

## **Is General Francisco Franco Still Dead?**

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Larry Bernstein:

Welcome to What Happens Next. My name is Larry Bernstein. What Happens Next is a podcast which covers economics, education, and culture.

Today's Topic is, Is General Francisco Franco Still Dead?

Our speaker is Michael Reid who wrote the new book Spain: The Trials and Triumphs of a Modern European Country.

Spain had an election last week, and I want to hear about the implications of a near tie in that election and what it means for Spain and Europe. The issues in Spain will be familiar to you: Too much immigration, abortion rights, and should the region of Catalonia be an independent nation.

Let's begin the podcast with Michael's opening six-minute remarks.

Michael Reid:

Thanks very much for having me. Let me start by saying that I hesitated long and hard before starting to write this book because I thought, frankly, there are too many books about Spain, especially by Brits. What moved me to write it was triggered by covering the events in Catalonia in 2017, when separatist pro-independence people tried to bounce Catalonia out of Spain with an unconstitutional independence referendum. That caught a huge amount of attention in the world.

I felt that the coverage in the English language media was misleading, because it tended to take at face value the narrative of the separatists that this was an exercise of radical democracy. I saw it through the lens of Brexit, as a nationalist populist identarian movement in which Madrid took the role of Brussels for the Brexiters in Britain. And the other trope in the English language press was that all this was the consequence of Franco's ghost. I saw it rather differently.

I had first visited Spain in 1971 in my student vacation. Franco was still alive. I visited a lot in the years since. I started working on Spain for The Economist, initially from London in 2008 and I moved there in 2016. I had seen this extraordinary period after the transition to democracy in '78, in which Spain enjoyed one of the most successful periods of its history with sustained economic growth, social progress reform, and political stability. And then since the financial crisis, which in Spain was long and deep, 2008 to 2012, things have been much harder. Spain has suffered austerity, corruption emerged, political fragmentation and polarization and instability.

These three waves of populism, one from the left, of the Indignados a template for Occupy Wall Street. Out of them came Podemos, a far-left group, and then the mutation of Catalan nationalism into separatism, and then Vox, a hard-right party. And so, my view was that most of these problems were similar to those in democracies everywhere and were not because of some defect of origin of Spanish democracy. All countries have their peculiarities. The Spanish peculiarity is the relative strength of the oxymoron, regional nationalisms in Catalonia and the Basque country.

Spain is very mountainous and quite a big country by European standards. Until high speed trains, airplanes, and motorways, it was a difficult country to get around. Industrialization happened partly because of that on the coasts in Catalonia and the Basque country.

At the same time, the Spanish state was relatively weak in the 19th century. I compare Spain with France in that regard. And it's interesting that in the mid-19th century, there were more regional languages spoken in France than in Spain. But the post-revolutionary state in France was a strong state, and it imposed from the center, outwards from the top down. It imposed a single language, the French language, and a single culture. And it did that through the massive expansion of rural railways and roads, through free and universal public education with a school in every village teaching only in the French language and by making military service universal and turning it into a school of citizenship.

The Spanish state tried to do all of those things, but it was less successful. So regional languages and cultures survived in the Catalonia and the Basque country where there were powerful bourgeoisie because of industrialization. They led that cultural revival, which in due course became political nationalism.

And although the last 15 years have been challenging, the country still has a lot of strengths. It's capable of fairly rapid economic growth by European standards. It has undergone a remarkable cultural transformation. 50 years ago, it was under the moral control of the Catholic Church. It's now become Scandinavia in the sun. It has successively legalized divorce, abortion, gay marriage, euthanasia and so forth. The society is broadly very tolerant. And it was interesting in the general election that was held on the 23rd of July, Vox, the hard-right nationalist party, which campaigned on culture wars, actually lost ground and its vote fell by a fifth to 12.4%. Spanish society is much less polarized than Spanish politics.

The two main parties in Spain, the Socialists on the center-left, and the People's Party on the center-right are regaining their strength. Their combined vote had dropped to just 48% in 2015. It's back up to 65%. But one of the lasting legacies and perhaps the strongest legacy of the Spanish Civil War of 1936 to 1939 is that the left/right political divide, which fortunately is peaceful, deeper than in the rest of Western Europe. It's harder to bridge it. So, although there's a moderate majority in the country; those two main parties find it very hard to collaborate. And so,

you had an outgoing coalition government of the socialists with forces considerably further to the left and fairly radical Basque and Catalan nationalist parties that may be repeated or there may be a fresh election.

There's a lot going for Spain. It's one of the best countries to live in the world.

Larry Bernstein:

My first question relates to Basque and Catalan nationalism. The Basques used terrorism as a way to pursue their agenda. They killed lots of innocent people, and assassinated or attempted to assassinate senior members of the government including the prime minister and judges. Has that left a lingering distaste in Spain for regional breakaway republics?

Michael Reid:

Basque nationalism is actually much more recent than Catalan nationalism. It only emerged at the turn of the 20th century. And the Basque language, which is unusual in being a non-Indo-European language, was not even codified until the early 20th century. It was spoken mainly in rural areas and was slowly dying out. And then there was a cultural revival. Franco was particularly harsh on the Basques after he won the Civil War because the Basques were strongly culturally Catholic. And yet because they wanted regional autonomy, they sided with the Republic which was anti-clerical during the Civil War. Franco found that very hard to forget. And he suppressed Basque autonomy.

Nationalism reemerged in the 1960s, and it reemerged in two guises: the mainstream moderate Basque nationalist party, which had formed the short-lived regional government during the Republic in the 1930s. And then ETA, this Marxist-Leninist, nationalist, terrorist group, which was one of several in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. There was the Baader-Meinhof group, so-called Red Army Faction in West Germany. There were the Red Brigades in Italy. And then of course, there was the IRA in Northern Ireland. And in some ways, ETA was similar to the IRA, but the big difference was that ETA carried on after democracy was restored with a sweeping degree of regional self-government for the Basque country, and a general amnesty, which meant that convicted Basque killers were released from jail in the late 1970s under that amnesty.

But ETA carried on and indeed intensified its violence in an attempt to bring down the new democracy, and particularly to target military and police personnel in the hope of turning them against the new democracy, to sharpen the contradictions in the terms that Marxist-Leninist used in those days. You could argue that the IRA emerged in Northern Ireland because Northern Ireland wasn't a proper democracy. It was gerrymandered. The Protestants were systematically overrepresented and ran the place at the expense of the Catholic minority, but that didn't apply in the Basque country. I mean, ETA only stopped its terrorism 10 years ago. It only disbanded five years ago.

That is certainly one reason for the hostility of many Spaniards to the idea of independence of their country being broken up. But I would say that, and it's something that many people in Britain don't understand, the European constitutional tradition is of territorial integrity. So, the idea that it's fine to have a referendum, more or less on a whim, to break up the country is anathema to many people in Spain. Now, that said, if the opinion poll showed that there was a very solid, stable majority for independence in Catalonia or the Basque country, I think they would've a strong case for it. But that has never been the reality.

Larry Bernstein:

Let's next discuss Catalonia's independence movement. I am not sure that the English-speaking press picked up on the bizarre nature of the independence referendum. It was not sanctioned by the central government; in fact, it was illegal. There was a surprise vote over a weekend. Ballot boxes were hidden in France and then rushed clandestinely over the border right before the vote. The politicians in Madrid view the referendum as treasonous, and the leader of the Catalanian referendum is currently in exile. What is driving the Catalanian independence movement?

Michael Reid:

I try and analyze how it was that, in the words of one historian of Catalonia, a separatist minority became a multitude in favor of independence. I think there are several causes. One was clearly austerity. That was traumatized when the regional government, the mainstream Catalan nationalist party which was essentially a Christian Democrat party, was in favor of cutting public spending. Then there was a big protest in Catalonia. And they reversed course and embraced independence as a way of deflecting that public anger.

Then there was a series of political missteps, which had inflamed opinion, about whether Catalonia should have a new statute of independence going beyond the original one of the 1970s, which granted them a lot of autonomy. They've run their own police force, their own prisons, their own ports. That whole saga of the new statute was mishandled, and bits of it ended up being rejected years afterwards by the Supreme Court. And Catalonia had always been the most advanced region in Spain. The Catalan nationalists and bourgeoisie looked down on the rest of Spain as underdeveloped.

With the rest of Spain started catching up, the Madrid region has overhauled Catalonia in terms of income per head. That insecurity led to that mainstream moderate nationalist party in Catalonia becoming pro-independence and pledging to hold a referendum. The conservative central government of the time in Spain was very preoccupied with saving the financial system with austerity and trying to get the economy growing again. And made the mistake of ignoring all this for too long. It would've been better in hindsight to have attempted a negotiation. The Catalan regional government put forward 40 points, but it turned out they were only ever

interested in the first point, which was to be able to hold a legal referendum on independence. Well, that under the Constitution is not possible. So, you would've had to change the constitution. You could have perhaps found ways around that. But the Catalan Regional government decided to just press ahead regardless. They pushed through the Catalan Parliament a law to allow the referendum and to disconnect Catalonia from Spain and appoint their own judges and things like that in total violation of the Constitution.

Catalonia was divided right down the middle. Even though there was no verified count of this unofficial referendum, it didn't get a majority turnout. The Catalan regional government, their big hope was that Europe would support them. Nobody did. Nobody wanted a new state and a territorial dispute inside the European Union, which has enough problems. It was really a political failure for the nationalist movement in Catalonia, and they'd been trying to grapple with that ever since.

Larry Bernstein:

There are generally three different types of European governments: supra-national, national, and regional. In this example, there is the EU, Spain and Catalonia. And as the EU grows stronger, it undermines the nation-state, which allows the regional government to make a power-play. Scotland similarly wanted to be an independent country, and now Catalonia, but both found no ally in the EU, why was that?

Michael Reid:

In Europe, there are three levels of government in most countries. The European Union, the nation-states, and then the regions. Catalonia and the Basque country have more autonomy than anywhere else in the European Union.

What distinguishes them and what they have in common with Scotland is that they're regions which the political class in those areas think of themselves as nations and not regions. In both Catalonia and the Basque country, as in many parts of Europe in the 19th century, there was a phenomenon which Eric Hobsbawm the British historian called the invention of tradition. There was this creation of national myths and traditions. It was an era of nationalism. I don't think it follows that if you have a language and a particular culture, you have to have a nation state.

There are far more languages in the world than there are nation states. And the that if you have a language, you have to have a nation state, is essentially ethnic cleansing now. I think it's much more reasonable to think that that language and that culture deserved to be cherished and nourished and protected.

I'm very much with Amartya Sen, the British-Indian economist and philosopher, when he says that we all have multiple identities, and that nationalists tend to assert a single identity, and that

divides people rather than unites them. I don't think it's a formula for successful living together and progress and good government.

Larry Bernstein:

Next topic is the Spanish Civil War. Do Spanish historians evaluate their civil war differently than foreign historians?

Michael Reid:

The way it's usually seen abroad; it was a prelude to the Second World War. And it was an anti-fascist struggle for the left in Europe. But it was also a continuation of a century political battle between liberals and conservatives in Spain.

The Republican governments of the left and center introduced a fairly radical program of reform which was fairly normal in the rest of Europe including secularization, the reduction of the role and privileges of the Catholic Church, an attempt to modernize the army, and land reform in a country where there were large estates and a lot of rural poverty, more powers for trade unions, and regional autonomy in Catalonia and the Basque country. That was all resisted from the right. At the same time, the left contained on the one hand Democratic reformers, and on the other hand, a powerful anarchist movement and powerful trade unions and a small but growing communist party.

When a right-wing government was elected in 1933, they attempted an armed uprising, which was repressed by the Army, led by General Franco.

When the left was elected in 1936, against the background of rising tension and tit-for-tat killing, the army staged an uprising. It was a coup attempt and it didn't succeed all over Spain. And that turned into the Civil War, in which Hitler and Mussolini intervened to help Franco and the right and the Soviet Union intervened to help the Republic. Britain and France, the democracies, sat on their hands. The Civil War was long and bloody. And the Republican side had clear political legitimacy, but they didn't enjoy a monopoly of moral legitimacy.

There was terror on both sides. It was more extensive on the Franco side, mainly because he won. And he imposed a long dictatorship which was pretty repressive at the beginning. In his last 20 years, it became less repressive. It succeeded in economic development in Spain. Spain rather impressively moved from a middle-income country with a lot of inequality into a developed country with a large middle class. So, the way that Franco is seen in Spain is not quite the same as the way he is usually seen outside. He was a dictator. There's no doubt about that. But as part of that transition to democracy, there was a tacit agreement not to use the past as a political weapon in the present and that serves Spain quite well.

Larry Bernstein:

To me one of the surprising elements of the Spanish Civil War was the role of the Catholic Church. The left was anti-clerical and there was much violence and murders of local Spanish priests. The religious conservatives were outraged, and that was a critical catalyst for the coup and the civil war. I thought it was very interesting that when Franco later governed during his dictatorship, he gave the Catholic Church substantial power with respect to both social services and schools. The Church was very pleased with its position, but it represents a strange co-existence between the Church and state dictatorship.

Michael Reid:

The Catholic Church was historically always very powerful and very important in Spain. I mean, if one goes back to Isabella the Catholic Queen of the late 15th century who expelled the Jews and required Muslims to convert, she defined being Spanish and Catholicism as synonymous. The weight of the Catholic Church by the time of the 19th century bred a strong anti-clerical strand in Spanish society as well. And those two clashed in the runup to the Civil War. Indeed, Franco, when he won, the Second World War was just starting. He thought that Hitler and Mussolini were going to win the Second World War. And so, he aligned with them, but Franco was always a fascist of convenience rather than of conviction. When he realized that Hitler and Mussolini were going to lose the Second World War, he very quickly switched and started presenting himself as a Catholic figure, and then an anti-communist as the Cold War got underway.

The unofficial ideology of his regime became what was known as National Catholicism. His ruling coalition had several strands. There was the army, there was the party, which had originally been a small fascist party for which he turned into a regime political movement. And then there were the monarchists who were disappointed by Franco because they expected an early restoration of the monarchy. It only came when he died in 1975. And then there was the Catholic Church.

Larry Bernstein:

In 1975, Chevy Chase led-off the Saturday Night Weekend Update with the top story: "This breaking news just-in, Generalissimo Francisco Franco is still dead." You may recall that Garrett Morris from the NY School for the Hard of Hearing, would cup his hands around his mouth and shout the news as Chase read that announcement. Was Chevy Chase on SNL onto something. Is Francisco Franco still dead, or does his ghost walk the streets of Madrid?

Michael Reid:

That's a brilliant line from Saturday Night Live, because he was indeed a near mummy for the last years of his life and kept going because his regime depended on him. But I think it's important to say something about the way the transition happened in Spain because it was widely

seen as successful for a long time. In the last 15 years, it's been critiqued quite widely. There's this idea that it involved a pact of forgetting, which I think is a misnomer at least. There was an agreement between moderate sectors of the Franco regime who understood that Spain needed to join the European community, and to do that, it needed to become a democracy.

And on the other hand, the opposition, which had had many decades to reflect on what had gone wrong with the Republicans and the Civil War, had become much more pragmatic and much more moderate. The transition to democracy and embodied in the Constitution of 1978 involved a historic compromise in which the right accepted decentralization and reasonable autonomy. And the left accepted the restoration of the monarchy. And there was an amnesty so nobody would be prosecuted for political crimes. That amnesty was a demand of the left since the 1950s. It's now called a pact to forgetting. It wasn't, it was amnesty. Society has remembered copiously. Almost every week there'll be stories in the newspapers, there'll be documentaries, exhibitions about some aspect of the Civil War. And there was an agreement not to use the past as a political weapon in the present. It's come under fire from the left in the last 15 years, and you have now two laws. One called the Law of Historical Memory, which did do something important, it recognized that the state should help people whose relatives had been killed and had disappeared. Their bodies had disappeared in the Civil War because a lot were thrown into unmarked graves. The state should help to find them if they wanted that. This seems to me to be a basic democratic duty. It also required the removal of monuments to Franco.

The second law, which is more recent, I think is more troubling because it's an attempt to use the past as a political weapon against the right. And that is not the way to overcome the scars of the past that can only come through consensus and agreement. But one important thing has happened recently that Pedro Sanchez, the current Prime Minister, organized the disinterment of Franco from this state mausoleum. His body was moved to a private family grave in a cemetery in a military camp. That seems to me to be appropriate, but I think it would be a mistake if Spain continues to revive this notion of using the past as a political weapon.

Larry Bernstein:

The far-right party in Spain is the Vox, and their opponents call it fascist and the Franco Party. It seems to me that the Vox resembles the other right-wing parties in Europe. The Vox agrees with the Catholic Church on many social issues like abortion, divorce, and gay marriage, and they also oppose illegal immigration.

Michael Reid:

I agree. I mean, there are a few diehard Francistas, a few hundred turn up on his birthday and so forth. Vox is something very different. It has a few Francistas in its ranks, but it is a party very much in the mold of the contemporary European nationalist populist hard right. Its closest point of reference is the ruling parties in Poland and Hungary. Its breakthrough came in response to



Catalan separatism in response to the events of October, 2017. It was a reaction of Spanish nationalism, having been dormant, out of fear of the country breaking up. And that gave Vox a start.

One of Pedro Sanchez's achievements is to have taken the sting out of the Catalan conflict by pardoning the separatist leaders who were jailed for the illegal referendum in 2017. So, Vox has less traction, but it switched its attention to two other things. One is culture wars, the defense of traditional Catholic, very male Spanish culture: bull fighting, hunting, and so forth. And its opposition to what it says is illegal immigration. Vox is fading because those issues do not get it a huge amount of traction with the Spanish electorate, which is not terribly interested in cultural wars either of the left or the right and is on the whole quite favorable to immigration, which is a very recent phenomenon in Spain. Within the grandparents' generation in Spain, a lot of them were immigrants from the poverty of Franco, and went to work in other European countries. So that means the attitudes to immigration so far, and it may change, are more tolerant than in many other countries in Europe.

Larry Bernstein:

Let's get into the weeds on the topic of immigration into Spain, as it is very different population than the rest of Europe. There are four major groups: Latin Americans like refugees from Venezuela, Eastern Europeans like Romanians, Brits retiring in the sun, and Africans from Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa. These immigrant populations are very different?

Michael Reid:

Immigration really took off in this century, and it was because there was a construction boom in Spain, which coincided with economic difficulties in several Latin American countries. The first wave was very Latin American plus Romanians who share some religious, cultural and linguistic similarities with Spain plus North Africans. And those three groups tended to blend in fairly easily. And then you have the Brits who retire to the Spanish beaches, some of whom have returned because of Brexit. But what you will have much more in the future is immigration from Sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africans are obviously more visible. They have fewer cultural and linguistic similarities.

Larry Bernstein:

Do you expect trouble?

Michael Reid:

So far Spain has done pretty well. There may be a reaction against Sub-Saharan Africans. And then there is the second generation of immigrants. There was a terrorist incident in Catalonia in 2017, carried out by second generation immigrants who apparently were quite well integrated, but came under the influence of a radical Imam. That was a kind of warning that Spain is a long

way behind Britain in terms of the descendants of immigrants playing a full and prominent part in national life. Just look at the Spanish football team and the English football team, you can see the difference, or look at the current cabinet in Britain and Spain. There's no comparison.

Larry Bernstein:

There was a recent election in Spain on July 23rd. Before the election, the polls suggested that the Center-Right Party the PP would win with a coalition government. What happened?

Michael Reid:

I think Pedro Sanchez is, by some margin, the smartest national politician in Spain at the moment. By calling this snap election on the back of a bruising defeat for the left in a regional election, he threw the PP the mainstream conservative party off-balance. It had to negotiate regional governments with Vox. Sanchez calculated that that would throw Vox into the spotlight. And Alberto Nunez Feijoo, the leader of the PP, although he was pretty effective in one head-to-head debate with Sanchez, who's not a very good debater, made some big mistakes on the campaign. He failed to put the Vox issue to bed. It would've been wiser to have taken a tough line and sacrifice the chance of some regional governments by refusing to form coalitions with Vox.

That would've served him in the national election because Sanchez managed to turn fear of Vox into a big issue in the campaign. The second big mistake that Nunez made was to be too negative. He tried to turn the election into what he called a referendum on Sanchez instead of doing much more to project his own positive vision of why he wanted to govern Spain. And he made a big tactical mistake of refusing to take part in the second debate and that left Vox as the defender of the right. The PP is the largest party but because if it allies with Vox, nobody else will ally with it.

Larry Bernstein:

Why is this Spanish election important for understanding European politics generally? And what does it mean to have coalition parties with extremists from multiple fringe parties. This reminds me of the Knesset.

Michael Reid:

One is that the hard-right lost ground, the hard-left also lost ground. There is a partial restoration of the two-party system. The combined vote of the two main parties, the Socialists and the PP, which was over 80% as recently as 2008, went down to 49% in 2015, is back up to 66%.

It's relevant that you brought up Israel. You have a situation in Spain in which you have almost two-thirds voting for essentially moderate parties. Yet the extremes on both sides have considerable leverage in this less fragmented parliament. There are 12 parties now down from 18

in the previous parliament. And because of the depth of the left/right divide and the difficulty of bridging it, these groups on the extremes have considerable leverage. It will be interesting to see what happens because to form a new coalition government Sanchez needs the affirmative vote in parliament of the party of Carles Puigdemont, the fugitive Catalan separatist president. But his party's initial negotiating position is a referendum and amnesty and those are two things that Sanchez cannot grant.

Larry Bernstein:

Given that the two parties in the center have two-thirds of the delegates in the legislature, why don't they create a coalition and keep the communists, the hard-right and the separatists out?

Michael Reid:

Well, Nunez has been making precisely that point. Why don't you abstain to let me govern? I think grand coalitions are quite problematic that's certainly not in the Spanish tradition. They tend to have the effect of stimulating the extremes as it's starting to happen in Germany. But what a lot of Spaniards would like to see is some basic agreements between the two main parties on governance. But I go back to the lasting influence of the Civil War, and that the left/right divide is very hard to bridge. There was an attempt at a center party in Spain, and it failed. It's interesting because opinion polls show that most Spanish voters cluster in the middle on an ideological spectrum but they tend to be quite tribal. And power has shifted hands in Spain not because on the whole lots of voters have moved from one party to the other, but because the disillusioned supporters of the governing party have stayed at home, while the mobilized supporters of the party in opposition have turned out in large numbers. Will that change? It might, there's been a lot of muttering about the wouldn't it be good if the two main parties collaborated more, but it's not going to happen in the short-term.

Larry Bernstein:

I end each episode with a note of optimism. What are you optimistic about?

Michael Reid:

One is this partial restoration of the two-party system and the return of a moderate majority. Another is the fact that Vox is trying but failed to turn Spain into a less tolerant country. A third is that Spain continues to be a pretty good country to live in. And I would say it's a country in which most people live together fairly happily despite the polarization of the politicians, and it is a country that can continue to make economic progress provided it has sensible policies. It is a country with challenges, but not many enemies. And lastly, it's a country that considers the European Union to be very important for it, and that provides a safety belt against adventurers and irresponsibility.

Larry Bernstein:

Thanks Michael, for joining us today.

If you missed last week's show, check it out. The topic was the Ethics of Big Data. Our speaker was Dick De Veaux. Dick is the C. Carlisle and Margaret Tippit Professor of Statistics at Williams College. I was Dick's student at Wharton in his Statistics 1 class in 1985. I loved Dick's class because he effectively used storytelling to interest his students in statistics.

At Princeton, Dick won the Lifetime Achievement Award for Exceptional Dedication and Excellence in Teaching.

Dick discussed the problems with big data and the algorithms that we interact with each day in finance like with credit card and mortgage applications as well as with crime prevention and parole boards.

I now want to make a plug for next week's show Barbie is the Bomb! I loved the new movie which is now a cultural phenomenon. Global tickets have already exceeded \$800mm and is rising. I am going to have two speakers about the movie. First, I want to take the comedy seriously and our guest will be Kay Hymowitz from the Manhattan Institute and the author of the book Manning Up: How the Rise of Women has Turned Men into Boys. I want to hear from Kay about the battle of the sexes in both Barbieland and the Real World. Then we will hear from the What Happens Next film critic Darren Schwartz about why the movie is so funny and entertaining.

You can find our previous episodes and transcripts on our website [whathappensnextin6minutes.com](http://whathappensnextin6minutes.com). Please subscribe to our weekly emails and follow us on Apple Podcasts or Spotify.

Thank you for joining me, good-bye.