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EXHUMING FRANCO: POLARIZATION IN THE DEBATE OVER HISTORICAL MEMORY  
IN CONTEMPORARY SPANISH POLITICS

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By Steph Gardiner

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion  
Of the Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies  
Croft Institute for International Studies  
Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College  
The University of Mississippi

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this thesis, I examine political media to show the different ways that the Spanish right and the left have framed historical memory about Franco. In Chapter 2, I give an overview of the development of the HML and political reactions to the law. I then look at the progression of the law's goals under the leadership of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy in Chapter 3, and in how the law was utilized in exhuming Franco, referenced in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 showcases, through quantitative and qualitative data, the overall relationship of how changing historical memory through exhumation elicited reactions from different political parties and impacted political polarization. Lastly, Chapter 6 provides information regarding the current manifestation of the historical memory debate throughout the Democratic Memory Law, and a more comprehensive look over the relationship between historical memory and polarization in Spain. Overall, I compare the difference between the framing and reception of the 2007 Historical Memory Law in comparison to the Democratic Memory Law of 2020. Both pieces of legislation pertain to historical memory of the dictatorship under Franco. However, the first law in 2007 elicited relatively neutral reactions from the political right and left while the second law was much more contentious and divisive. My thesis explores these laws as well as several key developments in between their drafting. This helps to show how Spanish politics have become more divided over the question of historical memory.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The day is April 28th, 2021. Security teams from *Correos*, the Spanish postal service, intercept a letter addressed to former Socialist Party Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Inside the envelope are three things: a belligerent letter and two bullets. Unfortunately, the threatening package filled with ammunition is not a one off case, as at least five other high-level officials receive similar threats.

These letters are small manifestations of a long-standing conflict in Spain centered around the memory of Francisco Franco. At the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939, Franco became the dictator of Spain and held his position for 36 years until he notably “died in bed”. The dictator’s totalitarian aspirations “led to harsh repression” throughout the country and he faced no successful opposition until after his death (Gunter 2000). Since then, Spain has been a deeply divided country, in part because of the disagreements between those in support of Franco, those who wish to allow his image to fade into memory, and those who condemn him. These divisions widened over the years following Franco’s death, when the legacy of the dictator was not addressed within the Spanish political sphere. As a result of *el pacto de olvido*, or “the pact of forgetting”, a norm was put into place so as to reject public deprecation of Franco in forgetting the tragedies caused by the regime. This pact led to harbored resentment towards the Spanish government’s neutrality on the subject of Franco and ultimately paved the way for legislation about historical memory.

In 2007, Spain passed the Historical Memory Law (HML), which formally denounced Franco’s regime and legislatively condemned the use of the Valley of the Fallen, a mausoleum where Franco’s body was buried, for political demonstrations and worship. This law set a precedent in the progression of debates and laws surrounding historical memory for Spain but

elicited relatively neutral reactions in comparison debates in recent years. While the Historical Memory Law did not specifically address exhumation and relocation of Franco's remains, the Commission of Experts on the Future of the Valley of the Fallen called for his exhumation nearing the end of Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's term in 2011.

Throughout the years following the passing of the HML, there were many shifts within the Spanish political sphere that I attribute to growing polarization. Elections in 2011 resulted in a transition from a left leaning prime minister associated with the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party or PSOE) to a right leaning prime minister from the *Partido Popular* (People's Party or PP). Both parties represent the general political left and right respectively in Spain. Following the transition to Prime Minister Rajoy (aligned with the PP), little progress was carried out on the HML. This stalemate in the exhumation process moved up to the Supreme Court in Spain under the succeeding PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's term. With the Valley of the Fallen being a reminder of the brutality towards opposition of the Franco regime, the location has been a controversial placement for Franco's remains. In spite of the heavy pushbacks in the name of preserving historical memory and pleas from the Franco family, the court decided to move Franco's remains to Mingorrubio, a private cemetery, on September 24, 2019. In the lead up to the court's decision, transitions of power and developments of extremist parties changed the symbolic meaning of exhumation in the context of historical memory.

Within this thesis, I use common terms that need to be defined in the context of my research. Historical memory, in general, pertains to the ways that groups of people construct an identity with specific narratives of periods of time or specific events. In most cases, culture and national struggles heavily define what historical memory means for specific groups. For Spain,

I've found that historical memory is typically referred to in the context of Franco's legacy. For this thesis, I define the term in the Spanish context as "a complex and multi-faceted push to reassess the sordid and controversial past of the Spanish civil war and Franco dictatorship" (Crumbaugh 2011). The legacy of Franco is characterized by the heavy bouts of violence, oppression, and mass graves of those killed in the civil war in its controversy. Justice for these victims and their families is one of the many goals of certain governments in reassessing this sordid past and rewriting historical memory. My research suggests that this process amplifies levels of polarization in Spain.

Political polarization, more standardly, refers to ideological affiliation with increasingly more liberal or conservative views on the political spectrum, moving further towards one pole and away from the opposing views. In the context of this thesis, polarization will be shown in the emergence of extremist left and right leaning parties, as well as more prominent political media reactions. The extremist parties I will observe are *Podemos* (We Can or UP) as a far-left example and *Vox* (Voice or VP) as the far right. Their emergence in Spanish politics showed more polarization within the country and their actions, like the threatening letters, demonstrate an extreme dedication to their stances on historical memory

Additionally, I show that the exhumation of Franco is one of the central polarizing issues at stake in recent Spanish debates about historical memory. Exhumation, within the context of this project, will often refer to that of Franco's remains; however, when the broader conversation of justice for victims is referenced, other exhumations will be briefly mentioned. As a symbolic driver for changing historical memory, I show that the exhumation of Franco represented the government's attempts at delayed justice for those who suffered under the dictatorship. The

process of exhuming Franco and the linked debate over the laws that define historical memory have and continue to contribute to a greater polarization within contemporary Spanish politics.

This thesis traces the immediate reactions to exhumation and shows how the debates over historical memory have carried on and shifted the trajectory of the Democratic Memory Law (DML), a bill currently being processed in Congress. This bill, much like the HML, is one of few memory policy statements that furthers the condemnation of Franco and his legacy and strives to achieve more comprehensive justice for the victims. In contrast to its predecessor, I show that the DML has elicited stronger, more overt political reactions in the media. By showing the changing reactions to the legislation, the meaning of the exhumation has contributed to more inflammatory and polarized reactions regarding historical memory of the country.

In this thesis, I examine political media to show the different ways that the Spanish right and the left have framed historical memory about Franco. In Chapter 2, I give an overview of the development of the HML and political reactions to the law. I then look at the progression of the law's goals under the leadership of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy in Chapter 3, and in how the law was utilized in exhuming Franco, referenced in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 showcases, through quantitative and qualitative data, the overall relationship of how changing historical memory through exhumation elicited reactions from different political parties and impacted political polarization. Lastly, Chapter 6 provides information regarding the current manifestation of the historical memory debate throughout the Democratic Memory Law, and a more comprehensive look over the relationship between historical memory and polarization in Spain. Overall, I compare the difference between the framing and reception of the 2007 Historical Memory Law in comparison to the Democratic Memory Law of 2020. Both pieces of legislation pertain to historical memory of the dictatorship under Franco. However, the first law in 2007 elicited



relatively neutral reactions from the political right and left while the second law was much more contentious and divisive. My thesis explores these laws as well as several key developments in between their drafting. This helps to show how Spanish politics have become more divided over the question of historical memory.

My research contains analysis of primary data, including comparing statistics and analyzing changes in the dataset. My primary sources consist of the data from CIS Public opinion surveys, specifically at changes in voter statistics and changes in the development of political parties. The CIS data I will focus on comes from the March, October, and December Barometers from 2019, the latter of which has a section regarding the rationale behind people changing who they voted for and how that pertains to Franco's exhumation. I also am using secondary sources from journalism published in left wing and right wing media outlets/sources/journals as a qualitative means of explaining these changes. The main news sources I will use are *La Razón*, a widely accepted right-leaning news source, and *Público*, the left-leaning counterpart. With articles from these sources, I will show how the stronger, more polarized reactions came to fruition based on the changes of the symbolic value of exhumation. More specifically, I utilize changes in language in media from 2007 to 2021 to explain why as a result of Franco's exhumation, the approach of historical memory became more widely contested and the political sphere became more polarized.

## **Chapter 2: The Historical Memory Law of 2007**

In order to set up a framework for the debates over historical memory, the introductory bookend of this thesis is the Historical Memory Law, also recognized as Law 52/2007. Passed on December 26th, 2007, the HML was one of the first legislative steps for Spain in changing the historical memory of Francisco Franco's dictatorship. Following the dictator's death in 1975, the country abided by a "pact of forgetting and a bipartisan amnesty to all the crimes of its dictator" (Deshmukh and Parekh 2020). This pact stalled the direct confrontation of the legacy of Franco in the political sphere, which led to people feeling unheard, specifically those striving for justice. While this agreement was meant to appease Spanish political parties from discussing Franco's legacy, the proliferation of historical memory movement groups meant that the neutral stance on collective memory of the dictatorship could no longer go unaddressed. As a result, the government needed to take a stance either to publicly condemn Franco and achieve justice for the victims of the dictatorship or prohibit the denigration of the dictator.

Under PSOE Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the Spanish government was able to utilize majority support to establish a stance in condemning Franco. The left-leaning government used legislation and created investigative committees in response to the movements' complaints. Being Prime Minister from 2004 to 2011, Zapatero worked diligently to redirect the pact of forgetting held by the dictatorship, in pioneering a law to begin changing the historical memory of Franco. As one of the first to take a different approach to historical memory, Zapatero had to capitalize on the dissatisfaction of the left-leaning voters and the complacency of the right-wing parties in order to pass more progressive legislation.

In drafting the HML, the Prime Minister's intent was to use more broad and general claims and clauses in order to have the highest probability of passing. Within the language of the

HML, the use of more neutral and open clauses acts as an umbrella for varied applications. The ample room for interpretation became increasingly important for later prime ministers in carrying out the exhumation of Franco, as backed legislatively by the HML. The three sections of the law I will use for analysis and comparative data in this thesis are the Introduction, the Explanation of Reasons, and Article 16: Valley of the Fallen.

Primarily, the law serves to “recognise and broaden rights and to establish measures in favour of those who suffered persecution or violence during the Civil War and the Dictatorship” (Nizkor 2008). This preface condemns the regime, which while seemingly obvious, was monumental in the development of historical memory as it established a new precedent. After remaining neutral over involvement in memory of the dictatorship, the government, in addressing the persecution of those against Franco, took steps towards achieving justice for said victims. These steps established a solid foundation for changing historical memory in the government.

Following suit in the Explanation of Reasons, the law dictates that it adopts “the condemnation of Francoism contained in the Report of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe signed in Paris on 17th March 2006 which denounced the serious human rights violations which were committed in Spain between 1939 and 1975” (Nizkor 2008). Likewise, this section of the document declares the condemnation of Franco and addresses the human rights abuses that occurred during the dictator’s regime. This statement was controversial as these offenses went previously unaddressed for decades in national political institutions. As a whole, this section of the HML marks the beginning of a more open conversation regarding the dictatorship’s legacy in Spanish politics. The Explanation of Reasons also demonstrates how

historical memory would be changed through achieving justice for the victims of the Franco regime in exhuming the dictator from the Valley of the Fallen.

The specific section of the law that mentions Franco's legacy at his burial place is Article 16: Valley of the Fallen. The Valley of the Fallen is a monument located outside of Madrid and was constructed through forced labor from the dictatorship's opposition. The mausoleum was meant to serve as a final resting place for those who died in the Civil War, as well as the resting place for Franco's remains. Admittedly one of the shortest sections within the law, the article contains two clauses:

***Artículo 16. Valle de los Caídos (Article 16. Valley of the Fallen).***

- 1. The Valley of the Fallen shall be governed strictly by laws of general application governing places of worship and public cemeteries.*
- 2. In no part of the grounds can any acts be carried out which are political in nature or which tend to extol the Civil War; its protagonists or Francoism.*

In the context of this thesis, the second clause provides more context as to how the HML spurred the exhumation of Franco. In prohibiting political acts at the Valley of the Fallen, the government redirected historical memory and changed the symbolic value placed upon the monument. As stated in clause two of article sixteen of the HML, for acts at Franco's burial place, apoliticality is mandated. The glorification and symbolism promoting the legacy of the dictator are prohibited. This mandate was monumental, as the Valley of the Fallen had become a shine to victory for the *franquistas*, or supporters of Franco. In rewriting the symbolic value and prohibiting expressions of glorification at the monument, the lawmakers dismantled the

complacency from the pact of forgetting and directed historical memory towards fulfilling justice for the victims of the regime.

While the second clause does not explicitly call for the exhumation of Franco's remains from the monument, its wording was eventually used to justify the movement for exhumation. As a result of the almost quarter million visitors annually, some of which come to praise Franco's legacy, there have been many violations of Article 16 (León 2015). In particular, the physical presence of Franco's remains have a great symbolic significance for his supporters, in how their place at the Valley of the Fallen is a token to remembering his legacy. The symbolic meaning, as it relates to the journeys people take in remembrance of Franco and his glorified legacy, heavily extols Francoism. However, the success of the law can be partially attributed to the conditions under which it was formed, like the political leaning of the government and the complacency. Due to the left-leaning ideological beliefs of the Prime Minister, the law was consistent with the views of the majority-left Congress of the deputies, setting a precedent for reformed historical memory legislation.

The reactions of both the political right and left in Spain to the passing of the HML provide a base of comparison for reactions to the exhumation of Franco. The political left highly valued the passing of the HML to change historical memory in delivering symbolic justice for victims of the dictatorship, as the law went against the long-standing precedent of the pact of forgetting. While the law was not used for political action in the years following its passage, it became more important to the overall conversation of historical memory when it was used to justify Franco's exhumation. This study will analyze *Público* and *La Razón* because the general consensus is that they are the most left and right leaning news sources, respectively, in Spain. As mentioned previously, when the bill passed *Público* and *La Razón*'s reporting was fact-based,

less opinionated. For instance, in an article titled *La Comisión Constitucional del Congreso aprueba el proyecto de Ley de Memoria Histórica* (The Constitutional Commission of Congress approves the draft Law on Historical Memory), Público utilizes a neutral voice for general comments while also having commentary from members of both the PP and the PSOE speak on the law (EFE 2007). In contrast, now these newspapers feature opinion-driven articles meant to criticize the other party. These opinion-driven articles will be analyzed more thoroughly in later chapters, but some include perspectives from more extreme political figures and more antagonizing language (EFE 2019b; Ortega 2019).

Because the idea of exhumation was not a prospect for the passing of this law, the symbolic value of Franco for the right was not threatened by the passing. Although the party was not in favor of the law, because it went against the pact of forgetting, the reaction was not as extreme because there were not tangible changes. The left applauded following the law's passing, which is an action not permitted in the Congress of the Deputies after the law passed (Cué 2007). This action demonstrates how monumental the HML's passage was for the political left and the symbolic start it meant in a larger process of achieving justice. In changing historical memory while not being radical in demands for change, the left was able to push through a progressive law and not encounter high levels of public criticism from the right, as shown through a neutral media response. Apart from the domestic response to the law, the international community felt as though the law did not do enough nor did it set a strong enough precedent for further progress in redefining the historical memory of the dictator's legacy in Spain. However, this international reaction can be used to further explain the levels of polarization between the left and the right in Spain later on.

Another aspect of this law that is important to note is how PSOE Prime Minister Zapatero set up commissions to retain the progress being made by the law prior to his successor, which hints to the structure of the Spanish government. This shows how if another party holds power after their opposition, they can undermine and dismantle progress on decisions with ease, a common occurrence for most western European democracies. To protect the long term goals of the HML, Zapatero established “a commission to review the future of the Valley of the Fallen, the massive underground basilica built to honor those who died for the Fascist victory” correspondingly named the Expert Commission for the Future of the Valley of the Fallen, or the ECFVOF (Minder 2011). This committee was utilized to retain the goals set forth in the HML and protect further progress, in spite of right-wing parties’ changes following the socialist government’s run in office and reinforced the left-wing parties’ commitment to changing historical memory. In this way, the left was able to inhibit future opposing governments from dismantling the progress made by the HML and continue the progress on changing historical memory.

### **Chapter 3: The Rise of Extremist Parties**

Following polls dropping due to a prolonged economic crisis, Prime Minister Zapatero made the decision to step out of the race in 2011. This cleared the way for the election of the PP Leader Mariano Rajoy. Generally speaking, due to their differing political affiliations, Rajoy and Zapatero's approaches to historical memory in Spain varied greatly. While Zapatero made progress in terms of changing the direction of historical memory and establishing progressive reform regarding the legacy of Franco, Rajoy, in line with right wing ideology, created a political environment that made progress stagnant. Prior to being elected, many knew Rajoy for his disdain for the HML. He became famous for saying "The Historical Memory Law serves absolutely no purpose whatsoever. I have no interest at all in seeing it passed" and after the HML's passing prior to his term, it was expected that he would do little to further the progress of the law (Francesc 2011). Generally speaking, Rajoy paid little mind to the reforms by his predecessor and attempted to limit the span of the HML.

Throughout his time as Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy vowed to "not give even one public euro" towards efforts regarding memory, specifically in carrying out the HML (Junquera 2013). This promise meant an attempt to regress back to the pact of forgetting, by keeping intact the memory of Franco's nationalist Spain as that of pride and honor. More blatantly, the dedication to the pact was shown through the prolonged stance on the privacy of the historical documents, like government and military archives regarding the true capacity of the consequences of the Franco regime (Venturi 2015). Due to the lack of accessibility of these documents to the public, journalists, and others, Rajoy unintentionally in part caused shifts in public opinion. He also saw the fervor in which people began to demand information and move away from more centralized political stances. By following his political party's predecessors in



“arguing that the pact of forgetting that enabled Spain’s return to democracy ought to be respected”, Rajoy upheld the traditionally conservative ideals in not allowing the HML to progress (Jones 2021). Contrary to his attempts, his inaction within the realm of the law only spurred polarized political movements in Spain, having adverse effects to retaining the “Old Spain”. Historical memory movements saw growing memberships, both for those advocating for the revocation of the HML, but also for those in support of furthering the changes made to historical memory. Those in favor of the HML continued looking for more progress towards rewriting Franco's legacy. In either case, Rajoy’s stagnant attitude towards the HML is partially what led to further political polarization in the context of the debate of historical memory in Spain (Humphrey 2014). His attitude and the effects are important to note when looking at the final days of Rajoy’s term, where he adhered to his party’s wishes in attempting to revert to a stage of forgetting.

As mentioned previously, in combination with other factors within global political movements as a whole, Rajoy’s lack of progression of the HML elicited more polarized sentiments. In turn, his inaction contradicted his party’s desire to maintain a unified Spanish nationalist pride. During Rajoy’s term, the European political environment began to emit a wider variety of public reactions to events, thus resulting in more extremist movements and responses. Due to the fragmentation of the nations’ politics around Spain, the continued movements translated into the emergence of further extremist parties in the form of VP in 2013 and UP in 2014. These parties, in relation to historical memory, further polarized contemporary Spanish politics on the issue in how they reacted to the HML.

Beginning with the party first formed, *Vox*, meaning “voice” in latin, was founded in 2013 with the driving ideas of “anti-immigration measures, ‘law and order’, the defence of

Spanish nationalism, and traditional conservatism” being the most valued focuses of the party’s platform (Santana etc. 2021). The party intended on serving further right platforms under a less right-wing oriented party in power, and was created with the interest of preserving more nationalist priorities in the contents of the historical memory debate. Well known for being modern day advocates of Franco’s positive legacy, VP prides itself on honoring Franco and revitalizing nationalism that Spain has lost as a result of the HML and advocates for the return to the pact of forgetting as well. Part of the reason for the formation of the party in the context of the HML was the sentiments the further right wing followers had that the left-wing government under Zapatero was rewriting the prideful historical memory of Franco, when Spain had the most nationalist-based unification and this law was a significant detriment to Spanish modern national pride. Within the recent years, there have been underlying ties to show the support of the Franco regime and even more overt ones being Santiago Abascal, leader of the VP party, explicitly condemning the PSOE, saying that “Life was better under Franco” (De Blas 2020). Literally, Franco still acts as an inspiration policy wise for VP and symbolically, his legacy of unifying the country (albeit based upon force and the exaltation of those who countered him) under a nationalist front are influences in the aspirations of the party to bring that environment back. VP actively to this day denounces the HML based upon the negative impact it has on progressing away from the prideful nationlist Spain Franco built and have active campaigns to limit progress and try to inhibit the effects of the law from becoming more widespread. Due to the already right-wing conditions VP was founded under in the Spanish government, the party really did not start drawing attention until 2018 and 2019 and therefore, media outlets on the left do not acknowledge the party’s standing nor how it related to historical memory at the time; however, through the lens of Público, one of only two left-leaning media outlets in Spain, we can observe

the initial fractures that progressed in to deep rooted polarization later on with their observations of the PP. The publication has actively criticized the Rajoy regime in allowing the formation of more right-wing causes and condemned the government for doing nothing but breaching the HML, intended to assist in the development of Spain into a more transparent and accountable state (Europa Press 2013). While not a blatant expression of polarization, the criticism of the government for its lack of action serves as an initial reaction to the development of more right-leaning initiatives and thus acts as a base for further political polarization upon the growth of VP within its span of influence.

Being created with the intent of representing more extreme left-leaning interests in the Spanish government, UP had a similar reaction to the international community upon the HML's passing and believed that the changes made were not substantial enough and that more active conversations needed to occur to create more movement and clearly dictate change. Founded on the basis of combating inequality and corruption, UP called to light many of the hindering actions of the Rajoy regime and similar to other left-wing movements, moved towards the condemnation of past nationalist regimes from the 20th century. Even in its earliest days, UP elicited negative reactions from more right wing media outlets, specifically La Razón. Upon a proposal in 2015 to remove the church from the Valley of the Fallen and remove Francoist symbols so as to neutralize the site to make it a historical memory museum, right-wing outlets began to react more adamantly against these plans. The language used in order to reject the more extreme left platform included saying that the plans "symbolize contempt for the regime" and used expressions like the "radical proposal" in order to villainize UP as a whole (Rojo 2015). Here, a significant change can be seen from previous media interactions, going from more subtle differences between parties to more overt, almost aggressive language, symbolizing an increase

in political polarization in regards to discussions of historical memory and attempts to shift the discussion about Franco's legacy. While there was not advertent suppression in the exchange of these more left-wing ideals, the PP under the leadership of Rajoy was laced with "institutionalized corruption" (LLC 2018). Many believe there was low levels of censorship in the media regarding historical memory and so while there is some information antagonizing the right for lack of progress, it is not nearly as abundant as the criticisms of the left by Spanish media outlets. In all, the formation of UP in reaction to the lack of action done to further the impact of the HML under Mariano Rajoy's term serves as a high degree of symbolic separation from the central left and continual polarization from the central and far right on the Spanish political spectrum.

In some of the final legislative acts of Rajoy during his term, he vetoed a reform of the HML, in which media and PSOE reactions furthered the conversation of exhumation and their adamant calls for reform further exacerbated the underlying tensions in the Spanish political sphere. The proposed bill in question was meant to promote the "withdrawal of Franco's symbols, create a national DNA bank to identify the victims of the Franco regime or the exhumation of the remains of the dictator of the Valley of the Fallen" (Prensa Latina 2018). This bill is one of the first outright expressions of the desire for the physical exhumation of Franco's remains that we see documented, explaining how the lack of progress under Rajoy's term up to this point has inspired more polarized politics surround historical memory and an added symbolic meaning of Franco's remains in left-wing platforms. Due to UP and the far-left in Spain being tied to European movements countering nationalist dictators legacies, and the prospect that "no other European country would allow a dictator to be buried in an altar" serves as rationale for the change in symbolic value of Franco for the left, further differing from the

center and right (Prensa Latina 2018). Justified by Rajoy in the fact that there was no government funding to allow for the passing of the bill and meeting the demands of the proposal, the veto further pushed the left-wing parties, specifically UP, away from the center of the political spectrum and polarized their ideas more to make certain of their proposal succeeding. In a larger sense, through Prime Minister Rajoy's inhibition of the stretch of the HML and the inherently more polarized European political climate, the debate over historical memory became more contested and in part, caused higher levels of political polarization.

#### **Chapter 4: The Process of Exhuming Franco**

Towards the end of Mariano Rajoy's term, there was an aforementioned bout of institutionalized corruption within his regime as well as an abundance of recorded involvements in scandals. As a result, there was a vote of no confidence that ousted Rajoy as Prime Minister. In addition to the increasing geopolitical tensions spurring from independence movements in the autonomous regions of Spain and other divisive concerns, the prospect of further political alignment divisions began to bring light to the corrupt PP.

While in the span of this project autonomous region independence movements are not the focus, it is important to note that Catalan independence movements supported a vote of no confidence for Rajoy and expressed their support for candidate Pedro Sanchez, who conversely was a member of the PSOE advocating heavily for changes to historical memory. During his contestation, Rajoy publicly denounced the unification of the different parties and movements in saying that "running a government with this kind of support is not viable and [Sanchez] knows it" (Pais 2018). While parties from different sides would be unlikely to unify under a sole cause or vote, the fragmentation caused by Rajoy's term and lack of action was enough of a purpose for differing interests to be put aside in order for a new wave of change. Like mentioned prior, in spite of being associated with the right, Rajoy allowed the HML to persist in its existence, allowing for changes to be called for as he made no movement to dismantle the legislation and therefore turned away support from far-right supporters and even some members of his own party. As a result of his negligence to do anything in the realm of historical memory in conjunction with the scandals he faced, Rajoy was ousted and replaced with PSOE leader Pedro Sanchez, who completely changed the direction of historical memory in Spain with more overt

actions and movement to change the conversation regarding Franco. An important note throughout the vote of no confidence was the lack of precedent that the vote held and as a result of this un navigated transition, there were some destabilizing effects that amplified the high levels of polarization already present in the political sphere.

Upon his election, Sanchez made numerous amounts of promises upon his platform, the most notable in this project being the affirmed plans to exhume and relocate Franco's body as well as reroute funding from other government projects to exhume the victims in the Valley of the Fallen to understand the impact and deliver justice and peace to the families of those who died (Minder 2018). In this way, he promised a reformed commitment to historical memory and promoted the more left-leaning policies of his organization, thus gaining the support of UP while also furthering the gap between the left and right parties (PSOE 2018). While Zapatero set up the institutions in order to begin the change, his actions were more neutral due to the climate of his time in office and conversely, Sanchez took advantage of the state Spain was in with the heightened tensions and the heavy fragmentation in order to be proactive and make the changes he saw necessary, that had been discussed since Franco was initially laid to rest in the Valley of the Fallen. With historical memory being ignored under Rajoy, it is important to emphasize the significance of the timing and environment that allowed for such big promises to be made an executed because both sides wanted change and immediately after uniting, Sanchez was able to maneuver the situation in the way of changing historical memory with little to no initial backlash. The transition of power between Rajoy and Sanchez, albeit not the most seamless, was an environment that utilized the brief unification of multiple parties based on their polarized ideology from a right wing centrist in order to continue the agenda of altering historical memory, specifically the symbolic meaning of the exhumation of Franco.

While many different factors in relation to fragmentations in the demographics of Spain can be attributed in some way to political polarization, even international sources and platforms acknowledge the heavy tensions created through the historical memory debates within the nation. Shortly following the transition of power, many sources looked towards the rise of an even deeper rooted polarization, saying that “Spain has long been bitterly divided about whether to stir the bones of its past, but the dispute has intensified since 2018” (Minder 2020). This ongoing debate has plagued policymakers in Spain since Franco’s passing and in spite of other factors attributing to political polarization, historical memory sits at the forefront, specifically following Sanchez being elected as Prime Minister. With the conversation of exhumation being brought forth on the political stage in a baltant way through the unofficial platform of Sanchez, the degree of polarization grew in the early days following the election (Welle 2018).

In spite of a prolonged judicial process, combining opinions of the Franco family as well as the increasing pressure for a decision to be made, the Spanish Supreme Court made the decision to approve the exhumation of Franco’s remains and replace them in a private family cemetery outside of Madrid on September 24th, 2019. The brevity in the conclusion of the court session was vital to the exhumation of Franco and the development of historical memory away from the dictator’s legacy because it lessened the immediate levels of contestation and polarization; however, these effects were only deferred, as the high levels of polarization only went on to grow as a result.

As one might be able to imagine, the decision and exhumation as a whole, as they both happened within months of one another, sparked fervent reactions from a wide variety of parties, furthering the political polarization already present. Leader of VP, Santiago Abascal, had an immediate reaction saying that “The Socialist [election] campaign begins: profaning tombs,



disinterring hatreds, questioning the legitimacy of the monarchy”, essentially explaining how the actions of exhumation and the implementation of the HML in exhuming Franco were hugely destabilizing to the then government of Spain at the highest officials point, the king (Dombey 2019). While center-right officials refrained from more intense reactions, following a “not wanting to re open old wounds” mentality the PP had held for decades, the far-right parties held a high disdain for the decision, with Ciudadanos, a right wing party in between PP and VP, believing that “Sánchez has spent a year playing with his bones to divide [them] into [Republican] reds and [Falangist] blues” (Dombey 2019). Knowing the stance of Ciudadanos and their statement that most Spaniards are disinterested in the reformation of historical memory speaks volumes on the degree of polarization between even the far-right and the moderate right in Spain. Most people within the country acknowledge the divisive nature of the conflict and thus understand the high levels of polarization on the national political spectrum.

The reaction of the far-left, similar to reactions to previous decisions, was that while any progress is good progress, there was some disappointment in the extent of change as well as some manifestations of the legacy of Franco occurring among government officials. During the exhumation itself, leader of UP Pablo Iglesias mentioned that it appeared to be a “democratic shame to see members of the armed forces square themselves in the body of a dictator”, meaning that the harbored admiration and pride held of Franco by members of the Spanish population had not been fled (LLC 2019). The deep rooted sentiments of nationalist pride being attributed greatly to Franco’s regime heavily impacts those involved in the armed forces specifically and while the exhumation occurred according to the agenda of the left, this concept was only a part of changing historical memory in Spain. A recurring theme within the Spanish political sphere is the concept that one step in an elongated process meant to be rather centrist only divides both

sides of the political spectrum further. As a result of the exhumation alone, the far-right and the far-left become even more polarized, with their expectations not being met on either side of totality, whether that be retention of Franco's legacy on the right or dismantling and rebranding historical memory completely for the far-left. While the legacy of Franco is ineradicable, the far-left had the expectation of doing more to rewrite the historical memory and after seeing the lingering effects and the wide span of reactions in relation to the exhumation, officials wanted further changes to be made, which led to the development of the Democratic Memory Law. In Franco's exhumation, historical memory changed in steps towards receiving justice for the victims of the dictatorship and further condemning the regime. As a result of these changes, the debate over historical memory and an accomplishment by the left in exhuming Franco amplified further levels of polarization between the Spanish political right and left.

## **Chapter 5: Reactions to Exhumation and Initial Polarization**

### **Voting and Exit Poll Responses**

Similarly to the reactions prior to the physical relocation of Franco's remains, the political reactions to the changing of historical memory following October 24th, 2019 were increasingly aggressive and in support of more polarized ideals rather than reflecting more center-leaning party statements. These reactions manifest themselves in a variety of forms, providing a wide base of reactions to interpret for understanding the levels of polarization more clearly. Within the constraints of this chapter, the reactions to the exhumation and the data regarding initial polarization will be interpreted from changes in votes from 2018 to 2019, as well as changes in statistics from political barometers from the Center for Social Investigations, being those from March, October, and December of 2019.

To better understand the implications of polarizations as a result of the exhumation, it is necessary to contextualize the surrounding political environment. Due to the timing of the exhumation, being in the late fall of 2019, the event fell only weeks prior to the Cortes Generales election on November 10th 2019 (Pais 2019). While this election was held in order to determine the representatives within the Congress of Deputies, the changes we can observe from the 2018 to 2019 elections and the compositions of the legislative body demonstrate the amplified levels of polarization within the state, in part due to the exhumation and conversation of historical memory. Within the span of the Spanish political sphere and the majority of political party identifications, there are five in which most Spaniards identify with. These parties are identified as such:

*VOX* : Far-right

*Partido Popular* : Right-wing/ center-right

*Ciudadanos* : Center-right

*Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol* : center-left

*Podemos* : Far-left

While there are other parties represented in the Spanish National Congress and Senate, these five parties make up an overwhelming majority of the seats in Congress and thus have the largest say in the decisions being made. In 2018, out of the 350 seats in the Congress of the Deputies, the PSOE held 123 seats, the PP 66 seats, Ciudadanos 57 seats, UP 42 seats, and VP 24 seats (Pais 2019). Due to the negative impacts of PP associated with Prime Minister Rajoy's lack of actions all around, specifically historical memory, the newly developed extremist parties had begun to grow, fostering some support. Additionally, the PSOE was strongly supported due to the vote of no confidence against Rajoy and the imposition of Prime Minister Sanchez, thus why the representation of the party held a majority during this time period. In the following year, as depicted by the distribution of seats from the 2019 November vote, the PSOE held 120 seats, the PP 89 seats, Ciudadanos 10 seats, UP 35 seats, and VP 52 seats. These numbers and the developments seen over the year of the exhumation process and exhumation depict the changing political climate and specifically the significance of historical memory to party affiliation. While the PSOE encountered a small decrease (three seats), UP endured further losses, with seven seats being lost, and Ciudadanos losing 47 total seats, bringing their representation down to 10 seats. Conversely, the PP saw an increase in 23 seats and VP with 28, demonstrating a movement towards more extreme right-wing parties from the center of the political spectrum. In these

changes, we can observe a significant movement from the center right (Ciudadanos) with a heavy loss to other more polar oriented parties, with VP having the highest percentage of gains in representation. Within the year of Sanchez being in office and making as many gains as possible with his progressive administration to alter the historical memory in exhuming Franco, there was a quantifiable shift in Congressional representation based on how Spaniards voted. These votes, as described, represent a movement towards more right-wing parties generally, but also bigger movements away from center-right parties and further towards the more extreme right parties, also demonstrating higher degrees of political polarization, more so for the political right.

Shortly following the physical exhumation process being executed by the government, the general elections were concluded, where exit polls were held in order to capture an image of the changed political landscape. Through observing the changes in political barometers, specifically the March pre-election barometer in comparison to the October and December Barometers of the same year, we can observe the quantitative changes in polarization and political identification movement. Due to the peak of the exhumation process occurring in late September with the movement of the remains occurring October 24th, 2019, the October Barometer demonstrates data immediately preceding the exhumation and elections, thus the March and December data collections being vital to understanding the “before” and immediate manifestation of the reactions in voting respectively. While all of the changes are not assumed to be all attributed to the changing of historical memory, from what we know about Spain, these shifts and the symbolic value of the exhumation have significantly impacted how people identify on the national political spectrum in terms of party affiliation.

Looking primarily at the differences in the political barometers from the Center for Social Investigations (CIS), it is important to note the differences in the survey types and attempt to identify the most equivalent questions within the studies in order to obtain the most accurate results in the changes over time. Both the March and October Barometers pertain to Pre-electoral General Election data and thus utilize similar if not the same questions, whereas the December Barometer surrounds Post-electoral sentiments in exit polls and additional specific election and policy questions. As a result, the questions vary from the March and October barometers; however, specific questions are included regarding how Franco's exhumation impacted how respondents voted and therefore it is important to note that while this specific survey differs, the responses assist in explaining the levels of polarization on behalf of exhumation, just in a different form.

In order to obtain the most accurate results on how political polarization occurred, the question used for the March and October Barometers will be "In the general elections called for the [date of elections for April or November], which party or coalition do you think you will vote for?" (CIS 2019). The responses for the question in the context of the five parties being focused on in this project are as followed:

### **MARCH 2019 RESPONSES**

PSOE: 18.9%

PP: 8.5%

Ciudadanos: 7.1%

UP: 4.4%

VP: 3.8%

**OCTOBER 2019 RESPONSES**

PSOE: 19.9%

PP: 9.1%

Ciudadanos: 4.2%

UP: 5.7%

VP: 4.0%

In viewing these numerical changes over the course of seven months with Sanchez in office, the focal point is the change seen in votes for the most center-leaning party, Ciudadanos. The only party having seen a decrease within the data, the party lost close to 3% of responses planning on voting for it, thus demonstrating the loss of support for the center party and movement towards either side of the political spectrum, resulting in polarization. All of the other four parties saw increases in expected votes according to the CIS, with VP seeing a 0.2% increase to UP with a 1.3% increase. Generally, as seen through larger gains on the left, the progressive policies of Sanchez, immediately prior to the exhumation itself, seemed to have had a positive effect on support for more left leaning parties and effectively changing historical memory played a part in political polarization, as seen through the largest increase of the five in support for UP. In this data, it is demonstrated clearly that there were changes in the months of progress leading up to the exhumation and that voting/political party affiliation and elections were impacted by said progress, resulting in people voting for more polarized platforms than prior.

In the December 2019 Barometer, the elections had passed and thus there was not a question equivalent to the other barometers; however, the survey includes a section of questions regarding the impact of the exhumation in voting decisions and how people were influenced by the situation. The first of the three questions in the section is “Did the exhumation of Franco have any influence in your voting decisions in the November 10th elections?”. Out of the sample, 5.7% of respondents responded Yes, and out of those respondents, 11.1% said that the exhumation led them to change the party they had planned to vote for. From those who changed the party in which they voted for and were willing to answer which party they voted for in the election, the following results demonstrate the breakdown of the five parties in their votes:

#### **DECEMBER 2019 RESPONSES**

PSOE: 33.5%

PP: 29.9%

Ciudadanos: 10.4%

UP: 5.9%

VP: 5.9%

As stated before, because of the context of the differing surveys and the questions involved, these numbers cannot be compared equally to the other two barometers and their data; however, we can utilize observed patterns and attempt to apply them to the differing data to further explain the span of polarization as it relates to changing historical memory. Similarly to the changing political makeup of the Congress, the amplification of the decisions to vote for VP directly translates to further movement towards the far-right and polarization as a result of



exhumation, within the context of the December Barometer. Both VP and UP received the same amount of responses for voters that changed their political affiliation from exhumation, which furthers the actuality of polarization from the event. The growth of support for the PSOE because of exhumation as shown by the December data signifies support for the actions of Sanchez in symbolically condemning Franco and altering historical memory in that sense. Ciudadanos also does not receive the highest levels of support from exhumation and continues to decrease in supporters, signifying the same idea that the exhumation does attribute to movement away from centralized political parties, resulting in polarization.

When analyzing data, there are some important acknowledgements that need to be made. Data in and of itself is inherently political and in order to avoid the higher levels of bias that come with independent surveyors, the CIS is the golden standard for research in Spain, thus eliminating as much unwanted bias as possible. Additionally, the data only demonstrates the thoughts of those surveyed, which varies every time, as the barometers are compiled regularly without returning to the same respondents. Thus, while these results are being applied to a more broad account and are the most accessible way to complete the analysis of polarization as a result of historical memory, they do not completely represent the entire Spanish population accurately. Sample size is also another important factor, as depicted within the context of the December Barometer. The section of questions utilized progressed on the condition of specific response groups and thus decreased from a survey group of 4,804 to 272 to 30 based upon responses. Continually, this minimizes the application to a broader group; however, the data helps prove the existence of the correlation between polarization and exhumation and in order to analyze this relationship, I will be utilizing news articles and opinion pieces from different politically affiliated media outlets.

## Right-leaning Media Reaction to Exhumation

One of the more pronounced socially conservative media outlets in Spain is La Razón, which within the context of this project will be utilized as a representation of generally right-wing opinions and news. In the following months after the exhumation, more and more articles and opinion pieces were released regarding the reactions to the exhumation and changing historical memory, often viewed as defamation of Spanish national pride and memory. An example of this comes in the form of an article titled “*Abuelo, ¿quién era Franco? ¿por qué le odian tanto?*” (rough translation: Grandpa, who was Franco? Why do they hate him so much?) written by Juan Chicharro Ortega, a military officer under Franco’s fascist regime. In having his perspective under the publication of La Razón, it is clear to see the leaning of the newspaper outlet and the sympathy for past military officials from the dictatorship. The author of the article uses inflammatory language, insinuating the malintentions of Prime Minister Sanchez in exhumation and the banning of the Francisco Franco Foundation, in line with the prohibition of the glorification of the regime. Ortega claims that “[*el*] uso continuado de la mentira y la manipulación responderán con maldad controlada” (the continued use of lies and manipulation will respond with controlled evil) will cause more of the population to hate Franco (Ortega 2019). This language villainizing the administration driving the exhumation demonstrates a collective reaction of more far-right aligned persons and continues to further the divide between those attempting to retain the “truth” in historical memory (the right) versus those utilizing manipulation and lies to alter historical memory (the left) as identified by right-wing media. Ortega goes on to describe the high levels of censorship that can be expected through the continued support of Prime Minister Sanchez, by stating “*probable que de prosperar las intenciones del Sr. Sánchez estas líneas no podrán ser publicadas por ley*” (it is likely that if Mr.

Sanchez's intentions prosper, [the sentiments as expressed in the title of the article] may not be published by law) (Ortega 2019). This is to further the ideas of the left being malintended in limiting freedoms, censoring information, and manipulating the truth in changing historical memory in an attempt to gather support and in so, further polarize the political landscape.

While the Valley of the Fallen within the reach of the HML is a site that prohibits any acts that are inherently political or glorify Francoism, some events take place at the monument where those in attendance, being politically aligned with the far right, defy this clause. An article that covers these demonstrations and gatherings of those glorifying Francoism is "*Los nostálgicos de Franco celebran el 20-N divididos y repartidos en varios escenarios*" (Those nostalgic of Franco celebrate the 20th of November divided and distributed in various scenarios) written by Andres Bartolome. Bartolome is a common author for La Razón and is known to specialize in covering historical memory related events and stories regarding the legacy of Franco in Spanish society. One thing about this article that is important to note is the focus on the proximity in dates of Franco's exhumation (24/10/2019) to the anniversary of his death (10/11/1975). Due to the event of peak glorification and remembrance being as close to the manifestation of the rewriting of historical memory and Franco's legacy fractures further the political sphere by eliciting stronger reactions during these times and promoting Francoist ideology heavily in this short span. As described by the article, the anniversary of Franco's death a year after exhumation was characterized by a "*peregrinación al Valle de los Caídos*" (pilgrimage to the Valley of the Fallen) and a "*ofrenda floral en el cementerio de Mingorrubio*" (floral offering in the cemetery of Mingorrubio) (Bartolome 2020). These events demonstrate the heavy remnants of sympathy for Franco and his legacy by those on the political right and the high degree of loyalty Franco followers still have to glorify him. The language utilized like

pilgrimage and offering also parallel to terms used in a religious sense, furthering the overt glorification of the past dictator and his continued legacy in Spain. In these more explicit terms and the ignorance of the HML in the glorification of Franco at the Valley of the Fallen clause, it is observable that the firm stance of the political right to maintain a glorified memory of Franco only differentiates the parties further from the left, which makes extensive progress to revise national historical memory.

Other articles further the evidence for more polarized reactions on the right side of the political spectrum demonstrate melancholic nostalgia for the removal of Franco's remains from the Valley of the Fallen, and continually refer to the process and remaining followers almost in a religious sense. Another article published on La Razón, entitled "*Del Valle a El Pardo, la «película» de Moncloa para enterrar a los Franco*" (From the Valley of the Fallen to El Pardo, the Moncloa film to bury the Franco [spirit]) written by Andres Bartolome, utilizes the anniversary of the exhumation to portray sentiments of betrayal and emotional turmoil felt by those in the right-wing of the Spanish political sphere. In relation to the title, *El Pardo* is the location of the Royal Palace outside of Madrid where Franco resided when he was the head of the state and essentially where he stayed until his death. As a representation of where Franco lived out his life as well as his legacy, *El Pardo* and the Valley of the Fallen are two symbolic locations typically utilized by the current followers of Franco by the means of glorification and retaining historical memory as dictated by the pact of forgetting. By the title of the article alone, the remnants of the Franco spirit even in the anniversary of the exhumation as well as his legacy are still a keystone for the right leaning Spanish population and are increasingly involved in Spanish popular culture. Bartolome describes the setting of the mass at the Valley of the Fallen, primarily utilized as a catholic basilica, held on the one year anniversary of Franco's exhumation,

where it “*llueve sin cesar...y una intensa niebla*” (it rains without ceasing and an intense fog) falls around the feet of the reporters (Bartolome 2020). Noting this specifically due to the parallels in the mood and weather, the author then continues to explain how there was a tense environment where people felt the need to write down all the details the next day to have and keep “*«muy vivo» el recuerdo*” (the memory very alive), demonstrating the continued dedication to retaining historical memory as it was prior to the changes made by the left-wing parties (Bartolome 2020). With the explicit somber attitude most have and the Franco spirit still ever present and alive in the Valley of the Fallen, historical memory in Franco and Spanish pride are still being unkempt by the political right, thus demonstrating a lack of support for the left parties agenda in changing it. While polarization is not something that the author observes within the dynamics of the mass on one year anniversary, the seemingly unchanged resolve of the political far right furthers them from the ever-progressive far left on the issue, thus increasing the metaphorical distance between the two ideologies on the political spectrum.

### **Political Right Reaction to the Political Left**

In observing the reactions of the far right-leaning media on the Spanish political spectrum to the exhumation itself, viewing how the left and far-left are portrayed in right-wing media can also be helpful in understanding how the changing of historical memory as seen in the exhumation can attribute to the conversation of political polarization. Within these articles, the general sentiment is that the left is insatiable in rewriting historical memory and institutionally condemning the Franco regime as that reflects in the political realm. In his article titled “*Pintadas contra Franco en la casa de la familia en A Coruña*” (Graffiti against Franco in the family house in A Coruña), Andres Bartolome shifts his focus from the usual glorification of

Franco and modern day supporters to condemning the actions of the far left and the left-leaning government. The vandalism itself was attributed to anarchist groups and extremist left groups, and in spite of criticism against the actions of these groups, the focus of Bartolome in additionally addressing the states plans with the historical building further demonstrates the high degree of polarization and disdain for the left. The article includes that “*El inmueble es, junto con el Pazo de Meirás, una de las propiedades de la familia Franco que la Administración quiere recuperar*” (The estate is, with the Pazo de Meirás, one of the Franco family’s properties that the Administration wants to recover), which expresses the desire for the left-leaning government to retake the property that historically belonged to the Franco family as a summer home (Bartolome 2019). This follows the sentiment of “*Devolved lo robado*” (return what was stolen), one of the graffitied expressions in the estate, as it is located in Galicia, the autonomous region with the most violence and repression under the Franco regime (Bartolome 2019). In spite of the right-leaning parties and media supporting the Franco family’s retention of the property, as a continuation of the memory and legacy of Franco, the government and other left-leaning parties are further progressing to revise historical memory in obtaining justice for the losses suffered as a result of the dictatorship. The article poses this expression of justice through the public retaking of the estate as the left stripping the family of their memory of Franco, thus furthering the idea that the left is insatiable and polarizing the political landscape.

Another example of the attempts at continued progress as perceived by the right media comes in the reactions to protests in Madrid regarding prevarication. Shortly after the exhumation, president of the Plenary Borja Fanjul advanced the agenda of dismantling a memorial for the victims of the Civil War, in order to place a more natural monument without names or specific recognition, but to recognize more general loss from the war (Echagüe 2019).

Fanjul, being a notable member of the PP, aligned with more right-leaning ideology and through this action, is seen to shift historical memory to a more general sadness so as to not emphasize the specificities or that vast hardships many victims' families still face today. The overt reactions against this decision of Fanjul by more left-leaning protestors is shown in a negative life, specifically for that of “*el portavoz municipal del PSOE, Pepu Hernández, que se ausentó del Pleno para acudir a la concentración*” (the municipal spokesman of the PSOE, Pepu Hernandez, who was absent from the Plenary to attend the concentration)(Echagüe 2019). In addition to the aggressive attitude the author shows the protestors to have, Echagüe, a long-standing employee of La Razón and right wing media, focuses on a member of the government missing work in order to protest as well. Like in other governments globally, serving as a representative of the state holds a certain level of national responsibility and pride and to be absent to promote a more polarized agenda is highly looked down upon, specifically by the right-leaning parties. In Hernandez being absent and continuing to advocate for progress in remembrance and more explicit changes to historical memory, the actions elicited negative reactions from his right-wing counterparts and the focus on his absence in the article reflects these ideas further. In spite of the success the protests had, ending with Prime Minister Sanchez publicly stating the plaque with names shall remain in order to show a “*compromiso con la memoria democrática*” (commitment to democratic memory) by the government (Echagüe 2019). This event, as a focus of the article, demonstrates a continued perseverance of the left in trying to change historical memory and countering the actions of the right in the government, thus presenting as polarization within the Spanish political sphere.

### Left-leaning Media Reaction to Exhumation

While La Razón is one of the more notable right leaning media outlets within Spain, Público provides many left-leaning party supporters with information and is known to have a rather liberal view of most political issues. In the months following the exhumation, contrary to the right-leaning reactions as illustrated previously, most articles articulated a sense of desire for further progression and described the exhumation as a beneficial first step towards a long journey of rebranding Spanish historical memory. In Mario Villar's article entitled "*El Relator de la ONU dice que exhumar a Franco no es abrir heridas, es cerrarlas*" (The Rapporteur of the UN says that exhuming Franco is not opening wounds, its closing them), the promotion of the benefits of the exhumation are amplified and shown in a positive light. By highlighting the words of the Fabián Salvioli, "*el relator especial de Naciones Unidas para la promoción de la verdad, la justicia, la reparación y las garantías de no repetición*" (the United Nations special rapporteur for the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition), the reaction of the left to exhumation is more easily identified (Villar 2019). In alignment with the international left in promoting truth and movement away from the pact of forgetting, the Spanish political left depicts a further movement away from the right, thus increasing levels of polarization. The article presents Spain as 'madura' (mature) and continues to express the necessity that was Franco's exhumation in healing Spanish memory of the war. With the notion of the various benefits of exhumation for closure for the families of Spanish civil war victims, the manner in which left-leaning media presents changing historical memory is placed in a helpful, necessary, and primary light, as a beginning step for the process of healing. Villar notes that "*la exhumación del dictador no permite por ahora cerrar un capítulo de la historia española, pues quedan muchos asuntos de Memoria Histórica pendientes*" (the exhumation of the dictator does not



allow for a chapter of Spanish history to be closed for now, since there are many pending issues of Historical Memory), which demonstrates the continued progression and foreshadows the next steps regarding the renewed configuration of historical memory by the political left (Villar 2019).

As mentioned previously, while the political left, through PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, made great strides in rewriting historical memory in the physical exhumation of Franco and emphasis of carrying out the goals of the HML of 2007, the further left parties like UP and Más País advocated for more progressive action. The same day as the exhumation of Franco from Valley of the Fallen, the article “*Podemos y Más País piden más avances para hacer justicia con las víctimas del franquismo*” (Podemos and Más País ask for more advances to do justice for the victims of Francoism) was published as written by Beatriz Gallego. While the exhumation was presented as a culmination of the PSOE’s progress towards a more open and honest truth regarding the Civil War, and in and of itself was a struggle to accomplish against strong institutional forces in support of Francoism, more extremist parties as they emerged in the 2010’s openly expressed future plans to continue progress in receiving justice. Opening with the statement that “*La exhumación de Francisco Franco no es suficiente para hacer justicia con las víctimas de la dictadura y cumplir con la Memoria Histórica*” (the exhumation of Francisco Franco is not sufficient to do justice for the victims of the dictatorship and comply with Historical Memory), the author emphasizes the necessity for further progress and that exhumation itself does not stand alone in altering historical memory in Spain (Gallego 2019). The article continues to explain how there is a lack of victory for any party, as symbolically meaningful as the exhumation is, there needs to be more of an emphasis on further actions to promote justice for those affected by the Civil War and a continuation of legal action in support of rewriting historical memory. She goes on to even criticize the PSOE led government in saying

that the exhumation still benefited "*las oligarquías que se enriquecieron con la dictadura*" (the oligarchies that got rich with the dictatorship), meaning that the publicity and benefit the government received was one of the partial motivators for exhumation (Gallego 2019). The explicit representation of the remnants of Franco in the government, even among the left-wing parties and the accused clouded motivations as noted by the far left demonstrate the extremist parties movements away from the standard political left in Spain and the desires for more radical reform depicts the party's as moving further left politically, thus fitting in with the predicted lines of polarization.

Only one month after the exhumation, there were rallies and protests held by the political right in Spain, advocating for the public disregard and removal of the HML, as a result of the utilization of the law to exhume Franco. These heightened sentiments, while previously rather undisputed or brushed off by the political left, attracted further left-leaning groups with specific missions to react against the political rights messages. During the rally held by the Association against the HML on 11/24/2019 in Madrid, six members of FEMEN, a renowned extremist left group, specifically associated with feminist movements, interrupted the march with messages condemning the political right on their chests. "*La manifestación "de afirmación nacional" y "en contra de la profanación del Valle de los Caídos"*" (The demonstration "of national affirmation" and "against the desecration of the Valley of the Fallen") elicited strong and blatantly more extreme reactions from the far-left than before the exhumation due to the more highly polarized political climate in Spain (EFE 2019a). The women from FEMEN carried phrases like "*Al fascismo ni honor ni gloria*" (to fascism neither honor nor glory), overtly in opposition to the people present at the march and done in order to present an unmistakable message in opposition to the glorification of the dictatorship (EFE 2019a). Due to the high levels of collaboration

FEMEN and UP have with each other in political movements, the relationship and presentation of the extremist left women within the march represent the growing separation between the far-left and far-right movements in Spain by the interruption and opposing sentiments. Within this statement, the far-left further separates the divide between both sides of the political spectrum by amplifying the conflict and deliberately interrupting opposing gatherings, showing more evidently the growing fractures and polarized political climate.

### **Political Left Reaction to the Political Right**

To replicate the sentiments studied prior of the right-leaning media viewing the left to observe polarization, the following section will utilize articles from left-leaning media to identify further reactions to the right-wing that inherently add to the overall conversation of political polarization in Spain. As mentioned previously, the overall sentiment of the Spanish political left, specifically the more extremist parties, is that exhumation was a stepping stone for further progress in the development of a new national historical memory that delivers justice and acknowledges the tragedy of the civil war. In looking closer at two articles from Público specifically regarding the right-wing of Spanish politics, the general sentiments of the left regarding the opposing reaction following exhumation can be clearly observed in how they fit into the overarching question of the amplification of the polarized political sphere in Spain. Beginning with the article “*El problema hoy no es la exhumación, el problema es que se vota a Franco*” (the problem today is not the exhumation, the problem is that Franco is voted for), the author clearly articulates the views of the left in believing that the right-wing of national politics remains a problem in spite of the progress that has been made. Published on the same day of the exhumation, the article condemns the Franco sympathizers commonly associated with the

Spanish far right and targets them as the problematic sect of the nation's issues. Unlike the political left, which celebrated the exhumation as a monumental step in rewriting historical memory, the political right, specifically the PP and Ciudadanos, took advantage of the day to reveal a new “*mensaje institucional: "¿Pasado o Presente? Futuro". "El pasado, pasado está"*” (institutional message: “Past or Present? Future. “The past is in the past”)(EFE 2019b). This message reinforces the ideas represented in the pact of forgetting and focuses on the retention of historical memory instead of reintroducing the realities of the Franco regime into society. By mentioning this side by side with the celebratory remarks from the left poses the political right with a bitter resolve and in a more or less negative light. The article as a whole problematizes the actions of the right in a stark contrast with the political left making progress through executing exhumation, thus backing up the ideas of the increasing fragmentation and political polarization within Spain.

Similarly, in another article condemning more far-right political actors, an author by the name A.T., well-known for explicitly left-leaning views, provides a more simplified analysis of where the different parties stand and problematizing the political right in the attempts to decelerate the progress of the political left. Titled “*Entre la derogación de la Ley de Memoria y devolver lo robado por el franquismo*” (Between the repeal of the Memory Law and returning what was stolen by Francoism), the article criticizes heavily the remnants of the Franco regime in the contemporary Spanish political sphere and the political right’s blatant disregard for legislation regarding historical memory. The description of the article is as follows: “*Las derechas (PP, Cs y VP) abogan por ignorar o, directamente, derogar la Ley de Memoria Histórica, mientras que las fuerzas progresistas (PSOE, UP y MP) defienden profundizar en derechos para las víctimas de la dictadura.*” (The right (PP, Ciudadanos and VP) advocate to

ignore or directly repeal the Historical Memory Law, while the progressive forces (PSOE, UP and MP) defend to further the rights for the victims of the dictatorship.)(A.T. 2019). Within one sentence prior to the prose of the article itself, the author clearly depicts the completely differing agendas of the political spectrum and the apparent polarization within Spanish politics in regards to historical memory. VP, the most right-leaning party, is described to want the complete dismantling of the HML, with further progress being illustrated as a desire of UP, one of the most left-leaning parties represented in the Spanish political sphere. As represented within the article, the lack of consensus or compromise and the opposing directions in the desires and goals of the ideologies regarding historical memory and the exhumation of Franco leads to greater levels of fragmentation and polarization within Spanish politics.

## **Chapter 6: The Origins of the Democratic Memory Law**

In spite of the large depths of analysis of the immediate reactions to exhumation being the main focus of this project, the progression of the polarized political climate within recent years has fostered the development of a new piece of legislation that is still undergoing the legal process in Congress. Understandably named the Democratic Memory Law, the bill began to undergo official congressional hearings in late July of 2021 and has yet to reach a decision regarding its passing or implementation. In the constraints of time, due to the still developing nature of the bill, the information being analyzed within this project will be limited to December 10th, 2021, which began the last recess of the 2021 calendar year for the Congress of the Deputies. Although the progress of the bill could be an interesting project to examine in the future alongside its potential developments, the progress of the bill until 12/10/21 will be helpful in the span of this specific project in fitting into the larger picture of political polarization and historical memory. There is enough information regarding how the right-wing is reacting to the further development of the left's plans to continue revising historical memory, which is clearly depicted in the progress, even with having to limit the timeline. By examining the current manifestation of the current policy in the form of the Democratic Memory Law, as advocated more for by more left leaning delegates in the Congress, we can understand the situation as an ongoing and progressing topic of conversation.

Primarily, the emphasis being placed on continued development of historical memory is driven by growing levels of polarization and the desire for progress from the political left in Spain, in addition to added pressure from the United Nations to continue movement away from the glorification of the Franco regime (APL 2021). Within the proposed legislation itself, there are five main sections that group the more than 60 objectives together and they are as follows:

- 1) Establishing the general disposition and purpose
- 2) Defining and recognizing the victims
- 3) Laying out various central policies of democratic memory
- 4) Recognizing those who have worked to defend democratic memory and establishing a new Council of Democratic Memory
- 5) Laying out the sanctions regime for violations

These groups together compile clauses that cover victims of the war and their families, further actions to condemn Franco and handle violations of rules within the political sphere. These pillars together were included specifically to address the shortcomings of the HML, as there was a lack of enforcement and little to no recognition for the victims actually done, mainly due to the more general language in conjunction with a politically opposing successor. As mentioned previously, the political environment in which the HML was introduced was much more closed and the lack of precedent and openness regarding Franco and contemporary opposition was not normalized and thus, the Law was constrained to a more centralized political sphere. Conversely, in a more polarized climate due to exhumation and differing ideas of what should come of historical memory in society, the Democratic Memory Law has had the opportunity to utilize more progressive language and attempt to have a larger more explicit impact on society. Of these groupings listed above, the most prominent backlash from the right as seen within congressional talks and outwardly reactions in interviews falls under the fourth and fifth groups specifically in how involved the government is in condemning the continued glorification of Franco. The conflict seen over these clauses boils down to the fact that “Human rights organizations are urging the government to advance the Act in the name of justice, while

critics on the right declaim it as punitive and a threat to the freedoms of speech and association” (Brooks 2021). As reported by Natalia Junquera in her article about the Democratic Memory Law, the most prominent points are as follows: Teaching about Franco’s repression; Convictions void, no compensation; Exhumations, register and DNA database; A prosecutor in charge of investigations; Eliminating the Francisco Franco Foundation; Removing Francoist symbols; Accessing Spanish citizenship; Valley of the Fallen; Nobility titles. Most notably in the context of this project, the Valley of the Fallen and the teaching about Franco’s repression will be more closely observed in their impacts and direct correlations to increased polarization.

Throughout the development of legislation surrounding historical memory in Spain, the Valley of the Fallen has remained a focal point, as its symbolic value differs for all involved parties, but its future and use remains up in the air. Within the definition set forth in the bill, the mausoleum should not showcase any specific grave, but be a communal site to remember the vast amounts of loss and victims that suffered under Franco. Additionally, similarly to Franco, “José Antonio Primo de Rivera, founder of the fascist Falange Española in 1933” will be exhumed and moved away from the public space so as to diminish the opportunity to politicize the space and glorify Francoism and fascism (Junquera 2021). While the HML laid out less specific plans for the Valley of the Fallen, the more politically polarized climate has allowed lawmakers to be more explicit and expansive in their goals regarding historical memory.

The overt clause regarding the teaching of Franco’s repression is a monumental feat and goal to include within Spanish legislation, even if this information is presented “in generic terms, perpetuating the idea of a symmetric responsibility” (Junquera 2021). Most of the ideology of the right-wing political realm in Spain emphasizes national pride and glorifies the legacy of Spain during the Franco regime. By publicly implicating newer generations to more open conversations



and educating them of the responsibilities of all actors involved, glorification of the regime will be challenged as well as historical memory and maybe even cause people to expel their suspension of disbelief. Through a more well-rounded education in regards to the effects of the Civil War, historical memory is likely to be further altered as well as the political field further polarized. In both specific points, the right-wing has highly contested the necessity of their inclusion as well as claim their suppression of freedom of speech within the context of how both significantly alter historical memory.

Symbolically for the right-wing of Spanish politics, the continued pressure on changing historical memory and the added prospect of punishments from the government for glorifying Franco and the legacy of the dictatorship threaten the freedoms and liberties of Spanish national pride and identity. These threats and a persistence in vetoing and stalling law from passing has led to increasingly aggressive reactions towards members of the Spanish political sphere affiliated with the left, like the example given regarding Zapatero receiving mail with bullets from VP. These more radical and profound reactions to the bill have only polarized the political landscape more, thus linking more contemporary progress on historical memory in legislation to higher levels of political polarization.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

In recent decades, Franco and his legacy have remained driving points of conversation in Spanish politics and in life. Family members of those who died as well as others on the political left feel there has been too much complacency in forgetting about the persecution of the dictatorship. A lack of addressing or condemning the dictatorship has left many Spaniards feeling unheard and unfulfilled on the basis of receiving justice. Such unresolved sentiments have contributed to a significant and growing degree of fragmentation and polarization. Attempts to make legislative changes related to the debate over historical memory within the past five years especially and has further divided the Spanish political sphere.

This thesis has used public opinion surveys, exit polls, changes in congressional representation, political literature, and national media to show the relationship between the changing of historical memory and political polarization. This has become increasingly apparent in the months immediately following the exhumation of Franco's remains from the Valley of the Fallen. In my research, there is a notable change in the way the political left and right discuss historical memory and the opposing side of the spectrum. Whereas prior to the exhumation process with the general right and left news sources having neutral reactions to historical memory legislation, both elicited stronger reactions and were more critical of the opposition after Franco's reburial. By comparing the reactions to two different pieces of legislation that assisted in the development of the historical memory debate, I show how political attitudes became more polarized.

While this is only one factor out of many that can attribute to amplified polarization levels in Spanish politics, changing historical memory plays an important role in the explanation of greater polarization. Other factors like general contemporary political divisiveness,

autonomous regions, differing identities, growing importance of social issues, all play a role in this overall conversation of polarization in Spain.

It is important to note that this issue is ongoing and cannot be covered completely in one thesis. Historical memory, in the context of Spain, is ever changing and the observation of the HML and exhumation are only primary steps taken in a more grand process of receiving justice for the victims of the dictatorship. It would be interesting to see beyond the December 2020 reunion what the reactions and outcome of the Democratic Memory Law will be and how the conversations further change the historical memory of Franco's legacy. While the law is mentioned briefly in this thesis, it is still being revised and debated at the moment of analysis. The aftermath and continued debate of what Franco means to Spain and how polarization is affected by this debate will continue to be of importance within Spanish politics.

An additional perspective that might be helpful to consider is the international political sphere and how the situation in Spain may be similar to that of other countries with histories of dictatorships and how those legacies conjoin with contemporary politics. This thesis had a more domestic focus to observe more about national media outlets and how Spaniards talked about Franco and his exhumation. However, through brief mention, the international community, specifically the political left, has pushed Spain to take a stance and move more towards receiving justice and doing more to denounce the dictatorship. Further research on this topic could analyze how these urges and influences affected Spain on a more European level in addition to how each case within similar origins now talks about polarization from changes in historical memory abroad.

The Historical Memory Law initiated more open conversations through an increased public focus on historical memory. Through this we can see the movement progress past the pact

of forgetting and towards a more comprehensive remembrance of the dictator's unsettled legacy. In spite of the growing degrees of political polarization, historical memory is shifting away from the glorification of the tragedies of the Spanish Civil War and towards providing justice for families still suffering from the effects of the fascist dictatorship. In an overarching trend of political polarization in Spain, debates over historical memory, as manifested in the exhumation of Franco, have played a role in amplifying divisive political sentiments.

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