderate reformer with an authoritarian streak.

Beginning in 1974, when he was still in London, and continuing throughout 1975 and 1976, Fraga worked industriously to form a center-right party that would encompass both conservative Franquists and democratic centrists. He founded Reforma Democratica in early 1976 as part of this process. Fraga brought this grouping into the AP, and became secretary general of the new federation (which became a party in 1977). He would remain the leading voice of Spanish conservatism through the late 1970s and 1980s (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 78-82; Lopez-Pintor 1985a, p. 188-192).

The other founders of the AP were mostly well to Fraga's right and had led groups that were highly sympathetic to the old regime. The most prominent of these was Laureano Lopez Rodo, leader of Accion Regional and chief economic planner for much of the late Franquist era. He had also served as Foreign Minister and as Ambassador to Austria. Lopez Rodo, while well-known in official circles, was unfamiliar to the general public. What notoriety he did have was as a close friend of Prime Minister Luis Carrero Blanco, who was assassinated in 1973. Gonzalo Fernandez de la Mora and Enrique Thomas de Carranza were even more obscure and more conservative than Lopez Rodo. Fernandez de la Mora had once been minister of public works, while Thomas de Carranza had served in some second-level positions.

Federico Silva, a conservative Catholic and former minister of public works, led a minority of his Christian democratic Union Democratico Espanol -- renamed Accion Democratico Espanol -- after most party members revolted rather than join the AP. Licinio de la Fuente was a former labor minister and perhaps the most moderate of the "Magnificent Seven." The youthful Cruz Martinez Estruelas had served
as both minister of planning and minister of education during the twilight of Francoism. He and Fraga were the only founders of the AP who joined the Coalicion Democratica in 1979. The others all left the AP because of either personal or ideological differences with Fraga. Silva and Thomas de Carranza later became associated with the extreme right (Lopez-Pintor 1985a, p. 188-196; Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 78-84).

Medhurst (1982) notes the strongly Franquist overtones of the AP's founding:

Such a high degree of continuity, in terms of both personnel and policies, entailed serious practical difficulties. Not the least the AP's obviously close association with the old order placed it in an ideologically ambivalent if not contradictory position. It aimed to establish itself as a viable conservative party within the new "liberal-democratic" context, yet was constrained to legitimize itself with reference to positions that, in significant respects, could not be differentiated from the authoritarian past. In seeking to blend the elements of continuity and innovation, the party's leaders were impelled by their own past, and by what they took to be their potential electoral base, strongly to accentuate the element of continuity. The alternative, perhaps, would have been to disown so much of the past as to undermine their own credibility (p. 309).

Not only did Fraga found the AP with the help of people who turned out to be not in the political mainstream, he recruited much of its regional leadership from the ranks of local notables who turned out to have little influence. These caciques had some sway over conservative rural areas such as Galicia, but were mostly irrelevant in a modern, urban society. Their presence in the AP contributed to its retrograde image. More interested in personal power than in ideology, many of these local leaders defected to the UCD after the

Fraga and the AP leadership made a series of miscalculations that cost them dearly in the 1977 elections. As has been shown, no opposition leaders were included in the AP. The inclusion of many diehard Franquists meant the exclusion of prominent centrists. Reliance on clientelism brought few rewards. The AP leadership also misjudged the nature of the electorate. Gunther, Sani and Shabad (1988) assert that the founders of the AP misperceived the true center of gravity in the Spanish electorate, believing it to be farther to the right than it actually was. There was also a discrepancy between their own "centrist" positions (as they saw them) and their right-wing images in the eyes of both other political elites and the general public. Elite interviews indicated that while such image misperceptions were common, in the case of the AP these distortions were more pronounced. Since most of the founders of the AP had been government officials under Franco, it is likely that they had become accustomed to evaluating the ideological stands of individuals according to their relationship to other members of the Franquist political elite. This basis of comparison was highly misleading, because Franquist governments consisted almost exclusively of persons with conservative political values (p. 83-84).

This misperception of the electorate was one of the factors that led the AP to make another error: the selection of candidates who proved to unable to attract wide support. Carlos Arias Navarro was not the only unrepentant Franquist who sought office in 1977 under the AP banner. Such AP founders as Lopez Rodo and Fernandez de la Mora controlled candidate selection in their home areas, often passing over moderate members of Reforma Democratica in favor of their own right-wing followers. Caciques and other local aristocrats also made up a significant portion of the AP's candidates (Gunther, Sani and
One of Fraga's most serious miscalculations regarded the electoral law. He expected the adoption of a single-member constituency plan. Such a system would put a premium on the sort of local organization and name recognition that the caciques could offer. It would also favor the creation of a two-party system, in which the AP would be the only alternative to Marxism. But a form of proportional representation was adopted, based on the d'Hondt method. Proportional representation favors the emergence of a multiparty system; this allowed the UCD to become an additional alternative to Marxism. But the d'Hondt method makes it difficult for smaller parties to establish much more than a token presence (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 84).

**A Poor Beginning: The 1977 Election**

The national elections of 1977 were a disaster for the AP. A party that had been established with the expectation of victory ended up finishing fourth, with only eight percent of the popular vote and less than five percent of the seats in the Cortes. The UCD finished first with 34 percent of the popular vote and a whopping 47 percent of the seats in the Cortes. The PSOE placed second, with 29 percent of the popular vote and 34 percent of the seats in the Cortes. The Partido Communista de Espana (PCE), the AP's arch-enemy, and its Catalan affiliate finished a distant third. The Partido Socialista Popular (PSP) and its allies in the Unidad Socialista, ran even worse than the AP, and soon expired. Various minor parties finished well behind. Those with strong regional bases, such as the PNV and the Pacte Democratic per Catalunya (one of the ancestors of Convergencia i Unio), survived. Those without local strongholds, such as alliances of
Christian Democratic and Social Democratic parties, did not (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 38).

The AP's electoral humiliation came after a calamitous campaign that served to further alienate centrist voters. The AP's failure did not stem from a lack of effort. Fraga criss-crossed Spain in support of his party. Lopez-Pintor (1985a) claims that "at least during the first half of the campaign, the [AP's] propaganda was probably more conspicuous than any other party's" (p. 197). He also states that

The AP's program and written publicity -- interviews, posters, pamphlets, books and articles -- clearly reflected an ideology of the center-right within the Spanish context. From the founding manifesto of October 1976 to Manuel Fraga's last article before election day, its written campaign material consistently reflected a moderate center-right position (p. 197).

The AP's propaganda espoused mainstream positions, such as qualified support for a market economy, maintenance of law and order, gradual constitutional reform and a pro-Western foreign policy. But the party's leaders often made statements inconsistent with this moderate stance, and many AP campaign activities alarmed voters. The campaign began with a rally at Philip II's tomb, where AP leaders "recalled the Spanish Civil War ... and claimed the country was crumbling politically, economically, and morally" (Lopez-Pintor 1985a, p. 199). Carlos Arias Navarro repeatedly exalted the memory of the Caudillo, most notably when he appeared on nationwide television and "explicitly mentioned the name of Franco 7 times, and made 14 additional allusions to him" (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 91). Fraga himself seemed to hamper his cause, at one point accusing Suarez of instigating a coup d'etat when he legalized the PCE, at another storming into a
crowd to confront hecklers who had interrupted his speech. This was not behavior suitable for a prospective leader of a Western democracy (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 91; Lopez-Pintor 1985a, p. 199). Coverdale (1979) asserts that "the violent tone of AP's campaign alienated many sincere proponents of order who increasingly saw AP itself as representing a real threat to the future peace of Spain" (p. 66).

The AP Splinters

In the aftermath of the election, the AP leadership moved to moderate its platform and reach out to various center-right parties. But before the AP had a chance to recover from its crushing defeat, it was faced with another crisis. The constitution adopted in 1978 contained language allowing the state to inspect religious schools and to require them to democratize their management. The constitution also did not rule out the eventual legalization of divorce. Fraga supported the document and even campaigned on its behalf, but these provisions enraged many AP traditionalists. They also complained that the new Constitution undermined national unity by providing for regional decentralization. Federico Silva, Gonzalo Fernandez de la Mora and Enrique Thomas de Carranza -- three-sevenths of the "Magnificent Seven" -- all left the AP in protest, along with many of their followers. While these departures may have hurt the AP in the short term, the party could never have gained respectability while these men were in the leadership. Their extremism is best illustrated by Thomas de Carranza's subsequent role in founding the extreme-right Fuerza Nueva under the leadership of the fascist Blas Pinar. Silva and Fernandez de la Mora tried unsuccessfully to form an extreme-right coalition with Fuerza Nueva and several small parties (Gunther 1987,
Coalition and Calamity: The Election of 1979

The election of 1977 convinced many small center-right factions that they had to join with the AP in order to remain politically significant. As a means of convincing the AP leadership that they were an important force, they began forming broader alliances. In January 1978, under the leadership of Jose Maria de Areilza, five small liberal parties united into Accion Ciudadana Liberal (ACL). Areilza was an aristocrat who had been a longtime supporter of Franco. His loyalty allowed him to become ambassador to the United States in the 1950s. But he became an outspoken liberal in the 1960s and 1970s and was branded as an opponent of the regime. But he later served briefly as minister of foreign affairs under Arias Navarro. Like Fraga, he was often seen as a moderate reformer. During the summer of 1976, Fraga had tried to persuade Areilza to join him in forming a center-right coalition. But Areilza refused when he learned that conservative Franquists would be included in the grouping. He went on to found the centrist Partido Popular (unrelated to the present-day conservative party), which then became part of the larger Centro Democratico. Areilza quit as leader of the Centro Democratico when it became clear that there was wide support for making Suarez head of the party, which subsequently became the UCD (Lopez Pintor 1985a, p. 195-196; Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 83, 95-97, 99, 172-177).

The AP leadership was keen on entering into coalitions that would help establish their party's viability. A high-ranking AP leader remarked in May 1978:

We believe that, by way of coalitions or mergers, the current party system should be simplified, and
nationalized, in order to present real options to the Spanish people. We will accept any formula that moves in that direction (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 172).

A national party leader commented that same month: We are committed to forming a new center, a new majority, to fully implant democracy in Spain. Fraga has publicly stated that we will merge with any party that is not Marxist, nor separatist, nor anarchist. Aside from those conditions, we will accept a fusion with any party. For reasons of its own, which I do not understand, the UCD had refused to join such a movement (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 172).

The splintering of the AP gave added stimulus to the efforts aimed at creating a gran derecha -- a "great right" that would include the smaller parties. The end of the AP federation on November 1, 1978 was rapidly followed by the creation of the Coalicion Democratica (CD).

The expectation that national elections would be called soon after the adoption of the new Constitution motivated much of this haste. The three principal partners in the CD were the AP, Areliza's ACL and Alfonso Osorio's small Partido Democrata Progresista (PDP). Osorio was a conservative Christian democrat long active in Catholic affairs and had been Suarez's deputy prime minister during the transition. Like Areilza, Osorio had been a member of Centro Democratico, but unlike Areilza, he had joined the UCD. He had been appointed to the Senate by King Juan Carlos in 1977. He later broke with Suarez and the UCD. Osorio had founded the PDP only shortly before the creation of the CD. Several small centrist parties, including ones based in the Basque Country and Catalunya, also joined the CD (Lopez-Pintor 1985a, p. 196-205; Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 173-177).

Many in the AP saw the formation of the CD as a means towards making their party's image more moderate and democratic. An AP
official remarked in 1979:
For the press and for many ordinary people, AP represented
the integralist right, an intransigent right, the
nondemocratic right. The presence of Areilza and
Osorio in Coalicion Democratica has served to
remove the harshness from our public image
(Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 174).

As part of this effort, the AP sought to promote itself as
a modern party of the center-right that was firmly committed to
democracy; interestingly, it shifted its economic ideology to a more
neoliberal position, abandoning the Spanish right's traditional
dislike of capitalism (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 175-176).

The campaign of 1979 was conducted in a rush. Parties had
only twenty-one days to seek support before the elections. The CD
was still coalescing when electioneering began. Fraga, Areilza and
Osorio shared the responsibility of serving as spokesman for the CD,
with Fraga playing the most prominent role. The CD began its campaign
by attacking the UCD's record in power; it concluded it by asking voters
to support the "center-right solution." Lopez-Pintor (1985a) argues
that:
The two different phases of the CD campaign seem to have
reflected two different assessments of the
party's electoral possibilities. The first
phase seemed devised under the assumption that
the [CD] would be able to attract an important
share of the vote that had gone to the [UCD] in
1977, while the second, disregarding that
possibility, merely aimed at maintaining the
support of the people who had voted for the [AP]
in 1977 (p. 200).

Selection of candidates proved to be controversial. The
inclusion of the AP's coalition partners meant that some party stalwarts
had to be displaced -- usually to their extreme displeasure. Laureano
Lopez Rodo quit the AP after he was bumped from the top of the provincial
list in Barcelona by a leader of the ACL. There was massive turnover
from the previous election; only 43 of the 350 candidates the AP had put forth in 1977 were nominated by the CD in 1979 (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 176-177).

Conflict between AP loyalists and the members of the ACL and the PDP went far beyond quarrels over candidate lists. Osorio and Areliza were given responsibilities in the campaign well in excess of their parties' abilities to fulfill them. In the end, the ACL and the PDP -- let alone the smaller parties -- turned out to be much too small to have an impact on the election. One AP deputy protested: Areilza really didn't have a party, and the party of Osorio is not a mass party, but a cadre party, which has followers in a few isolated places. These were not important contributions.... Alianza Popular was tricked by Areilza and Osorio.... Coalicion Democratica is practically (nothing more than) the old Alianza Popular -- decreased in size, because many elements have left the party (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 177).

The CD may also have been hurt by its decision to abandon the symbol and colors of the AP, and to otherwise distance itself from the party's image. One AP leader claimed: In the past campaign, we could have maintained the image of Alianza Popular and added to this... (a new component), but not eliminating the image of Alianza. The name Alianza Popular-Coalicion Democratica, AP-CD, would have been much more advantageous (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 291).

The CD finished a distant fourth in the election of 1979, winning barely six percent of the popular vote, down from the AP's eight percent two years before. In 1977, the AP won 16 seats out of 350 in the Cortes; the CD won only nine. The UCD and PSOE finished far ahead of the pack and did slightly better than in 1977. The Communists finished a solid third, significantly improving their performance. While the far right only won two percent of the vote,
that was more than double its 1977 showing. Like the AP, the CD ran strongest in traditional conservative strongholds such as Castile and Galicia, and weakest in Andalusia, the Basque Country, Catalunya, Estremadura and Valencia. Fraga quit as party leader soon after the election and was replaced by Felix Pastor (Lopez-Pintor 1985a, p. 201-205; Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 179-180). Clearly Spanish conservatives, whether under the label of AP or CD, were a long way from being a competitive political force.

**The Right Rebuilds**

The AP was devastated by its defeat. Membership rolls shrank. The party organization fell apart. Activists ceased their work for the AP. The party seemed on the verge of death.

Party leaders began to take action. The CD was abandoned as an electoral vehicle, remaining only as a parliamentary grouping. Areilza eventually quit the CD and joined the UCD. On the eve of the Third Party Congress in December 1979, Pastor resigned and Fraga returned to power. He rebuilt the AP in his image as a party of the democratic right. No longer did the AP rely on local notables or coalition partners to gather support; it was developing its own organization (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 417-420).

**Breakthrough: The Election of 1982**

While the AP rebuilt itself under Fraga's leadership, the ruling UCD was crumbling. After the election of 1979, Suarez moved to consolidate his hold on the party by forming a new cabinet that excluding many of the UCD's leading figures. While Suarez was forced to bring many of these notables back into the cabinet in 1980, the damage had been done. The UCD's disparate factions were growing farther apart. A bitter clash over regionalism only added to the UCD's
problems. Religiously based quarrels over education and divorce turned the UCD's Christian democratic faction against Suarez's leadership. The UCD seemed incapable of changing from a collection of factions to a modern party. Suarez's personalistic leadership style alienated many of his followers and proved inappropriate for this situation. In January 1981, with his popularity waning both among party activists and among the wider public, Suarez stepped down (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 422-427; Lopez-Pintor 1988b, p. 301-313).

The departure of Suarez left the UCD in tatters. Its factions engaged in open warfare, with liberals and Christian democrats battling Suarez loyalists. Between December 1980 and December 1982, the UCD had four different presidents. A steady stream of politicians left the party to form their own organizations, climaxing in the summer of 1982, when Suarez founded the Centro Democratico y Social (CDS).

Between 1979 and 1982, the UCD lost six major elections. The most catastrophic defeat came in Andalusia in May 1982, when the UCD lost 60 percent of its 1979 vote. In most of these contests, the chief beneficiaries of the UCD's collapse were regionalist parties, the PSOE and the revitalized AP. Against a backdrop of political turmoil (including an attempted coup d'etat) and economic difficulty, the UCD's support among the Spanish public fell from 27 percent in January 1980 to only five percent on the eve of the October 1982 election. During the same period, the AP's support tripled from four percent to 12 (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 420-427; Lopez-Pintor 1985b, p. 301-313).

The disintegration of the UCD benefitted the AP in several ways. The implosion of the main centrist party left the AP in the
position which its founders had sought: the leading alternative to Marxism. Center-right voters dissatisfied with the UCD were natural recruits for the AP. Many of the more conservative UCD activists joined the AP, since both the PSOE and Suarez's CDS were unattractive options.

The AP also sought to build a coalition with two of the small parties that had emerged from the ruins of the UCD. Oscar Alzaga and Jose Luis Alvarez, two conservative Christian Democrats previously active in the UCD, had formed the Partido Democrata Popular (PDP). Along with the small Partido Liberal, the PDP joined with the AP in forming the Coalicion Popular (CP) (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 417-420).

The October 1982 election marked the end of the UCD as a viable political organization. Its share of the popular vote fell from 35 percent in 1979 to just over six percent in 1982. Its representation in the Cortes declined from 168 seats to eleven. The UCD did not survive long after its defeat. The Communists, whose image had steadily become more extreme, saw their share of the vote be more than halved, and their parliamentary delegation fall from 23 to four.

The PSOE won an enormous victory, raising its portion of the popular vote from about 30 percent to over 48 percent, and winning 202 seats in the Cortes. This was a big increase from the PSOE's previous total of 121, and was more than enough to form a government. But if the PSOE was now firmly ensconced as the nation's leading party, the AP was clearly in second place. The AP and its allies in the CP won close to 27 percent of the popular vote and 107 seats in the Cortes, a remarkable rise from the CD's 1979 showing of six percent and nine seats (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 402).

Turnout was high: 79.5% of eligible voters -- the highest
since the restoration of democracy. According to postelection analysis, three-fifths of former nonvoters supported the AP, with most of the remainder backing the PSOE. By contrast, 60 percent of new young voters voted Socialist, while the AP claimed only one-tenth of them. The PSOE and the AP split the votes of former UCD supporters just about evenly, each receiving about 40 percent (Lopez-Pintor 1985b, p. 297).

Treading Water in the 1980s

If the election of 1982 had at last made the AP a significant player in Spanish politics, gaining a majority still seemed impossible. The PSOE outnumbered the AP by almost two-to-one in the Cortes. While the CDS was still weak, it was a serious competitor for the centrist voters that the AP needed to attract. The Coalicion Popular remained unstable. Economic prosperity insulated the Gonzalez government from attack. The PSOE in power pursued market-oriented policies that were more vulnerable to attack from the left than the right. Robinson (1987) notes that, by 1986, some observers were asserting that "governmental responsibility has induced the PSOE to transform itself from a social democratic party to a social-liberal one." Robinson himself calls the Gonzalez government's policies "austerity Socialism" and "hardly distinguishable from the 'liberal' remedies proffered by the centre-right" (p. 122). In addition, Gonzalez's pro-Western foreign policy, highlighted by his support for Spain's continued membership in NATO, left the AP unable to attack him as pro-Soviet.

Gonzalez called an election shortly after his victory in the March 1986 referendum on remaining in NATO. Robinson (1987) notes that "during the course of a rather conventional and routine election campaign many observers lamented the absence of substantive issue
debate." The AP and its allies in the CP criticized the Gonzalez government for its "tendencies towards 'arrogance of force' in the exercise of power." They stressed their support for cutting taxes and government expenditures. The AP and its allies took a strongly pro-American and pro-Western stance in foreign affairs, and a traditionalist approach in social policy. Fraga once again played a dominant role in the campaign, allowing his party to benefit from his formidable talents, but also forcing it to shoulder his many liabilities (p. 121-123).

After three elections that saw remarkable volatility, the June 1986 contest seemed almost boring. Coalicion Popular's share of the vote remained almost unchanged at exactly 26 percent. Its total of 105 seats was only one less than four years before. The PSOE lost some ground, with its share of the popular vote falling to 44 percent and its representation in the Cortes slipping to 184 seats, but its parliamentary majority remained intact. Some of the regionalist parties, especially CiU and the Basque separatist party Herri Batasuna, gained ground (Robinson 1987, p. 121-123).

The most disturbing result of the election for the AP must have been the strong showing of the CDS, which went from winning two seats in 1982 to winning 19 in 1986. Its share of the popular vote tripled to nine percent. Robinson (1987) speculates that the CDS may have inherited some former UCD supporters. He also suggests that some disillusioned onetime Socialists may have voted CDS, as well as some young first-time voters. Suarez criticized the Gonzalez government and reminded voters of his own term in office. The CDS campaign focused on its leader's persona to such an extent that one may speculate whether its strong showing was more a tribute to Suarez as a man (public opinion
polls in the mid-1980s showed his popularity on a par with Gonzalez's) than to its rather vague, populist-flavored platform. While the CDS seemed unlikely to be able to form a government on its own, it did seem to be a possible junior partner in a coalition with one of the major parties, should the PSOE lose its majority. The increased strength of the CDS meant that the AP had a rival for voters to the right of the PSOE¹ (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p. 419, 427; Robinson 1987, p. 121-123).

In the aftermath of the 1986 election, the tension between Fraga and Alzaga burst into open conflict. Alzaga and the PDP leadership blamed Fraga for the CP's failure to gain strength. It was becoming common practice to speak of the right's "electoral ceiling." The CP soon fell apart. The PDP struck out on its own, only to be crushed in the 1987 local and regional elections. Gunther, Sani and Shabad (1988) blame several factors for the PDP's failure. First, its status as a narrowly confessional party in an increasingly secular society. Its extremism in defending Catholic positions perturbed even the hierarchy itself. Second, the PDP was unpopular with both conservatives and centrists because of its leaders' bitter disputes with both Suarez and Fraga. Third, Alzaga and Alvarez lacked the necessary charisma to lead a major party (p. 425-426).

The breakup of the CP marked the end of the right's strategy of coalition-building. Garcia Cotarelo and Lopez Nieto (1988) write that the AP leadership perhaps ... realised the unrealistic nature of the idea that

¹It is questionable if Suarez was really much more conservative than Gonzalez. Despite his background as a Franquist official and ardent Catholic, Suarez had been drifting to the left for years. Most notably, he was significantly more anti-American than either Gonzalez or Fraga.
a governing majority could be achieved by means of the so-called "Natural Majority" (AP's strategy of forming electoral alliances with centrist parties) and the consequent formation of a two-party system (p. 82).

Fraga resigned as president of the AP in December 1986, and was replaced in February by the youthful Antonio Hernandez Mancha. He soon proved not to be up to the job. The AP lost ground in the 1987 local and regional elections, as did the PSOE. The CDS was the primary beneficiary of these losses, and appeared to be nearing major-party status (Gunther, Sani and Shabad 1988, p.420, 427).

After almost two years of Hernandez Mancha's inept leadership, the time was ripe for Fraga's return. He had bided his time in the European Parliament while the AP fell in public esteem and split into factions. In October 1988, Fraga announced his intentions of reclaiming the party leadership. Hernandez Mancha resigned just before the AP congress in January 1989. Fraga ascended to the party leadership with the intention of continuing to moderate the AP's image. He had not lost his longtime taste for coalition-building, and sought to ally once again with his old CP partners. He did bring Marcellino Oreja, a prominent Christian Democrat, into the AP. Oreja was secretary of the Council of Europe and had once served as foreign minister under Suarez. He brought in some of his ideological brethren with him. Fraga also expressed interest in allying with the CDS, but Suarez's continuing drift to the left made that unlikely. Fraga did make one lasting change. He renamed the AP as the Partido Popular (PP), affirming its identity as a coherent party rather than a loose network of factions.

Despite all these changes, and a renewed sense of vigor,
the PP fared poorly in the June 1989 European elections, losing ground from 1987. Oreja had led the party's list in this contest, and had been considered a likely PP candidate for prime minister, but these discouraging results did not help his chances. The PSOE maintained its previous level of support, but the CDS did poorly. Regionalists were the big victors.

Gonzalez dissolved the Cortes on September 1. The election was set for October. While the 1980s had been a prosperous decade for Spain, there were increasing signs of economic trouble, and there had been a general strike in December 1988. The PSOE was seriously divided, but the PP seemed to be in worse shape, and Gonzalez remained popular with the public. Amodia (1990) remarks that there was "more than a technocratic touch" to the PSOE's platform, now that it had forsaken radicalism (p. 294). At a time of low public interest in politics, and of increasing convergence between the major parties, the campaign focused on the personalities of the party leaders.

Fraga stepped down as PP leader on the eve of the election, and was replaced by Jose Maria Aznar. Amodia (1990) describes Aznar as "young, presentable, and, above all, without the Francoist past which, in previous elections, had handicapped" Fraga. Amodia continues:

Though showing signs of inexperience, Aznar ran an intensive and well-organised campaign. Nevertheless, he was unable to stand totally clear of Fraga's patriarchal shadow, or to dispel the impression that his position at the top was not entirely secure in a party which had had four different leaders in less than twelve months. PP is still struggling to widen its ideological appeal, not an easy undertaking when confronted by a Socialist government that has been implementing an extremely moderate, even conservative, set of policies (p. 295).
Aznar tried to appeal to the electorate on ethical grounds, telling voters that he gave them his word that he would implement his promises.

The PSOE won the election, but its share of the vote fell from 43 percent in 1986 to just over 39 percent in 1988. It maintained control of the Cortes with a majority of one seat. The Izquierda Unida (IU), which had succeeded the PCE, gained the most from the PSOE's decline. Winning seventeen seats in the Cortes, the IU nearly doubled the PCE's 1986 percentage when it won nine percent of the vote. The CDS took a serious hit, falling from 19 to 14 seats in the Cortes, and slipping from nine to eight percent of the popular vote. The 1989 election turned out to be only the beginning of its troubles. The PP held its own, winning just about the same share of the popular vote -- 26 percent -- that it had won in 1982 and 1986, and gaining one seat in the Cortes, for a total of 106 (Amodia 1990, p. 296).

While some judged the PP's showing a success because of its leadership turmoil, Amodia (1990) notes that the PP's quarter of the vote was sizable but insufficient to threaten the Socialists. Fraga's domineering leadership had in the past been seen as the main reason for the party's failure to break [the 25 percent] barrier. But the change of leaders has had no noticeable effect. PP cannot yet be seen as an alternative government for a number of reasons. The moderate strategy of successive socialist governments has left little room for opposition politics. The CDS, in spite of its disappointing results, still occupies some right-of-centre areas that PP will have to take over to present a real challenge to the PSOE. But the main obstacle must be found in Catalonia and the Basque country. Here the PP has so far been unable to reach any kind of agreement with the important conservative nationalist movements present in both regions (p. 297).
But Maxwell and Spiegel (1994) note that the PP "fared far better than expected" in the 1989 elections. They assert that "with the replacement of Fraga by a new generation of leaders from the post-Franco era, the PP moved away from its roots and its reputation as a party of law and order." They also point to Aznar's success in removing many old-timers from the party leadership (p. 59-60). In an article entitled "Third term lucky," published on November 4, the Economist analyzes the elections results. It proclaims that the PP had done "far better than the polls had forecast" and hails it as an "impressive performance" because of Aznar's newness to leadership. The Economist also asserts that the campaign "offered the first glimpse of a modern-minded Spanish right, free at last of links to the days of Franco's dictatorship." It would not be the last glimpse.

**A Good Decade to be Right: the 1990s**

The 1990s have been the decade during which Spanish conservatives have finally been seen as a real alternative. They may be the decade during which they finally form a government. Even before the decade actually began, events began to go the PP's way. In December 1989, the PP won an absolute majority in the Galician parliament, and so Fraga became president of his home region. The next year, the PP won four seats in elections held in the traditionally left-wing Basque Country (Maxwell and Spiegel 1994, p. 59-60). In April 1990, Aznar formally replaced Fraga as president of the PP.

The next year turned out to be a remarkably good one for the PP. The first in a long line of scandals involving the PSOE broke. In nationwide local elections, the PP won 25 percent of the vote, up from 21 percent in 1987. Remarkably for a party once identified with rural caciques, the PP won control of several major cities,
including Madrid and the left-wing bastions of Valencia and Seville -- the latter is the birthplace of Felipe Gonzalez. Many regional conservative parties also ran well. The PP benefitted greatly from the collapse of the CDS. The defeat for his party was so overwhelming that Suarez actually stepped down as leader of the CDS. Maxwell and Spiegel (1994) assert that the PP's strong performance in these elections "was an important step in weakening the PSOE's mystique as the only party capable of governing Spain" (p. 60). These defeats were particularly ominous for the Socialists, since their victories in the 1979 municipal elections foreshadowed their coming to power in 1982. While their percentage of the vote was still greater than the PP's, the Socialists seemed to be losing momentum.

As the 1990s progressed, the PP gathered steam. It seemed that a different PSOE scandal broke every week. Voters, while not yet ready to embrace the PP, were growing weary of what they perceive as Socialist arrogance. The divide between the PSOE's left and right wings was growing. And the PP, supposedly the party of elderly reactionaries, was showing remarkable strength among the young -- who had no memories of Franco to taint their perception of conservatism. Young voters may have also found attractive the youthful cadre of leaders brought in Aznar.

As the June 1993 election approached, the PP was increasingly confident. The once-booming Spanish economy had turned sluggish. Scandals involving Kuwaiti investors and the ties between the PSOE and Filesa, a company which defrauded many leading businesses, further injured the Gonzalez government. A once yawning gap between the PP and the PSOE in the poll had fallen to single digits. Aznar told a PP congress in February that, "It is not a question of left and right.
It is a fight between the past and the future, between hope and fear, between unity and division. The choice is going to be straightforward: continuation or renovation" (Jones 1993, p. 40). This is virtually the definition of a nonideological appeal; Felipe Gonzalez could have spoken the same words in 1982. At the conference, the PP tried to project a modern, centrist image, touting the large number of women in its leadership and pledging to reduce unemployment -- which had passed 20 percent by election's eve. Aznar later promised not to change Spain's abortion laws.

The PP promised to cut taxes, to privatize state-owned firms and to reduce interest rates. It received strong support from the Confederacion Espanola de Organizaciones Empresiales (CEOE), the Spanish employers' association -- perhaps the flip side of labor unions' traditional support for the left (Maxwell and Speigel 1994, p. 60).

The Socialist campaign was not notable for its substance. Txiki Benegas, secretary of the PSOE, attacked Aznar as for having "more moustache than ideas." (Moustaches are associated by many Spaniards with the Franco regime) (Webster 1993, p. 20). In a televised debate (in which Aznar impressed many voters), Gonzalez berated Aznar for not demonstrating against the Franco regime when he was a student in the 1970s: "How can you say that university os only for studying when there is a dictatorship." But as Webster (1993) notes, it was becoming evident that this line of argument backfires with young voters, who form an especially important sector in these elections. Because the baby boom arrived later in Spain than in the rest of Europe, there are two million first-time voters, who have known only Socialist government, and for whom the dictatorship is history.... Among this age group, there is a strong desire for change, but more from an ethical than political point of view (p. 20).
Students jeered Gonzalez at a speech in Madrid, while Aznar opened his campaign at a university in Oviedo. This phenomenon would have puzzled the militants of the 1970s, many of whom went on to be Socialist leaders, and for whom the right was synonymous with nostalgia and reaction.

Despite its problems, the PSOE managed to pull off a victory, but just barely. It won only 38.6 percent of the popular vote. More importantly, it lost its parliamentary majority, falling from 174 to 159 deputies. Maxwell and Spiegel (1994) claim that this result was "above all else, a personal victory for Felipe Gonzalez," rather than an endorsement of the Socialists (p. 66). While the PSOE was able to form a coalition with CiU, the wide differences on social policy between the two parties guaranteed that Gonzalez's fourth term would be filled with strife.

Despite the PSOE's victory, June 6 was still a day of glory for the PP. It won almost 35 percent of the vote, and increased its representation in the Cortes from 109 to 141. The PP had broken through its electoral ceiling and was at last a serious contender for power. It collected 8.1 million votes, 2.8 million more than in 1989. (Because of high turnout, the PSOE also received more votes, but the increase was less spectacular). The PP ran well even in the autonomous communities of Catalunya and the Basque Country and in traditional leftist strongholds such as Andalusia and Valencia. It appeared that the PP had "been accepted as a legitimate contender" and had escaped the "shackles of its Francoist past" (Maxwell and Spiegel 1994, p. 66).

The PP's chief rival for anti-Socialist votes, the CDS, was
devastated in the election. The CDS lost all of its 14 seats in the Cortes. It was hard to see how it would could remain a significant political player, especially with the acceptance of the PP into the mainstream. The IU and the regionalists maintained roughly the same level of support that they had enjoyed in 1989 -- although, interestingly, a coalition based in the Canary Islands won four seats in 1993 after winning none in the previous contest (Maxwell and Spiegel 1994, p. 66-67).

The PSOE's troubles continued into 1994. In June, the PP scored the first outright victory in a national contest when it won 40 percent of the vote in the European elections, outdistancing the Socialists by almost ten percentage points. Its margin in cities with over 100,000 people was almost 20 percent. The IU also achieved its best result in a national election, by winning over thirteen percent of the vote. Gonzalez campaigned little, while Aznar worked vigorously in his party's behalf (Webster 1994, p. 22-23; Jones 1994, p. 6-7). Younger voters continued to give a cold shoulder to the PSOE, preferring the PP or the IU to a party they associated with corruption and unemployment. Webster (1994) writes that a pre-election comment by Fernando Moran, head of the PSOE list, provided a "measure of how out of touch some socialists are with the younger generation." Moran stated that:

We are going to win the elections for several reasons. In Spain, there is a sociological and cultural majority of the centre left. Only a little while ago, we came out of an autocratic right-wing regime and people want the change to be maintained (p. 23).

Webster points out:
Few under 30 have more than the vaguest memories of politics under Franco. Nothing could seem more self-righteous and irrelevant to most young
voters than the performances of the vice-secretary of the [PSOE], Alfonso Guerra, at his specially staged rallies in poor rural districts of the south where, sporting a microphone clipped to his shirt, he walked the stage insulting the right and recommending the latest book on General Franco, by the British historian Paul Preston (p. 23).

This is not a good strategy if a party wants to portray itself as forward-looking. Even as the PSOE suffered defeat in the European elections, it lost its majority in the parliament of Andalusia, Gonzalez's home region and a historic Socialist heartland. The PP won 41 seats to the PSOE's 45 in a body of 109. The previous figures had been 26 and 62, respectively. Here too, the IU gained strength at the PSOE's expense.

The Gonzalez government remained troubled by divisions between the PSOE's technocratic right and its militant left led by Guerra. The presence of the center-right CiU only aggravated this split, since if Gonzalez moved to the left, it could bring down his cabinet; indeed, the PP began flirting with the Catalans in the hope of persuading them to quit the coalition. Both the PSOE and the CiU continued to deal with scandals. The economy began to show signs of improvement, but too slowly to help the Socialists much. In the fall of 1994, a poll published by the Madrid daily El Mundo showed the PP leading the PSOE by more than 11 percentage points. Almost half of respondents rated Gonzalez as a "bad" or "very bad" prime minister, a devastating showing for a man long known for his personal popularity. But he brushed aside suggestions that he resign; earlier in the year, the UGT, the Socialist trade union federation, had joined with its Communist counterpart in calling on the prime minister to step down (Jones 1994, p. 7; Valls-Russell 1994, p. 8).
All was not perfect for the PP. While Aznar was reasonably popular, he lacked Gonzalez's charisma. But some saw this as an asset, arguing that Spaniards had had enough of personalism. The right's historic centralism made cooperation with regionalist parties difficult. Bringing down the Gonzalez government would require the participation of these parties; and the PP might conceivably need their support for a future governing coalition. Fraga and other party notables tried to develop a distinctive PP approach to the regionalist problem that would not raise the specter of centralism.

Gonzalez was forced to confront a new problem in 1995: revelations that security forces had engaged in a "dirty war" against Basque separatists during the 1980s. While the prime minister claimed he did not know about the affair, and that his government had not supported it, many Spaniards seemed unconvinced. Polls showed the PP far in front of the PSOE, with the IU also faring well. Despite economic recovery, the accumulated weight of scandal was weighing down the Gonzalez government. The PP won an overwhelming victory in the May 1995 local and regional elections, winning close to a majority of the vote. With continuing revelations about the "dirty war," the PP's increasing strength and the CiU's declared intention of quitting the coalition by the end of the year, the Gonzalez government's days seem numbered as of this writing.

**Conclusion**

Spanish conservatives have traveled a long and difficult road from the founding of the AP in 1976 to the PP's current position as the putative winners of the next election. Several inferences can be drawn from this case. The first is that the AP/PP could not have become viable without the disappearance of centrist opposition in the
form of the UCD and the CDS. The second is that the right needed to get out from under the shadow of Franco before it could hope to govern. In the 1970s, memories of the old regime were too fresh to allow a party of the right to gain legitimacy. By the mid-1990s, twenty years had gone by since Franco's death, and a new generation had appeared that was willing to give the PP a chance. Turnover in leadership also helped erase the image of the Caudillo. The AP leadership that emerged in 1976 was simply unacceptable to the great majority of Spanish voters. Even the relatively moderate Fraga was too loaded down with Franquist baggage to be considered respectable. His authoritarian style convinced many voters, somewhat unfairly, that he was not quite part of the democratic mainstream. But Jose Maria Aznar lacked any ties to the old regime, and his manner was more likely to foster tedium rather than terror. Many Spaniards found that they preferred blandness to bluster. His leadership cadre was full of thirtysomething politicos at home in modern Spain instead of loyal Franquists uncomfortable with their changing society.

A third inference is that context matters in politics. No matter how much the AP reinvented itself, it was not going to win elections in the 1980s when the PSOE (and especially Gonzalez) was widely popular. The scandals and economic troubles of the 1990s have eroded the PSOE's prestige, and have given the PP an opportunity for victory. The sheer length of Socialist rule has created an appetite for something new.

The most obvious comparison to the evolution of the Spanish right is the changing nature of the British Labour Party. In both cases, a party once seen as out of the mainstream has moderated its positions and has replaced old militants with an attractive young
leader. And in both situations, the parties have benefitted from a long series of scandals and embarrassments that have destroyed the government's reputation. The Partido Popular and Labour have one more thing in common: they are both seen as being certain to form the next government.
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