

Success of general franco essay sample



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The Spanish Civil War provided the contrast of ideas and ideology that were to define the twentieth century. Historians have done extensive research and published many accounts, views, and stories of the conflict of 1936-1939.

General Franco was the unifying force of the Nationalists and the man who would later rule Spain for almost forty years. His success was due to factors that were seen on the battlefield and beyond it. Strong capabilities in the political world were crucial as he strove to create a broad support base that included conservatives and fascists. Propaganda was an important part of the Nationalist effort, as they tried to gain more support and undermine the Republican government. Strong self-belief aided Franco, and helped to develop a loyal core of followers. Finally, the weakness of the elected government was to contribute to the General's success, particularly in regards to military preparedness. The success of Franco was important not only for the people of Spain, but for the world in understanding the divisions that were being created in society.

The political astuteness of Franco was one of the major factors in his success. Spain's regional nature, social divisions, and polarized views in regards to governance posed great challenges for its leaders. The failure of Primo de Rivera and then the Second Republic created a power vacuum in Spain; one that could be exploited by someone with sound knowledge of society and the ability to build a broad base of support. Franco's military background allowed him to portray himself as a servant to Spain, and this was a viable alternative to the instability and violence in the years of the Republic. Preston argues that on the battlefield the General was cautious,

but had infinite political ambitions and had a firm view on the Spain of the future.

His strong views in the political sphere were closely related to his traditional upbringing and family life. Franco blamed Spain's fall from a colonial power on the decadence and carelessness of liberalism under the constitutional monarchy. Awareness that much of the Spanish population wanted a return to the glories of the past were a major advantage for Franco, as he was able to persuade them that this could only be done through his conservative and calm approach. Unity and discipline are key ingredients to success in the army, and this can be transferred to politics as well. By bringing in the right wing groups, and reigning in the excesses of the Falange, Franco was able to project strength to the people and promote their legitimacy as a viable administrative force.

Franco's knowledge of the shift towards the right, and his ability to gain significant support from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, were key advantages that the leader had over his opponents. The social upheavals and the spread of ideology created a dynamic mix across the continent, and the relationship with the two Axis powers was crucial. Andy Durgan argues that German and Italian assistance was crucial from the outset, with Franco's Army of Africa requiring planes from both the Fascist regimes to guarantee the passage from North Africa to the Iberian Peninsula. Ideological sympathies contributed to this help, but it also required boldness and negotiating skills on Franco's part. Promises of raw minerals and an unspoken alliance in future conflicts with the Germans were tempting, but it also required the General to portray himself as strong, and in essence, a

winner. Powerful friends inspired confidence in Franco from within Spain also, and helped make transform him into a figure that conservatives and ultranationalists could rally around.

The alliance with Germany and Italy had broader benefits in the diplomatic sphere. During the years of the Civil War Britain was largely concerned with the policy of appeasement, a viewpoint that was largely aimed at Germany. Developing a relationship with the Reich provided a safety net for Franco as the English tried to avoid any confrontations with Hitler and his allies.

Moradiellos writes of the importance of the Nationalist leader's diplomatic efforts, such as portraying himself as a moderate who was seeking to control the Communist threat in his country, and allowed him to push for assistance from countries that might not normally have intervened. His meeting with the British Consul on 20 July 1936 proved highly successful, with the world's leading naval power agreeing to prevent access to Tangier and Gibraltar for Republican ships.

Gaining concessions via dialogue were complimentary to his skills in military affairs, and allowed him to create a statesmen-like image. The bilateral approach of mixing international negotiations with brute violence was very productive for Franco, and isolated the leftist government, who relied largely on the Soviet Union for arms and diplomatic assistance. This help from the Communist power gave the General justification for accepting more military aid from the Axis. David Wingeate Pike notes that the Nationalists accepted foreign volunteers in response to acts such as Russian armoured vehicles being used in the capital. Franco's ability to transfer his organisational skills

from the armed forces to the political world was of great benefit to him personally and to the wider Nationalist effort.

The use of propaganda and the ability to shape public views was one of Franco's most significant achievements. Context is very important when assessing matters relating to the Spanish Civil War. The 1930s was a decade that saw the great clash of ideology, and Spain experienced it along with their European colleagues in Germany and Italy. Franco's primary goal was to defeat the Socialist Republic. They held power, and his use of written propaganda and other mediums such as music to bring much of the population over to his perceptions was vital. In *The Politics of Revenge*, Preston notes that Franco and his supporters were able to paint a distorted memory of Spanish history, and manipulated this to their own advantage. A war of ideas ran parallel to the Civil War, and the attempts by the Nationalists to convince the public of the need to return to the glorious past under Conservative powers such as Philip III, were largely successful.

It is natural to warm to stories and promises of greatness, and Franco was able to woo his people with eloquent speeches, displays of military strength, and patriotic sound in a similar matter to Hitler and Mussolini. The Republican government was illustrated as a proxy for the Soviet Union, and when combined with the Nationalist imagery of Spain as being a passionate and historical place where politics and violence were intertwined throughout the centuries, justification was given for the removal of the leftist administration by any means. J. P. Fusi writes of the General's reasons for the need for conservative rule, such as the number of governments that had existed during liberal eras. While opening a sitting of the Cortes (parliament)

in 1967, the dictator noted that between 1833 and 1868, Spain had experienced 41 governments and 2 civil wars.

Combined with his constant reference to the struggles and importance of the 1936-1939 Civil War, this was a very important and strategic tactic by Franco. Essentially it invoked fear within both the population and their representatives, and the ability to keep this memory alive via propaganda was one of the authoritarian leader's defining characteristics. The timing of this speech to the Cortes was also significant. Franco had been in power for three decades, and the 1930s was quite distant for many people in Spain. Timely reminders such as this were calculated attempts to keep his rule legitimate in order to maintain civil harmony and prevent the rise of the left in his lifetime. Franco was respected by many people even in the absence of love, and his ability to communicate his political and social ideology to the masses helped to keep him in power for almost 40 years.

The successful campaign of political indoctrination aimed at the youth within Spain also assisted Franco in his efforts to dominate Spain and build his legacy over decades. Speeches directed towards children, and organizations for school students that were pro-nationalist, were implemented to create a feeling of love, fear, or both for the dictator. As with his German and Italian colleagues, Franco wanted a system that was all-encompassing for the young people, and where individual thought and criticism was kept to a minimum. Programs of nationalist instruction such as the Formacion del Espiritu Nacional for boys, and the Ensenanza del Hogar for girls were deliberate attempts by the Nationalist administrations to control education and create a broad political support base for generations to come.

These courses were important in the context of the greater aims of building a more 'Spanish' nation, as they helped to advocate not only the need to be loyal to the government, church, and military, but they also helped to define gender roles. Boys were taught to work hard and devote themselves to Spain through Nationalist principles of strength, faith, and supporting the family unit. Girls were instructed on the need to take care of the home, and have children that would also help to make Spain strong in the future. Franco's need to be involved with many spheres of society such as education showed his obsession with gaining support from all angles. This can be seen as excessive social intervention, but essentially it helped to solidify his position as leader of the nation. The fact that he lasted in power for almost four decades is proof of his success.

Strong self-belief and the ability to convince others that his ideology would prevail played a pivotal role in Franco's victory. The General's background, family history, and years of service abroad were just a few of the factors that shaped his personal philosophies, and his ability to unite key people and in particular right-wing militias and organized armies resulted in him having a head start on the Republic when it came to battle. Franco's unwillingness to accept any other outcome than a Catholic, Conservative Spain led by him not only ensured continued support, but resulted in extra backing from neutrals within Spain. Franco's upbringing in the largely agrarian Galicia had fostered his belief in a structured, family-based society, where the Catholic Church played a leading role in providing guidance for people of all ages.

According to Ellwood, the General's inspiration from his faith only grew and he had a sense of providence in regards to his and Spain's struggles, and

this would help to define his side of the conflict from the Republican side. This sense of righteousness was important not only for the identity of the man who successfully led the Nationalist rebellion and Spain post-1939, but for those who yearned for a different course for their country. Absolute belief in one's ideas often provides justification for cruelty and terror in times of war, and the abhorrence of the Socialist principles of the Republican order allowed Franco and his supporters to do this. By defining himself as a Conservative and a servant to Spain, he was also able to point out that his moral blue print was more moderate than for example the Falange, and this drew even more supporters from the traditional Conservatives and the centre of society. His mix of nationalism and conservatism attracted volunteers from abroad.

The International Brigades are well known for their support of the Republic, but Franco's ability to attract fighters from Britain, France, and even Russia helps to illustrate the appeal that he had. A Soviet newspaper claimed that 128 'White' Russians (pro-nationalist) were fighting in Spain in October 1937, although the figure could possibly have been higher. This number is much lower than the thousands who fought for the Socialists, but the fact that the General's ideas and personality were so strong that people travelled from the epicentre of Communism, Russia, showed some international solidarity behind the rightist rebels. Men who would happily spend money getting to Spain, and give their lives in pursuit of a return to the traditional pro-monarchy European order, was a valuable military resource for Franco. His ability to inspire people was one of his greatest successes.

The failure of the Republic and forces such as the International Brigades to build a disciplined and cohesive fighting force negated any moral high ground that they had, and was significant in the success of Franco and his allies. Air and ground support from the Axis has been mentioned as being vital to the Nationalist cause, but similar foreign support for the Socialists could have met this strategic advantage that the General had. Liberals, political sympathisers, and others who travelled to Spain in support of the democratically elected government were high in enthusiasm, but often ill-prepared for the conflict that lay ahead, and tactically deficient when it came to combatting an army that was battle-hardened and led by officers who believed just as strongly as those at the top of the Conservative hierarchy.

Snellgrove argues that the Republican forces would move through Spain to the battle fronts with ideology and passion, trying to mobilize the lower classes with egalitarian cries such as “ We the workers of Spain are poor but we are pursuing a noble ideal”. Many people, particularly in the more agrarian regions such as the Basque Country, Asturias, and Galicia, were quite poor and the message resonated with them. But the underlying problem of poorly trained and equipped soldiers, when compared to the Nationalists, was to be much more pivotal in the Civil War. Franco’s patience and experience in the field were extra areas of superiority.

The arms and other support received from the Soviet Union was crucial to the effort, but this assistance was not free. Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses notes the Republican Prime Minister Juan Negrin, an academic and doctor, had to give up Spain’s gold reserves as payment for the military goods that were critical to the war. It can be argued that the Germans and Italians expected

support from Franco when war broke out in 1939, and indeed he gave it, but it was unofficial and discreet. The desperation of the Republican government in giving up something as important as the nation's gold showed weakness and gave a leader such as Franco the opportunity to highlight this to the people and make strong criticism of such an act. The inherent weakness of the government was a significant factor that led to the rebels prevailing in the conflict.

Many factors contributed to the Nationalists defeating the Republican government in the Civil War of Spain. This essay has looked at several of the successful tactics and traits that assisted Franco to seize power and return to a more conservative society. His military and political advantages are clear, but there are other explanations for the Nationalist victory.

The European climate was crucial in deciding the war, as the powerful Nazi and Italian Fascist states willingly gave resources to Franco to practice for the major conflict that would start in the same year that the Civil War ended. The Socialists failed in their endeavours, but it is unlikely that any real chance of victory was ever there, in the face of such a strong enemy. Another area that could be researched is Franco's rapid rise through the ranks of the Army in Africa, specifically the connections that he had there. His success not only in winning the war, but in dominating Spanish social and political life for decades is clear and his legacy is evident.

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