

ALBANY MODEL UNITED NATIONS
TOPIC GUIDE: THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

A Brief Statement on Sensitivity:

Please be aware that this committee will engage with sensitive historical topics. If you wish to interact with other historical figures during the simulation (e.g., Stalin), please step out of character and directly state your intentions.

While groups who diverged from traditional Spanish cultural, social, or sexual norms were targeted by the Nationalists historically, this simulation will focus only on political conflict. Violence or other targeted action in crisis notes should be based on a person or group's perceived alignment with either the Republican or Nationalist side.

If you communicate with Nationalist figures in your crisis notes, do not attempt to replicate Francoist rhetoric. Any use of anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia, or other forms of hate speech will be reported to Mr. James and potentially Mr. McNally. Our aim is to foster a respectful and intellectually engaging committee environment.

I. Topic Introduction

In 1934, growing labour unrest culminated in a violent miner's uprising in the Spanish province of Asturias, which was brutally suppressed by forces led by General [Francisco Franco](#). Political instability continued, and following the [Popular Front](#)'s electoral victory on February 16, 1936, conservative military leaders planned a coup which began on July 17, 1936. Your committee, which will be from the perspective of the Republic, will begin after the attempted coup of July 18, 1936, at the start of the military uprising.

The Spanish Civil War began as a military revolt against the democratically elected Republican government, supported by conservative factions within Spain. When the initial coup failed to seize full control of the country, the conflict escalated into a bloody civil war.

The Nationalists (referred to variously as rebels, fascists, or Francoist) received support from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. In contrast, the Republicans were backed by the Soviet Union and international volunteers, which included members of the [International Brigades](#) from Europe and the United States.

“Spanish Civil War,” *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2025).

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II. Causes of the Spanish Civil War

Economic:

In the years leading up to 1936, Spain was facing an economic depression due to slow growth and uneven industrialization throughout the nation. The loss of its remaining colonial holdings in 1898 exacerbated the downturn, as the government lost access to critical external markets. Furthermore, it was slow to transform into an industrial economy compared to other nations in Europe; in the 1930s, Spain had only a per capita income comparable to that which Britain had reached in 1860.¹ The country's political divide was great. Progressive industrial elites, particularly in Catalonia's textile sector, supported modernization efforts. In contrast, rural farmers (referred to as *la España profunda*) and large landowners clung to conservative values, resisting these changes.

Political:

The government of the Second Spanish Republic in 1931 and again in 1936, enacted many political reforms; freedom of speech and association was granted, women were given the right to vote, divorce was legalized, and Spanish nobles were stripped of their privileges.³ Additionally, the government was anticlerical, promoting the separation of church and state, which alienated religious elites.⁴

The extensive political changes alienated many Spaniards, liberal and conservative alike. The reforms often failed to meet expectations for leftists, and there were many strikes and uprisings in the early months of 1936 leading up to the outbreak of war. For conservatives, the changes represented a departure from traditional Spanish values, gender roles, and religious identity.

Social:

The rapid economic and political changes prior to 1936 resulted in many social tensions, increasing support for the more conservative Nationalist agenda. In this lens, the Nationalist coup can be seen as "a crusade to defend an endangered way of life."⁵ The Republic's interference with the Catholic church was viewed as an attack on Spanish social identity, particularly for those living in more rural areas, where daily life was largely centered around religious traditions. The Catholic church was able to mobilize female constituents into an electoral bloc vote in favor of conservative candidates.⁶

Spanish traditional elites and military elites also opposed the Republic's reforms. The elites, who supported traditional cultural values, viewed the Republic as an illegitimate regime. The military elites, specifically at the main military academy in Zaragoza, led by Francisco Franco, believed that the military should be the "guardian and saviour of Spain," which led to the emergence of an ultra-nationalist right.⁷

III. Timeline⁸

September 13, 1923: General Miguel Primo de Rivera orchestrates a coup d'état that topples the parliamentary government. A dictatorship is established.

January 28, 1930: The Spanish economy is reeling as a result of the global depression, and King Alfonso III forces Primo de Rivera's resignation. The monarchy has become too closely associated with the excesses of the dictatorship, and Republican sentiment has grown too strong to tolerate Alfonso's continued meddling in Spanish politics. An alliance of former liberal monarchists, Catalan politicians, and Republicans meets at San Sebastián on August 17, 1930, and agrees to overthrow the king.

April 12, 1931: Spain returns to a democratic government. Republican and Socialist candidates triumph overwhelmingly in municipal elections. They demand Alfonso's abdication, and the military withdraws its support from the embattled king. Many progressive changes are made in Spain, including reform of land ownership, enfranchisement of women, and separation of church and state.⁹ Church property is nationalized (requiring the religious authorities to pay rent to use churches, convents and monasteries); public education is secularized; nuns, priests and brothers are banned from teaching in public and private schools; public religious processions are banned; and the Jesuit order is expelled from Spain.

February 16, 1936: After two years of right-wing government, a Popular Front coalition of left wing and liberal parties narrowly wins parliamentary elections and seeks to reintroduce the radical policies of 1931.¹⁰ The Popular Front, a broad left-wing coalition headed by Manuel Azaña, wins the majority of seats in the Spanish Cortes (parliament). Rightist military leaders begin plotting the overthrow of the government.

July 17, 1936:

Spurred to action by the assassination of extreme-right leader José Calvo Sotelo by government security forces, a cadre of right-wing military officers makes its move. An army mutiny begins in Spanish Morocco and, at dawn the following day, Gen. Francisco Franco broadcasts a manifesto from his base in the Canary Islands, declaring that the rebellion has begun. Although Franco's Nationalist forces quickly occupy a number of provincial capitals, they are unable to secure Madrid, and the coup attempt devolves into civil war. This is where our committee will begin, in the chaos that ensued following the coup.

IV. Different Ideologies^{11 12}

Republicans:

One of the central issues facing the Republicans was the emergence of many political factions that often disagreed with one another, leading to much infighting. These factions didn't have the same end goals but worked together against the Nationalists. This section provides an overview of some of the groups that comprised the Popular Front (another name for the Nationalists), which is the group you will be representing during our committee.

The Republicans

The following organizations were more moderate than the socialists or anarcho-syndicalists. They were responsible for making many of the changes during the Second Republic, and believed in democratic socialism.

- **IR (Izquierda Republicana – Republican Left):** The IR was formed from four smaller left-wing social-democratic groups. It primarily drew its support from skilled workers, small businessmen, and civil servants. Along with the UR and ERC, the IR formed the bulk of the first government after the Popular Front victory in 1936.
- **UR (Unión Republicana – Republican Union):** The UR broke away from the Partido Republicano Radical (Radical Republican Party). Its main supporters were skilled workers and progressive businessmen.

The Socialists

While the socialist parties also believed in democratic socialism, it was a form of socialism that was much further left than that advocated by the Republican Left. They believed in a synthesis between socialism and democracy in which a republican government would oversee the socialized means of production.

- **PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español – Spanish Socialist Workers' Party):** Following the Popular Front victory, it was the second largest party in the Cortes, after the CEDA. It supported the ministries of Azaña and Quiroga, but did not actively participate until the Civil War began. It has majority support amongst urban manual workers.
 - The **UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores – General Union of Workers)** and the **Federación de Juventudes Socialistas (Federation of Socialist Youth)** were the socialist trade union and PSOE youth organizations, respectively.

The Anarcho-Syndicalists

Anarcho-Syndicalism is an ideology that believes the state should be disbanded and power should be given to the workers, organized in syndicates, who will govern themselves. In Spain, they believed in violent strikes and revolution in order to achieve these goals.

- **FAI (Federación Anarquista Ibérica – Iberian Anarchist Federation):** Federation of

militarist anarchist groups who were active in Republican militias during the war. The FAI formed the backbone of anarchist militias at the start of the Civil War.

- **CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo – National Confederation of Labor):** The CNT was a confederation of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions, and primarily focused on the worker's movement.

The Marxists

- **POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista – Worker's Party of Marxist Unification):** The POUM was a party of Trotskyite communists. Their political ideologies lie somewhere in-between the PCE and the FAI.

The Communists

Due to the strength of Socialist, Anarchist, and Marxist movements in Spain, the Spanish Communist party was small, but was supported by Stalinist Russia.

- **PCE (Partido Comunista de España – Communist Party of Spain):** The PCE were Stalinist communists, and believed that the POUM and FAI posed a threat to Spain as severe as the Falange. The PCE also thought that the involvement of the POUM and the FAI in the defense of the Republic would prevent the Western democracies (Britain, France and the United States) from helping the Republic, and wanted the moderate factions to lead the fight against the Nationalists.

The Catalans

Autonomous communities were legalized in Spain as a part of the reforms under the Second Republic. Catalans viewed themselves as separate from Spain, and had their own government and political parties that aided the Popular Front during the Civil War.

- **ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya - Republican Left of Catalonia):** The ERC was created from the merging of the separatist Estat Català (Catalan State) and the Catalan Republican Party in 1931. It controlled the autonomous government of Catalonia during the republican period.

The Basques

Similar to the Catalans, the Basques had an autonomous region. They supported, variously, greater Basque autonomy or Basque independence, since Basques have their own language, culture, and traditional laws/style of government.

- **PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasco –Basque Nationalist Party):** The PNV primarily believes in Basque autonomy, and is strongly anti-fascist. They are more politically conservative than other groups of the left, but have allied with the Popular Front.

The International Brigades

The International Brigades is a group of military units made up of anti-fascist Socialist,

Communist and anarchist volunteers from different countries. They have volunteered to fight in Spain for the leftist cause, given the non-interventionist policies taken by the British, French and US governments.

Nationalists:

One of the core unifying factors amongst the Nationalists was the Catholic Church. Religious support was synonymous with a set of traditional, conservative social, economic, and political values. You will *not* be representing the Nationalists in this committee, but it is still important to understand the divisions and nuances of your opponents.

- **UME (Unión Militar Española – Spanish Military Union):** Conservative political organization of officers in the armed forces, received the support of fascist Italy.
- **CEDA (Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas – Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rights):** Composite right-wing Catholic party that collapsed after the Popular Front victory in 1936; most members switched to the Falange following this.
- **Falange (Phalanx):** Fascist party that united political and military groups of the Nationalist side.
- **Carlists:** Wanted a return to monarchy, composed of clerical hard-liners led by the aristocracy and a group of farmers and rural workers.

During the coup, the revolutionary government drew support from both the extreme far-right as well as middle-class people uncomfortable with communist ideology. However, the majority of the dramatis personae of the Nationalist faction are military officials, who sided with the counter-revolutionary ideology of the coup. The eponymous Generalissimo Francisco Franco, who would eventually consolidate the nationalist side, was surrounded by a plethora of high ranking staff officers who were either originally involved with, or later defected to, the nationalist side.

One of the most senior officers leading into the war was General Miguel Cabanellas. In 1936, Cabanellas was the commander-in-chief of Zaragoza. Although uncomfortable with Franco's autocratic tendencies, Cabanellas declared his support immediately following the coup. Other notable officers included José Sanjurjo, who was involved in the initial coup; Emilio Mola, who commanded the Army of the North and attempted to take Madrid; Luis Carrero Blanco, who was appointed Chief of Naval Operations, and Mohammed ben Mizzian, who commanded the Regulares Indigenous troops.

In terms of military strength, the Nationalists generally inherited a stronger hand. Although the Republic retained control of the majority of the navy, most of the high ranking officers defected to the rebels, leaving the fleet without an effective command structure. The Republican army

was more generally composed of untrained volunteers, and was undersupplied compared to the Nationalists. This would become exacerbated later in the war, as the Nationalists received modern guns and ammunition from Germany and Italy, while the Republican army was largely stuck with outdated equipment and refurbished ammunition. Similar to the Navy, the Air Force lacked a cohesive command structure and did not effectively involve itself in the war.

V. International Situation ¹³

Non-Intervention ¹⁴

In August 1936, the Non-Intervention Agreement was signed by France, Britain, the Soviet Union, Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and several other states. This agreement prohibited states from providing war materials to Spain during the war, with the goal of preventing escalation of the Spanish Civil War conflict throughout Europe, since there were fears that this war could result in another World War.

While Britain appeared intent to remain faithful to the agreement, France seemed less so, and Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union appeared likely not to abide by it. Hitler and Mussolini's support for the Nationalists could give their army a huge advantage.

Democratic Nations

Britain and France were plagued by economic depression in the years leading up to the Spanish Civil War. On balance, the British government reluctantly supported the Nationalists, but was leery of getting involved in another international conflict following World War I. In fact, upon learning of the coup, British governmental officials hoped for a rapid rebel victory so that the conflict would not escalate into Europe: Britain did not have the military capability to fight a war against Germany (and simultaneously to defend its colonial interests in East Asia against an opportunistic Japanese attack, should Britain go to war again against Germany). A rapid Nationalist victory would also protect British investments in Spain. ¹⁵ Most Britons, however, supported the Republicans; support for the Republicans was particularly high among working class men and women, and among middle class intellectuals.

France, a republic that from May 1936 had a Popular Front government consisting of Radicals, Socialists and Communists, was more relaxed and allowed the transportation of weapons by land into Spain. However, it did not provide any official support for the Republicans or a substantial amount of weapons.

The United States Congress adopted the Neutrality Act of 1935 in August of that year; the Act prohibited the sale of weapons to countries at war. The Act was tightened by the Neutrality Act of 1937, which banned the sale of weapons to countries where there were civil wars, and which prohibited American ships from carrying materials to countries at war, even if the materials were not produced in the United States. Neither of the Neutrality Acts banned the sale of oil, trucks or food to belligerents, and American corporations supplied oil and trucks to the Nationalists – despite the sympathy of the American public for the Republicans.

Communist Nations

The Soviet Union also maintained a policy of non-intervention. However, it was concerned about the establishment of another fascist nation in Europe in addition to both Germany and Italy. If push comes to shove, and it appears that the Republicans are in danger of losing the war, Stalin may be persuaded to provide aid in the form of arms and monetary resources to the Popular Front. At the same time, the Soviet Union may not have the same financial resources as the fascist nations to devote to the Civil War.

Fascist Nations

Germany (under the rule of Adolf Hitler) and Italy (under the rule of Benito Mussolini) currently had strong ties to several of the Nationalist political groups. Although bound by the Non-Intervention Agreement, both leaders know the importance of expanding fascist influence, and are willing to increase their support of Franco and the Nationalists to achieve their political goals.

VI. Current situation

The committee starts in July 1936, immediately following the coup. The following map shows the distinction between Nationalist and Republican territory at the start of committee.¹⁶



In 1936, both sides faced military, economic, and political challenges in mobilizing their forces and had to figure out how to unite political factions in favor of a common cause: winning the war.

The national military had split in half, with one half in support of the coup and the other remaining Republican. Therefore, both sides had to centralize their militaries and develop

effective strategies for claiming more territory. Additionally, without international aid, it would be difficult for either side to win the war.

Spain continued to suffer from an economic depression and, while devoting resources to their war efforts was important, both sides had to find a way to maintain some form of economy that could provide civilians with their basic needs (i.e., food, water and shelter).

Finally, both sides consisted of people with different interests and political ideologies. It was unclear if it would be possible for the people on either side to put their political differences aside and create a united front to fight the war.

VII. Positions- Republicans

Manuel Azana

Azana is the current President of the Spanish Republic and leader of the Republican Left party. During World War I, he served as a journalist, covering operations on the Western Front. He had a large role in establishing many reforms under the Second Republic. He is concerned by the lack of unity within the Popular Front.

Santiago Casares Quiroga

Quiroga is the current Prime Minister of the Spanish Republic and a member of the Republican Left party. He promoted autonomy for Catalonia and the Basque Country during the Second Republic. He is attempting to pick up the pieces following the coup and rebuild the Republican military forces.

Diego Martinez Barrio

Barrio is the former Prime Minister of the Spanish Republic and a member of the Republican Left party. Though he made initial attempts at avoiding war, it is clear that the Nationalist forces are not backing down and Barrio must figure out the best way to support his country.

Andreu Nin

Nin is the Minister of Justice for Catalonia, a leader of the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM) and a founder of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE).

Additionally, he previously served as a translator and journalist and supported Trotskyism. He later broke with Trotsky over tactics but continued to support left-wing (anti-Stalinist) Marxism.

Julian Gorkin

Gorkin is a prominent socialist author and a central leader of POUM. He has written books, novels, and plays on political and cultural themes. His goal is to educate people on the POUM's political beliefs through his writings.

Dolores Ibarruri

Ibarruri is a deputy in the Cortes Generales representing Asturias and member of and writer for the Communist Party of Spain (PCE). Nicknamed *la Pasionaria* (the Passionflower), she is known for her slogan ¡No Pasarán! ("They shall not pass!"),

introduced at the Battle of Madrid.

Jose Diaz

Diaz is the General Secretary of the PCE. He dedicates himself to inner party politics rather than participating in the Second Spanish Republic, and his main goal is to ensure the military victory of Republican forces over Nationalist troops.

Juan Astigarrabía

Astigarrabía is the General Secretary of the Basque Communist Party and Director of Public Works in the Basque government. He promotes Basque nationalism and believes that the Basque right to self-determination can only be achieved after defending the Spanish Republic against the fascists.

Indalecio Prieto

Prieto is the Minister of Army and Navy and member of the reformist wing of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). He previously served as the Minister of Public Works in the Second Spanish Republic, and worked to improve the infrastructure of Spain through hydroelectric projects and improvements to public transportation. He proposed Keynesian measures to develop the domestic market of the country.

Julian Besteriro

Besteriro is a Dean at the University of Madrid, former Speaker of the Cortes Generales, and former President of the Union General de Trabajadores. In the February 1936 elections, he won the highest number of votes of any candidate in Madrid in the Popular Front elections. A former PSOE president, he works with Azaña to serve as a diplomat to other nations.

Juan Negrín

Negrin is Minister of Finance and a member of the reformist wing of the PSOE. As Minister of Finance, he is concerned about the ability of the Nationalists to gather enough money for arms and equipment. He is attempting to obtain vital aid from France and Great Britain, but it is unclear if he will be successful.

Francisco Largo Caballero

Largo is the President of the PSOE and the Minister of War. He is primarily focused on maintaining military discipline and government authority within the Republic. He is interested in restructuring the current cabinet structure to more effectively mobilize the Popular Front.

Jose Antonio Aguirre

Aguirre is the President of the Basque government and leader of the Basque Nationalist party. He is interested in working with the other groups that support the Popular Front following the coup. Additionally, he is trying to mobilize Basque troops to help fight, but faces difficulties in receiving artillery and establishing an air force.

Josep Dencàs

Dencàs is a Catalan separatist and member of the Republican Left of Catalonia. He is considered a leading figure of the Catalan version of fascism, and has ideological

conflicts with the other political parties in the Popular Front.

Anastasio de Gracia

Gracia is the Minister of Industry and Commerce and member of the reformist wing of the PSOE, which supported a more moderate form of socialism compared to the UGT. The three reformist PSOE ministers in the government (Indalecio Prieto and Juan Negrín) all tended to work in isolation from each other, which weakened the PSOE in the Republican government.

Ángel Galarza

Galarza is the Minister of the Interior, a member of the PSOE, and a founder (before he was expelled) of the Radical Socialist Republican Party. As Minister of the Interior, he is responsible for the protection of constitutional rights. In the past, he worked as a journalist during the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera.

Álvaro de Albornoz

Albornoz is the Ambassador to Paris, a former Minister of Justice, a former Minister of Public Works, and a founder of the Second Republic. His goal is to persuade France to pursue a more relaxed policy of non-intervention so the Republican military can obtain sorely needed artillery and weaponry.

Joan Comorera

Comorera is Secretary General of the Communist Party of Catalonia (PSUC) and Minister of the Economy. He wants to build up the PSUC amidst all the infighting between the Socialists, Stalinists, Trotskyists, and Anarcho-Syndicalists in the Republican government.

Lluís Companys

Companys is the President of Catalonia, co-founder of the Central Committee on Anti-Fascist Militias, and one of the leaders of the ERC. He must navigate how Catalonia plans to work with the rest of the Spanish Republican government throughout the war.

Federica Montseny

Montseny is the Minister of Health and Social Policy. An anarcho-feminist intellectual and novelist of Catalan ancestry, she is horrified by the violence in Republican-held territory. Her main goal is to send humanitarian aid to civilians and soldiers injured by the war.

Diego Abad de Santillán

Santillán is an anarcho-syndicalist economist and popular writer. He supports the FAI, and seeks to educate people about the workers' revolution through his writing. He publishes propaganda for the Republican government.

Manuel Buenacasa

Buenacasa is a chronicler for the CNT and FAI, a carpenter, and a militant anarchist. He has previously written several books on the anarcho-syndicalist workers' rights labor movement, and serve to educate people on the structure of CNT and FAI operations. His primary goal is to educate people on anarchism

IX. Sources

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