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# Spanish Conservatives at the Early Stages of Spanish Democracy: Reshaping the Concepts of State and Community in the Thought of Manuel Fraga

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**Abstract:** This article focused on the evolution of Spanish conservative doctrine in the early years of democracy in Spain. By analyzing the concepts of ‘state’ and ‘community’ in the thought of Manuel Fraga, the Minister of Information and Tourism under the Franco dictatorship and leader of the Spanish right during the 1980s, this article sought to explore: the manner in which the conservatives sought to “democratize” their doctrine to adapt themselves to the new party system and the importance of this conceptual reshaping in establishing the roots of conservative Spanish nationalism.

**Keywords:** Spanish conservatives; nationalism; authoritarianism; regime-changing; political culture; Spanish transition; Alianza Popular; Manuel Fraga

## 1. Introduction

The changes in political regimes, and in particularly transitions from authoritarian systems into parliamentary democracies, involve a set of agreements in order to establish a shared regulatory framework that sustains the architecture of the new regime, but also a subsequent reshaping of the political landscape and political party legitimation. In the Spanish case, the idea of consensus and agreement during the transitional period has been highlighted in numerous works (Juliá 2019; Tusell 2005). The consensus was forged among the main political forces from the opposition and the “opening sector” (*aperturistas*) of the dictatorship who were willing to prepare the transition towards a pluralistic democratic system and a new constitutional framework. Once *de iure* moment has elapsed, parties had to reshape their programs and approaches in light of this new scenario in regard to changes in the sources of legitimacy, the new political actors, and the functioning of the new institutions.

This is what the conservatives had to do in the early years of democracy. Franco’s death in November 1975, and the subsequent political reform that led to opposing political parties, free elections, and finally the proclamation of a constitution was a turbulent process that fragmented both the left and the right within a reconfigured framework. At the end of 1978, hegemony on the left predominantly laid with the *Partido Socialista* (PSOE) and *Partido Comunista* (PCE). On the other side of the spectrum, the right found themselves pushed from the center by the emergence of a big centrist party—*Unión de Centro Democrático* (UCD), and fragmented between the those who were resistant to political reform, which became the far-right party *Fuerza Nueva* (FN), and those who from inside the Francoist regime promoted change and new constitutional rules, which became the *Alianza Popular* (AP). This latter conservative grouping was led by Manuel Fraga.

This article has focused on how the democratic right evolved their doctrine to adapt from Francoism to the new democratic regime. First, we focused on the realignment of the democratic right during the early years of democracy and how Manuel Fraga made innovations within the conservative doctrine. Next, this paper analyzed Fraga’s character to better understand his ideological development, both under dictatorship and democracy. Third, we explored how he reshaped the concepts of ‘state’

and ‘community’ in his published work between 1978–1982. Finally, we offered some conclusions about how this reshaping helped ensure the survival of the conservative right under Spanish democracy.

## 2. The Reorganization of the Democratic Right in the Consolidation of Democracy

With the ratification of the constitution on 6 December 1978, democracy began its consolidation process with the first legislative elections in March 1979. Parties then polarized on the political spectrum, but all were united in accepting ‘the transitional democratic outcome’. Scholars like Gunther have pointed out that Spanish democratic consolidation was the product of a profound transformation of Spanish political elites from disunity to political unity (Gunther 1992, p. 40) in defense of the nascent democracy. This agreement regarding the defense of the new regime allowed the main parties to operate with a high level of consensus within the political system, to ensure the consolidation of democracy. During this process, parties coexisted with peripheral actors who rejected the democratic consensus or were excluded from it, either through a “democratic surplus” (Andrade 2012) outside the hegemonic left agenda, or by the survival of an “authoritarian surplus” on the far right who did not accept the legitimacy of the new constitutional order (Gallego 2006, 2008). These ‘unsettling factors’ potentially included political violence, terrorism, and the threat of military intervention. In this context, conservatives divided between sectors and individual intellectual figures. On the one hand, those who supported the opening of the dictatorship were grouped under the AP, and on the other, there were Christian-democrats who predominantly comprised the center-right of the UCD. As argued by Gunther et al. (1988), in 1979, the AP shifted to a more conservative stance due to their leaders’ ideological origins, and the pressure exercised by the UCD to occupy the political center.

However, beyond the parties’ varying electoral strategies, the circulation of ideas on the reconstruction of conservatism took place in different spaces, such as political magazines; in newspapers like *ABC* or *Pueblo*; and debate forums, such as club *Siglo XXI*, in which were addressed issues related to the state’s territorial organization, the ‘problem’ of Basque and Catalan nationalism, the defense of the nation, public order, and the country’s economic restructuring. Once the transition ended, the political elites had to face the political issues related to the design and implementation of the new structure of the state and economic modernization. This was a field in which many conservative leaders found it difficult to make proposals, and, therefore, they were identified as more likely to act with the same old prescriptions rather than helping make a significant contribution to the new democratic framework.

At this time, Alianza Popular can be considered as ‘a convergence platform’ for all those who sought opening after the dictatorship (Del Rio Morillas 2016, p. 121); that is, those who were willing to create a centrist political space, and at the same time, remain ‘conservative’ regarding civil and political liberties and the defense of the nation as a political community. This was a strategy that has been described as “a history of ambitions and failed intentions” (Gunther et al. 1988, p. 91). In 1976, AP was a political coalition that comprised six small parties in a federal structure, formed by ministers or civil governors who had represented different political positions in the dictatorship’s last years, but who were united around the idea of limited political reform. Among those were Manuel Fraga and Jose María de Areilza of *Reforma Democrática*, Cruz Martínez Esteruelas’ *Unión del Pueblo Español*, Federico Silva Muñoz’s *Acción Democrática Española*, Laureano López Rodó’s *Acción Regional*, Licinio de la Fuente’s *Democracia Social*, and Enrique Thomas de Carranza’s *Unión Nacional Española*. In three years (until the III AP congress in December 1979), a coalition under the leadership of Fraga displaced the other initial figures. At this point, the AP heavily relied on its leader (Montero 1987), whose ideological evolution was in some ways parallel to the party’s development, and that figured persistent search for an independent ideological and electoral space, which also sought to maximize the attractiveness of the party by building political coalitions.

However, voters broadly rejected AP because they tended to identify it with the dictatorship, its erratic turn to the right in the 1979 legislative elections, and the failure of the centrist strategy after the UCD imploded. In 1979, half of the AP voters identified this force to be at the right, and 35% at the far right, while, among the electorate, 30% identified the party to be at the right and almost 50%

at the far right. Four years later, in 1982, when the political landscape seemed to be established, 64% of AP voters considered the party to be to the right, and 27% to the extreme right. However, among the constituencies, the party continued to be seen as part of the far-right (54%) rather than a mere conservative party (39%)<sup>1</sup> in a period where ideological preferences among voters were characterized by moderation and abhorrence of extremism (Gunther 1992, p. 70).

In this context, Manuel Fraga's 'doctrinal reshaping' of the party did not bring the expected electoral results. The journey of AP is the story of aiming at victory, but only being able to consolidate itself as the conservative opposition until the end of the decade; this was a process that Montero (1987, p. 15) described as 'resistance without triumph'. However, Fraga's work managed to guide the conservatives out of the maze they found themselves in once the constitution was approved. Dependent on Francoist symbolic structures, with little experience of political pluralism and with a lack of clear coordinates for political action, Fraga adapted the doctrine without substantially modifying core authoritarian beliefs about 'order over political and civil liberties', patriotism, and the moral conservative values inherited from the Francoist regime. Fraga never questioned the iusnaturalistic essence of the Spanish nation, but he partially re-imagined the 'political community' (Anderson 2006) and updated it from the Francoist approach where the nation was seen as "unity of destination in the universal" (Primo de Rivera 1933). In doing so, Fraga reorganized Francoist symbols and narratives to adapt them to the new democratic context.

Beyond the narratives of the Spanish transition and democratic consolidation, which present Spanish democracy as a process of 'providential actors helping produce democracy' (Prego 1995; Powell 2001), the analysis of the concepts established by these actors, and their efforts at the time to create a political culture, allowed academics to advance in the study of intergenerational transmissions to other parties and civil society organizations in the following decades. For this reason, we now turned our analysis to Fraga's concepts of 'state' and 'community' as he was the ideologue of the reformist wing within the Franco regime and the 'spiritual father of the right' during democracy. Our work covered the period that ranges from December 1978 to October 1982, from the approval of the constitution to the V Congress of the Alianza Popular. To carry out our analysis, we primarily focused on Fraga's published work in those years, paying particular attention to his perspective of what defines a state, his historical notion of the state in Spain, and how it related to his efforts in constructing a political community in the conservative imagination. Additionally, we also analyzed various interviews published in national newspapers where national political issues were addressed. The sessions recorded in congress were deliberately excluded as we argued that those debates refer to a wide range of topics, and the same arguments could be found in various books published in those years.

Firstly, this paper focused on only 1978 to 1982 because it was in these years when Fraga addressed the doctrinal reshaping of the Spanish right; while the preceding years of intellectual work were dedicated to the political reform, the construction of a party coalition, and the design of the constitutional text. Secondly, this period was crucial for Spain's democratic consolidation as it encompasses a number of key democratic developments (specifically, it includes Adolfo Suárez's victory in the March 1979 legislative elections, the 23 February 1981 failed *coup d'état*, the collapse and almost disintegration of the UCD, and Felipe González's socialist victory in the legislative elections of October 1982). Also, during this period, there were a total of sixteen electoral processes between municipal, regional, general elections, and referendums in which the AP, founded by Fraga in 1976, went from obtaining 8.21% of the votes in the constituent elections of 1977 to become an opposition force in the 1982 elections with 26.36% of the votes against a Socialist Party that came to power by almost doubling their votes.

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<sup>1</sup> Encuestas Data for legislative elections survey in 1979 and 1982.

Throughout these four years, the leaders of the dictatorship 'opening sector' managed to re-position themselves within the Spanish political landscape as a second force and laid the foundation for the next three decades of bipartisanship (or two-party dominance). Much of this rise was due to the implosion of Adolfo Suárez's government and the UCD's continual internal crisis that favored the transfer of the electorate to the AP. But it was also due to Fraga's doctrinal reshaping carried out through his books and his work at the Fifth Congress of the Popular Alliance in February 1982, in which he proposed a centrist strategy and threatened to resign from his position if agreements were reached with the unconstitutional far-right. Fraga also proposed approaching the UCD in order to form a "natural majority" (García-Atance 1982, p. 178) that would allow the entire center-right to be regrouped inside the constitutional framework.

Between December 1978 and October 1982, Fraga carried out intense intellectual work to reshape the guiding principles of the right within the new democratic framework. Within a context marked by the need to consolidate Spanish democracy, political violence, and pressure from the far right and the military in a country without an advanced democratic culture, Fraga updated the political doctrine of the democratic right by combining the core principles of pre-Francoist Spanish conservatism, adding elements of Margaret Thatcher's 'moral economy', an inspired inclusion of Carl Schmitt's political philosophy regarding 'tacticism within the state', and—no less important—he incorporated traditional core symbols, such as the monarchy, the unity of the nation, the Spanish flag, and the defense of Christian and conservative moral values.

In this context, this is why we used the notion of "reshape" instead of a "refounding" or "transformation" of the Spanish conservative ideology. It is due to several factors, including, on the one hand, Fraga belonging to the reformist wing, which since 1969 had advocated for limited and controlled political reform. Unlike the regime's most extreme conservative sectors, Fraga belonged to a generation that had no direct experience of the Civil War. Fraga's ideas found contestation both on the far-right, which rejected constitutional legitimacy, as well as on the center-right, which included Christian democrats and liberals, during the transition. However, throughout the consolidation of democracy, Fraga remained the symbolic right-wing successor of pre-democratic values. Hence, when he worked on his democratic political program, he reshaped the preceding political principles within the new democratic juncture, including with it the new constitutional framework, but safeguarding the idea of a defending national party and defender of Christian morality. Conservative thinking reshapes its political principles by seeking to offer a synthesis between economic modernization and acceptance of a certain political pluralism while maintaining a distinct and independent nature. Fraga's reformist character is directed in a different direction from the continuation of the consensus of the transition years, as expressed in a 1979 article entitled *Turn to the right*: "For a modern right can only be made from the recognition of the reasons of the left, but without concessions to their reasons and abuses" (Fraga 1979).

Fraga's work did not produce a closed and complete theory for the functioning of the right inside the new regime, but rather a set of principles, metaphors, and shared images that provided a vision of a new country. The act of reshaping sought to cut with the Francoist past while keeping some of its authoritarian and conservative values. Analyzing how Fraga constructed his notion of 'state' and 'community', we could identify two main changes inside conservatism, both during and after the democratic transition. On the one hand, the opening of the state to the electoral competition implies a change in which it is conceived as 'a political and normative command', as its own agency. On the other, the concept of community necessarily refers to the way in which the dictatorship had constructed the Spanish nation and its denial of opposition, condensed in the Francoist update of the old nationalist idea of "*Antiespaña*" (Borras 1954). Also, through this concept, it is possible to understand Fraga's understanding of the essentialist elements of the Francoist regime, with its movement towards a somewhat more pluralistic notion, which admits a greater diversity of approaches, but maintains its firmness about the defense of nation, Christian religion, and morality against the 'catastrophic consequences of the actions of Marxists and Socialists'.

In sum, during this period, Fraga introduced a set of ideas that established a democratic right party inside a polarized pluralist party system (Sartori 2005, p. 172) in a liberal democracy. Fraga was aware that his main obstacle came from the identification of both himself and his party as successors of the dictatorial regime (both among the militants and voters), so he focused his efforts on the creation of a narrative that enabled him to make some significant innovations for the right. By binding the concepts of state and nation to the need for broad economic modernization, he paved the way for a conservative political space that maintained a distance from symbols of the recent past while refusing to enter into debates with far-right political actors who did not accept the constitutional order. The alternative to Fraga's blueprint was to risk becoming a political remnant from the past. As he stated in *España entre dos modelos de sociedad*: "History is also a cemetery of those political systems that didn't know how to incorporate new groups and social concerns" (Fraga 1982a, p. 133).

### 3. What Did Manuel Fraga Mean for Spanish Politics?

The figure of Manuel Fraga Iribarne (1922–2012) is one of the most complex and polyhedral in the second half of the Spanish twentieth century. Born in Villalba (Lugo), to a Galician father and a Basque-French mother, he studied politics, law, and economics once the war was over. In 1945, he joined the Corp of Lawyers in Parliament, and, in 1947, the Diplomatic School. In 1948, he obtained the Chair of Political Law at the University of Valencia, and, in 1953, the Chair of Theory of State and Constitutional Law at Complutense University. A few years later—in 1953—he was designated secretary of the Education Council by Minister Joaquín Ruiz-Giménez. In 1961, he was appointed Minister of Information and Tourism, a position that served him to promote the famous campaign to attract foreign tourism under the slogan "Spain is different", but also to amend the Press Law that had been in force since 1938. The old law established a system of prior censorship, while the new 1966 law established a system of fines and publications embargo that severely punished moderate opposition publications. He held the post until 1969 when a case of corruption partially affecting the government came to light and led to the entire reformulation of the cabinet. As a result, Franco nominated him to be Ambassador in London, where he maintained cordial relations with various personalities from the 'Tory environment' and the right-wing of the Labor party. He returned to Spain in 1975 to become a member of the government again, holding a delicate but central position as Minister of Home Affairs, at a time characterized by a high level of uncertainty about the future of the regime and increasing internal and external political tension. He held this position until the government's fall in July 1976, when President Arias Navarro found himself incapable of relieving internal tensions and of promoting political reform. The following government led by Adolfo Suárez (1976–1981) marked the beginning of political *apertura*, and Fraga founded the Alianza Popular party and published *The White Book for Democratic Reform*, in which he outlined his idea for a new political regime and the strategy to accomplish it. Fraga did this in the context of tempestuous relations with the moderate right of the UCD and numerous complaints about the design of the political transition. However, this did not prevent him from being, after the first Constituent Courts, one of the ideologies of the Constitution, and, despite strong disagreements over the final product, he strongly campaigned for and supported the new constitution in parliament. In the following years, he would remain President of the Popular Alliance and Deputy, running for the presidency of the government in the general elections until 1986. In 1996, at the age of 66, he became president of the Galicia Xunta until 2005 and, subsequently, became Senator from 2006 to 2011, a few months before his death in January 2012.

Despite his impressive political career, this does not overshadow his work as a university professor nor as an academic writer and essayist. At the head of the Chair of Political Law during the dictatorship, he was a professor to many students who, at the same time, were part of the political opposition groups to Franco (*Frente de Liberación Popular*, PCE, PSOE). Amongst Fraga's books, there are numerous works dedicated to the study of constitutional texts and forms of government in countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Puerto Rico, in addition to others dedicated to Spanish conservative authors, such as Antonio Cánovas del Castillo and Antonio Maura. Fraga's essays belong

to a second stage, which coincides with the moment when he took over the responsibility to create Alianza Popular. In these latter works, Fraga served as a chronicler of his time and took the opportunity to strengthen the theoretical foundations of the nascent position of post-Franco conservatism in Spanish democracy. He brought together a political doctrine rich in classical philosophy and political references with an in-camera description of the milestones of the political life of the Transition, along with a denunciation of the flaws of the nascent democracy. Works, such as *España entre dos modelos de sociedad*, *El debate nacional*, *Ideas para la reconstrucción de una España con futuro*, and *El cañón giratorio*, express the political foundations of the post-Francoist right, upon which conservatism would be defined for the next decade. Finally, towards the end of his life in the late 1980s, he wrote several memoirs, including his autobiography "*Brief Memories of a Public Servant*".

Fraga evolved from being one of the main promoters of political reform in the late 1960s—as Ferrán Gallego extensively recounts in *El mito de la Transición*—to become the leader of the democratic right in the eighties, one of the fathers of the Constitution, and one of the longest-serving parliamentarians. This is a considerable journey that very few politicians from the diverse groups of Francoism could or ever sought to complete. Strong in character and authoritarian with those who worked with him, he always sought to be knowledgeable over a huge range of topics, which eventually led him to be an avid reader of contemporary authors, from Marx to Hegel, through Carl Schmitt and Alain de Benoist. When asked about how he saw himself, he answered: "*I am a man of the people and from the people [ . . . ] Lies, doublespeak, cowardness and opportunism bother me*". He would claim that his main concern was work by and for the state: "*My wife lives like a widow*" (Fraga 1982b, p. 143).

Even though he adopted a conciliatory and open to dialogue tone in his works, when it comes to setting out his arguments, including references from his political adversaries, his balance as a politician had some important chiaroscuros. As Minister of Information and Tourism, he was in the Council of Ministers that sentenced Julián Grimau, one of the leaders of the Communist Party in 1963, to death for continued military rebellion. Likewise, while in this same position, he was responsible for the closure, administrative persecution, and embargo of opposition publications through the Press Law of 1966. Also, in 1969, in the context of the murder of anti-Franco student Enrique Ruano, which was covered up as a suicide, Fraga threatened the father of the murdered student. As Fraga confessed years later to Torcuato Luca de Tena, the director of the right-wing ABC newspaper, it mobilized the paper to modify Enrique Ruano's personal diary to detail the reasons for his "suicide". In 1976, as Minister of Home Affairs, he was responsible for the *Sucesos de Vitoria* of March 3rd, in which the police repressed a protest in a church, murdering five workers and injuring more than 150 people, incidents for which neither Fraga nor Rodolfo Martín Villa—Minister of Unions relations at the time—were prosecuted for by the Spanish courts. Months later, Fraga uttered his famous sentence "the street is mine", thus forbidding the opposition to protest on the First of May 1976.

#### 4. The State: From an Authoritarian to a (Limited) Pluralist Construction

While the autocratic regime of the dictator endured, Fraga remained undoubtedly loyal, whether as Minister of Information and Tourism, as Ambassador to London, or in any of the tasks he undertook since his entry into politics during the dictatorship. Within the different factions of the dictatorship, Fraga was one of those who, from 1969, began to work on the hypothesis of a certain democratic openness, but his postulates did not find support in the Caudillo's trusted circles as they were committed to a continuity strategy. The question about succession following the assassination of Carrero Blanco encouraged enmities within the different factions of Francoism during the last governments (Eser and Peters 2016; Gallego 2008) so that the death of the Caudillo found the leaders of the dictatorship without a unified strategy of continuity or reform (Gallego 2008; Juliá 2019; Morán 2016).

Fraga always thought that once the reform process started, he would lead the political transition. Thus, when the development of events positioned Adolfo Suárez as President of the Government, he manifested his anger since he considered Suárez an opportunist who had, in some ways, 'ruined his

destiny'. After the ratification of the 1978 Constitution, Fraga found himself, for the first time since 1953, without a post inside the state.

Fraga did not reflect on the nature of the state in abstract terms but built a system based on theoretical patchwork applied to the functioning of society and the Spanish state. He knew that, even if the main political challenge was to consolidate the new system of government, it was also crucial that the first task of the state was to economically modernize the country, which was far behind Europe. Among the journalists of the transition, it was often said that he was a man "who had the state in his mind". His knowledge of the structures and forms of the functioning of the Francoist state during the period 1953–1975 allowed him a certain advantage over his political competitors in the democratic opposition during the transitional period. Given that his political career was almost as long in a dictatorship as in democracy, it is possible to say that Fraga was a statesman regardless of the form of government in which he worked.

The starting point of Fraga's thinking was the consideration that there are government structures that exist before a form of government is chosen; structures that refer to the very spiritual and customary character of the people. This conception led to specific and original traits for the conservatives. On the one hand, it steered clear from the Francoist construction of the legitimacy of the state, which was largely inspired by the reactionary thinking of the second half of the 19th century. On the other hand, Fraga was capable of incorporating in his thought a close reading of the German jurist Carl Schmitt with a synthesis of the British conservative *tory* thinking. He extracted from Schmitt's philosophy an accurate reading on the sources of power and the law (rights) of a society. He also borrowed the conception of a realistic philosophy of history, even cynical, on the internal progress of societies. Fraga took the idea from the British *tories* of articulating custom as a source for law and their capacity to build a stable political regime. The synthesis of these two traditions resulted in a strain of conservative thought that is based on the coexistence of two principles: the survival of a telluric character in Spanish society and the reformist principle as a solution of continuity, which "synthesizes" in *El debate nacional*:

*"The conservative principle starts from the assumption that it is better that things are not moved; that social action must be based on experience and that it is not a field for sorcerer's apprentices; that it is better not to shake a society that satisfactorily accomplishes its basic functions; that the deepest parts of the social order are those that benefit the most over the long duration, and those that are most harmed by light and unjustified change". (Fraga 1981a, p. 21)*

In almost all of Fraga's publications in this period, he referred to the same historical anecdote in which an old Chancellor Metternich explained to the young nineteenth-century conservative intellectual Donoso Cortés the superiority of a system of principles over the rigidity of an abstract ideology, as the first could face any situation, while the other could be quickly involved in contradictions. "Just as a rotating cannon is preferable to a static one" added, Fraga. Given the number of times he mentioned this anecdote, it is plausible to think that Fraga worked on the state from the inside and not as a part of society with shared values and attitudes that aspire to govern. In *El debate nacional*, he listed these values, starting from an *iusnaturalist* approach: firstly, he settled on the principle of *unity* as the basis for every society and which must be defended against those who wish to challenge it. Secondly, the principle of *continuity* follows, as a way to "enhance the legacy of tradition" (in a mellifluous reference to Francoism), but accompanied by a principle of *reshaping* that allows an organic and orderly evolution of societies; strongly contrasting this with any principle of revolutionary order. Moreover, these considerations were complemented with references to the principle of *freedom* as free will, to an organic principle of solidarity and common defense, and, lastly, to a principle of *transcendence* beyond a particular political regime.

When Fraga chose to define his doctrine as a series of principles and not as an ideological construct, he did not deny the political character but organized them in such a way that facilitated a political shift both to the right and to the center, in the name of the persistence of a group of political principles that ultimately referred to the 'unfathomable essence of Spain'. This approach, although not new,

proved to be exceptionally useful as it was able to evolve towards both right-wing and central political positioning, in a pragmatic approach that Fraga implemented from 1982 to 1989. Likewise, this choice allowed him to perform a theoretical balancing act by finding a solution to the idea of dictatorship figures continuing within the new democratic regime.

This renunciation of a structured political ideology allowed the Spanish right-wing to be able to accommodate problematic decisions without having to resolve ‘logical contradictions’. By constructing the origin of legitimacy on an *iusnaturalist* principle, he managed to solve the problem of continuity between dictatorship and democracy and the moral implications involved in moving from one to the other. Regardless of how the transitional period was characterized, either as an agreed rupture (Tusell 2005) or an inter-elite pact to prevent social rupture (Ortí 1989, p. 14), the political consensus forged in the 1978 Constitution laid a *tabula rasa* among political actors but not for society, for whom the figure of Fraga remained linked to Francoism. In 1978, it was a fact that the majority of Alianza Popular leaders had held positions of responsibility in the previous 15 years of the dictatorship. Hence, when Fraga decided to put forward a political agenda for Spain and argued that its doctrine was not based on an ideology but a set of principles, he did not deny a strong position on the political side, but placed the cause of that position in a prior place to any form of state, and at least gave vigor and versatility to those principles. When he claimed that human societies are ruled by principles derived from the human condition itself, prior to the state, to the different forms of government and the modern notion of law, he implicitly developed a connection between conservative Francoism and the nascent democracy. The same moral conservative principles of society, but stripped of the dictatorship’s rhetoric and Francoist symbols, are those that operate in a democracy. History, as per Fraga, “gives us the testimony of which things have worked out well and which have gone wrong. And, in this sense, it shows us also the permanent failure of human nature, both individual and social” (Fraga 1982b, p. 18). The conservative approach argues that changes in societies must always be for the better, an extremely difficult task in which “we always have to figure out which part of the former legacy we save” (Fraga 1982b, p. 18), about which Fraga argued “I am inclined to save as much as possible, but it is obvious that there are other things that need to be reformed” (Fraga 1982b, p. 18).

Referring to this previous stratus, it is possible to describe a series of valid political principles, which govern in both forms of government. The conservative principles are equally valid in a dictatorship and in a democracy, as long as they have a place inside them. The new democratic right, under the transition, must be able to develop these principles in the new system. In this way, Fraga viewed History as “a series of instalments that we must pay to our ancestors” (Fraga 1982b, p. 15), as a series of commitments or obligations that every generation establishes with the preceding one, which, foremost, have a moral character based on the telluric being of Spanish society.

Once a society confirms the survival of these principles, Fraga argued that it is possible to move forward to political positions by adopting a realistic approach that allows adaption to the correlation of forces of each moment. This can be seen in two clarifying historical fragments. The first can be found in the memories of Felix Santos, director of the *Cuadernos para el diálogo* journal<sup>2</sup>, where he shared an anecdote from the ex-Minister of Education Joaquín Ruiz Jiménez during a private discussion about the Press Law he promoted in 1966 with Fraga, when he abruptly concluded: “There were two topics on which the slightest criticism would not be allowed [ . . . ] these topics were: the figure of the Head of State—Francisco Franco—and the legitimacy of July 18th” (Santos 2019, p. 156). This conversation, held sometime in 1966, contrasts with a second one, when 10 years later, Fraga presented his political party Alianza Popular in the newspaper *El País*, expressed as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> *Cuadernos para el diálogo* was a cultural and political journal published in Spain from 1963 until 1978 and was considered one of the meeting points of the democratic opposition to the Franco regime. It aimed at having a ‘democratic and consensus spirit’, and was a meeting point for Christians democrats and socialists who would play important roles as intellectuals and politicians in the Spanish transition.



“It is said that we want to perpetuate the Francoist institutions. That is not true. The figure of Franco and his *way* of governing are not repeatable. What we ask for is that instead of blowing things up (*voladura*), reforms should be made, and that, instead of seeking apologies for the past, serious work for the future should be carried out”. (Fraga 1977)

From 1980 onwards, Fraga took the issue of the country’s future very seriously. In 1980, he published *Ideas for the Reconstruction of a Spain with Future* where he developed two main ideas: on the one hand, he worked on what he considered to be the initial errors of the Spanish democratic system (state mismanagement, territorial organization, and terrorism growth), whereas, on the other, he argued that his party should create an economic program of modernization for the country inspired by the nascent neoliberal doctrines of US President Reagan. If the political work of Fraga was to reconstruct the Spanish right under democracy, his work focused on finding the elements that bring together the democratic, liberal, open-minded sectors of the dictatorship to convert an electoral space identified as an heir to the dictatorship, in a new democratic right. There are four common elements, which he, specifically, defended: Spain’s unity and the structure of Autonomous Communities; the fight against terrorism and insecurity; the economic modernization of the country; and Christian moral values. Fraga proposed an ‘Order party’ with a narrow conception of political pluralism, support for a strong political state, and liberal on economic issues, whose purpose was to be able to highlight and take advantage of the initial problems that Spanish democracy was facing. In Fraga’s view, the constitutional change happened at an unfavorable economic juncture that resulted in both “*the disenchantment of large sections of the population and a high degree of uncontrolled violence*” (Fraga 1982a, p. 32).

In 1979, with the AP in fourth place in Parliament after ‘disastrous electoral results’, Fraga read the situation strategically and perceived that the UCD’s weakness and the implementation of the new democratic state opened a new opportunity for him to become the next leader of the Spanish right in a short period of time and, furthermore, to personify himself as the political choice of the right, as an antithesis of Socialist and Communist choices. This would be a movement consisting of two elements: maintaining strong support for the constitution while, at the same time, criticizing the Electoral Law, territorial organization, and economic and education policy. Both in *El debate nacional* (1981) and in *España, entre dos modelos de sociedad* (1982), Fraga focused on the same principle to articulate his political program: nascent Spanish democracy was going through a profound crisis with causes related to the modernization of societies and the “incapacity” of other political forces to provide solutions to this new situation of the state. The rapid political change had established a “*culture of decay*”, which is the “*perfect breeding ground for preparing the revolution*” (Fraga 1980, p. 19). In turn, the economic crisis had also led to a youth crisis as the result of high expectations and widespread labor conflict that, eventually, led to a crisis for business and companies—which in Fraga’s opinion—could not find an ally in the state. All this led to a state crisis, as it was overwhelmed and unable to face the new changes. The state suffered a legitimacy crisis since, inside the system, there were both those who “*want to bring the revolution inside the Constitution*” and those who, from a federal perspective, threatened Spanish unity. But the state also faced a legal crisis, because in trying to assume more and more functions, it had become incapable of fulfilling its obligations. Fraga presented an image of an incompetent Spanish democracy that was not responding to the challenges of its time. Against this, he presented himself as an alternative to order and modernization for Spanish society.

The role of the state is to provide minimums of security, effectiveness, and justice at a reasonable cost. State crisis could stem from the new ruling elite’s lack of preparation but also from the volume of powers that the new state sought to develop. Paraphrasing Reagan, he argued that: “*in the context of the current economic crisis, the public sector is not the solution, it is the problem*” (Fraga 1982a, p. 78). Fraga then added a reference to Spaniards’ historic character for whom—in Fraga’s opinion—“*the state is not a good word, but the symbol of what intervenes in one’s life*” (Fraga 1980, p. 241). Excessive development of the state leads to unsustainable situations and is the product of dissonance between reality and political aspirations. Fraga was building an antagonistic narrative of an incipient democracy, as implemented

by the UCD and PSOE. As both parties were facing difficulties in developing the social and territorial structure of the state, by decentralizing the administration into different levels, Fraga would hold a centralist position, claiming that only a fit state could address the economic difficulties, and only a liberal agenda could modernize the country. This formula was presented as a program to develop Spain over the following two decades from a society in “decay” to a developed and “free” society. In this narrative, the figure of a strong state and economic liberalization are presented as inevitable: “*What freedom does one have who is unemployed or fears the terrorist’s machine gun? There is no freedom but within the law or true progress other than within the objective laws of the economy.*” (Fraga 1982a, p. 185). In sum, Fraga sought to approach the conservative continental formulations of the time, with the particularity that, in this case, it was not an evolution of conservative post-war thought but a doctrinal reorganization in search of better democratic accommodation.

Therefore, Fraga—a meticulous reader of Carl Schmitt—sought, in 1982, a return to an antagonist political system in Spain once the transition was concluded. In April 1980, he stated, following a meeting with the King, that “*after a constituent period and a consensus that everybody says needs to be closed, it is time for a division of roles between the government and the opposition, and let everyone take their place*”. The Parliament can no longer be “*a chamber of embraces and joys*” (Fraga 1982a, p. 145) but a place where the different or even antagonistic political projects compete electorally. With this request for an allocation of political positions, Fraga concluded the right-wing reorganization exercise for this new era. This was a piece of work that allowed the Spanish right-wing to operate in a democracy without having to criticize the dictatorship or answer for their leaders’ prior conduct. By virtue of the *tabula rasa* established by the transition agreements, it became plausible to reorient the doctrine of the Spanish right from *Caudillistic* positions to a conservatism that combined Gaullist elements of the ‘party of Order’, an *iusnaturalistic* justification of the political principles and a proto-neoliberal economic organization. Once the new coordinates were established, Fraga was in a position to start the struggle to become the referent of the right.

## 5. Community: From the Francoist Heritage to the “Natural Majority” of Conservative Spaniards

Despite the agreed and consensual nature of the Spanish transition, the arrival of the new democratic system placed the conservatives in a complicated situation regarding political pluralism within their doctrine. Franco’s autocratic rule had been built around the denial of half Spain—those defeated in the Civil War—and the recovery and exaltation of the Imperial past embodied in the figure of the dictator. Following the Constitution’s approval, the conservatives needed to distinguish themselves from the ‘nostalgic far-right’, thus developing a differentiated narrative on political community and Spanish identity, which was able to integrate into the new system some of the operating principles of the former structure but accommodated to the new constitutional order.

This circumstance found Fraga in a situation where he had to develop an approach that allowed him to accept political plurality in the government, without renouncing the identarian features of the Spanish right. From this process, which Fraga approached selectively and strategically, we focused only on those elements that involved the reformulation of a conservative democratic political option, without having to directly address the whole symbolic inheritance of the dictatorship. That is why it is necessary to rescue three aspects of this doctrinal reworking to better understand the coordinates in which the Spanish right had to move. The first is the conservative management of the new democratic situation and political pluralism after four decades of dictatorship; the second relates to the defense of the nation and national unity, and, finally, a third aspect searches for historical references of the conservative tradition not linked to the dictatorship.

### 5.1. A Natural Majority

The approval of the Spanish constitution and the general elections in 1979 left Fraga’s party in a critical situation: it lost half a million votes and gained only 6% of the votes in an election that gave Adolfo Suárez the Presidency of the government for the second time, along with an expanded

political center. The first democratic general elections ‘penalized’ Fraga for being regarded as the heir of Francoism. Facing this adverse situation, Fraga became convinced that he was predominantly responsible for the results and resigned as leader of the AP. His withdrawal from the leadership only lasted a few months, but it was enough time to gain the necessary perspective to observe Spanish society and the new party system dynamics. In these months, Fraga found himself surrounded by a governing party that clustered the Christian Democrats and the liberals around the figure of Adolfo Suárez in the presidency, and to the right, by the nostalgic far-right groups that accused him of being a traitor to Franco’s legacy. Fraga considered Suárez and his followers to be opportunists, whereas he saw the latter as being unrealistic reactionaries for placing themselves outside of the constitution. At this strategic crossroad, Fraga became aware of the need to generate a distinct narrative of these two political positions in order to survive. Throughout the 10 books that he published between 1978 and 1982, there are two striking elements in relation to the concept of community or belonging to an identity, which, in this case, is Spanish: firstly, it is striking the lack of references to Spanish History from 1930 to 1975, apart from the scarce occasions in which he mentioned the Civil War (1936–39) as a failure of coexistence, but also his omission of anecdotes and personal encounters during that period, something that is certainly anomalous for someone who had been a diplomat and minister on several occasions. Secondly, in his different books, he built an image of Spain rather than an idea of nationhood.

By drawing on anecdotes statements and pieces of advice from people from throughout Spain on matters that concern Spaniards, Fraga sought to build a ‘unanimous account of the country’. An old Galician baker, a *guardia civil* from the Basque Country, or a peasant from the rural region of Extremadura are some of the voices that emerge from his works to create ‘a common sense’ among Spaniards. Through this resource, Fraga sought to understand the telluric character of Spaniards, which leads them to reach the same conclusions about the development of the country, even though they experience different circumstances. In this way, he built a notion of the community from the discourses and values shared by most Spaniards, instead of operating with a strong and deductive notion of nation and what it means to be Spanish. In the nascent democracy, every attempt to redefine the principle of Spanish nationalism referred directly to the dictatorship years, so Fraga developed his vision of Spanish identity through the constitutional consensus set out in Article 2, thereby creating a ‘composite character of Spanish society’ that is associated with the development of a realistic and comprehensive perspective of its past history.

Fraga perceived himself as pragmatic, arguing that he assumed “*the whole History of Spain, the one that is liked and the one that is not*” (Fraga 1982a, p. 184), because his intention was to form an idea of Spain through a developmental and modernizing program that, in his words, “*can be used to imagine the Spain of the year 2000*”. In this way, he projected an image of a community that has economic modernization as its starting point, without having to settle accounts with the recent dictatorial past. As a result, the reshaping of Spanish conservatism needs to reconnect with the citizens through the creation of common sense, based on the right-wing’s discontent with the course of democracy, but without abandoning the constitutional framework.

In this context, during the 5th Congress of the Alianza Popular in 1982, Fraga launched the idea of a “*natural majority*” of Spaniards, sharing a number of principles and notions of how Spanish society should work. This idea was mentioned for the first time in 1976, but it became central when the UCD began to crumble after Suárez’s resignation. Fraga used this idea to make a turn to the center-right in order to include some of the UCD’s policies but also to gather a broader electorate capable of competing with the socialists. However, this ‘turn to the center’ was not performed by the concordance of ideological principles but through the rearrangement of a right-wing block under democracy, which Fraga summed up in his closing speech to the 5th AP congress:

“the grouping of that vast majority of Spaniards who want peace, law, jobs, social services at a reasonable price, all that by democratic means and with the conviction that there is only

one way, which is the creation of political majorities that, under its discretion, public opinion and Spanish society produce in that moment". (in [García-Atance 1982](#))

This idea is one of the signs of the conclusion of the transitional period since it somehow comes to express a break with the consensus messages characteristic of the previous years. The idea of a natural majority refers to the existence of an operating block, which, although it may have several electoral expressions, operates under the same logic. The idea that there is a social majority that agrees on fundamental issues is common to every party that tries to reach power. However, in this case, Fraga defined 'natural majority' by referring to the 'double character' of the Spanish people. In a theoretical dimension, it refers to a majority that is not built by simple opposition but is pre-existing to all kinds of government, that professes a series of genuine values and attitudes of the Spanish people, and which Fraga associated with his conservative proposal. Whereas, in a practical dimension, the allusion to a natural majority refers, implicitly, to 'sociological Francoism', that is, to those layers of the Spanish population who, during the dictatorship, supported the regime more or less tacitly. The "natural majority" in 1982 was the emblem of a conservative right that built a political community from a liberal economic modernization program and the prevalence of a Spanish telluric common sense, beyond a closed ideology. Although it would take 15 years more for the Spanish right to reach power, this concept remained at the core of Spanish conservatives' strategy during the following decades as the only way to ever win an election again.

## 5.2. Indissoluble Unity

Specifically, one of the shared values that Fraga conferred on that natural majority is the will to remain united within the same nation, with a strong and centralized state. In order to achieve this, he depicted the radiography of the country in which he associated "Spanishness" with the defense of conservative values about the territorial organization. Thus, Fraga linked Francoist imaginary in democracy again through a defense of the 'always threatened unity of Spain'. He no longer referred to it as the "unity of destiny in the universal"<sup>3</sup>, but framed it as the defense of the "indissoluble unity" of the nation, as expressed in the constitution.

During the development of the constitution, Fraga had been critical of Article 2<sup>4</sup>, which talked about the defense of the unity of Spain and the principle of autonomy of the different regions. However, once the text was approved, he adopted the constitutional framework, understanding that the core of the consensus in that article is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation. As Spain's different autonomous communities developed, he remained a centralist, although he did not deny the particularities of the different regions of the country. He claimed that his territorial project would create "*an indestructible Spain, made of also indestructible regions; with real autonomies, from the bottom to the top, but culminating in a strong and effective national state*". According to Fraga, the main problematic issue was that the constitution did not clearly resolve the difference between nation and nationality, which led some political forces to undertake a federalist reading of the constitution, which, once put into practice, would decentralize state functions and, from his point of view, jeopardize the unity of the nation.

Fraga argued that the development of decentralized administrative levels into different regions would generate a weak state with narrower maneuvering space when it came to providing solutions to the climate of crisis and disenchantment that he himself outlined in his books. From this perspective, the development of regional autonomy would endanger the spiritual elements of the Spanish people and lead to the failure of the historical project, as well as weakening democracy. Fraga's main reason

<sup>3</sup> This formula was commonly used under Franco in reference to the nation. It was first expressed by Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, the founding father of the Falange during the II Republic.

<sup>4</sup> Article 2 states that the "constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation, the common and indivisible country of all Spaniards; it recognizes and guarantees the right to autonomy of the nationalities and regions of which it is composed, and solidarity amongst them all."

was pragmatic: only a strong state would be able to accomplish the economic and social modernization that the country needed in the 1980s. He believed that opportunism and improvisation in the early years of democracy had meant that the idea of the nation as an organic whole was forgotten, which, in turn, led to disenchantment of part of the population and to dramatic situations, such as the failed coup d'état on 23 February 1981. Given this, Fraga understood that the task of his party started from considering that: "the *Alianza Popular* [ . . . ] does not consider Spain as the remains of a shipwreck at the mercy of the waves, but as the basic value of our social life" (Fraga 1982a, p. 184). Therefore, it is about defending the nation and protecting its symbols and institutions. The flag and monarchy were considered to be the cohesive elements for a Spanish identity, naturally formed as a historical project, and, hence, it was through these that the "natural majority" of Spaniards expressed their adherence to this political community. This is how the conservative bloc maintained the defense of the nation as its main guarantee for the viability of Spain's project. Defense within the constitution was both against expressions of independence and the terrorist threat, but also against what they consider to be excessive administrative and political decentralization in the regions. Its project is, first and foremost, that of a centralized state, the only guarantor to avoid eventual national failure and the organic dissolution of the political community, something that Fraga sometimes expressed dramatically: "If we are not Spanish we are nothing, because neither will we become English or Russian." (Fraga 1982a, p. 184).

### 5.3. Recovering the Non-Authoritarian Intellectual Tradition

In this conservative doctrinal reorganization in the incipient years of Spanish democracy, Fraga did not ignore the task of searching for new political and intellectual referents that could be differentiated from those of Franco's regime. In his works from the early 1980s, references from the reactionary thought of the Spanish XIX were scarce, and their doctrine was never summarized. The same occurred with the Falangist intellectuals, such as José Antonio Primo de Rivera or Patricio González de Canales, references to Italian fascism, or to those who built the political and legal structures of Francoism and their apologists. All those figures disappeared in Fraga's work except when he referred to specific historical anecdotes. Instead, he drew on references from the 'new philosophers', such as Alain de Benoist, and sought to accommodate *iusnaturalism* and economic modernization in the same system; Burke, when he needed to address custom and stability in the conservative doctrine, and Joseph de Maistre to combat the horrendous consequences of any revolutionary doctrine put into practice.

Due to this choice, during the exercise of doctrinal reshaping, Fraga needed to find in Spanish history new political referents with whom the Spanish right-wing could identify itself. That is why, in the course of his book *El pensamiento conservador español* (Fraga 1981b), he developed a genealogy inspired by a conservative and reformist character. He rescued from the history of Spain figures like Jovellanos, Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, Antonio Maura, and Ramiro de Maeztu, in an attempt to reconstruct a historical timeline from the 1876 Restoration to the point of writing, thereby illustrating that a conservative tradition of the Catholic Spanish nation has always existed. But this is also a pragmatic tradition when it comes to undertaking reforms for the modernization of the country. Both Antonio Cánovas del Castillo and Antonio Maura were Presidents of the government during the Bourbon Restoration, skilled parliamentarians within their respective political traditions, and above all, two historical 'Men of state' figures, who Fraga eulogized for their integrity and moral character. They were anti-heroes, far from the epic politics of Francoism, and, on the contrary, emblematic of a conception of parliamentary politics restricted to the parties of order.

A history of conservative thought that sought to continue with the dictatorship would have included the figures that forged the ideological basis for the 1936 *coup d'état* and also those that constituted the intellectuality of the regime and both legally and politically organized the Francoist regime, and of whom Fraga is, to some extent, their natural heir. By removing the Francoist intellectual from this new conservative thought, the philosophy is freed from an ethical and political responsibility that could be developed under democracy without restrictions. There is a 'deliberate silence' over the previous 40 years of a government that allowed Fraga to survive in two very different senses: on the one

hand, in the new democracy, every relevant political actor needed to find non-authoritarian historical references that allowed them to have legitimacy as democratic actors. On the other, this rereading of Spanish conservatives enabled future political generations to develop their political principles without having to be held accountable for their authoritarian past.

## 6. Conclusions: The New (Old) Coordinates of the Spanish Right

Manuel Fraga's reshaping work from the end of 1978 to 1982 allowed the Spanish right to operate under democracy for a further three decades without excessive dependence on Francoism but also enabled it to remain united as one political bloc from 1982 to 2015. This was an exercise of doctrinal reshaping once the constitutional text came into effect, that is to say, the internal process through which Spanish conservatism built its democratic legitimacy. This does not mean, however, that there was a modernization and profound democratization of Spanish conservatives: the Spanish conservatives did not abandon their position as a Party of Order, a supporter of a strong state, and with certain authoritarian gestures. This is the reason that we defined this process as a reshaping and not as a transformation. Fraga's conservatives did not have to transform themselves into another political expression, but find doctrinal accommodation within the new democratic framework in an adequate manner, in order to group the right together. But this reshaping took place within a democratic framework, which Fraga respected and which he himself contributed to creating, as one of the constitutional *rapporteurs*.

In September 1982—one month before the elections that would give victory to the PSOE—Fraga had already developed in *España, entre dos modelos de sociedad* the strategy towards the consolidation of the blocs' policy, typical of bipartisanship. This conservative project would be consolidated as a center-right opposition to the socialist governments until 1989 when it grouped together the entire democratic right into the Popular Party.

The idea of "natural majority", even though it never led to an electoral majority under Fraga's command at the head of Alianza Popular, was comprehensively incorporated into conservative doctrine in relation to two issues: firstly, it was useful to guide political strategy around specific issues that could unite very diverse electorates under the same electoral option. Lastly, it allowed the coexistence of currents within the same party to be managed. By incorporating the democratic and liberal sectors within the Alianza Popular, Fraga ensured hegemony within the block and established the political positions that would define the development of Spanish democracy for decades to come.

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