# The Exhumation of Francisco Franco's Remains

## What is the issue?

- The Supreme Court of Spain recently ruled in favour of the government's plan to exhume the remains of former dictator Francisco Franco.
- After his death in 1975, Spain transitioned from the authoritarian structure to a constitutional monarchy.

## What is the Spanish Civil War (1936-39)?

- It is known as the '**Guerra Civil**' in Spanish.
- The conflict pitted Spain's democratically elected Republican government against forces led by General Francisco Franco, who seized power in 1939 after three years of brutal warfare.
- **Supporters** - Franco was supported by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, as well as by conservative elements within Spain.
- The Republican government was helped by the Soviet Union and by volunteer forces from democratic countries in Europe and the US.
- The major European democracies of the time, Britain and France, shied from helping Spain's Republican government officially.
- The Civil War is thus regarded by many as one of the key harbingers of World War II.

## How was Franco's rule (1939-1975)?

- After becoming Spain's ruler in 1939, Franco **maintained the country's neutrality in World War II** but remained friendly with the Axis powers that had helped him come to power.
- Franco's initial years in office were especially **repressive**.
- Thousands of political opponents were sent to prison by military tribunals, and executions by firing squads took place.
- He **prohibited the public use of regional languages** such as Catalan and Basque.
- Catholic Christianity was the **declared state religion**.
- Trade unions were banned. Divorce and abortion were also forbidden.
- Towards the end of his rule, Franco relaxed his grip on power, and his anti-communist stance brought him closer to the US and its allies during the Cold War.

- The last two decades of his rule saw an **overhaul of Spain's economy**.
- In 1969, Franco declared the exiled royal Juan Carlos I as his official successor upon his death.
- **Juan Carlos I dismantled Spain's authoritarian structure** after taking over in 1975 and restored Spain to a constitutional monarchy.

## Why the exhumation of Franco's remains is to be done?

- After his death in 1975, Franco was buried at the **Valle de los Caídos**, a state mausoleum.
- It was built during his rule using forced labour and where 33,000 victims of the Spanish Civil War are buried.
- In the years since, as democracy grew stronger in Spain, calls to relocate the dictator's remains to a less honorific place arose.
- **2018** - The **Spanish parliament** agreed to exhume Franco's remains.
- But the government's plans were impeded by protests from the former dictator's family as well as by church authorities.
- **2019** - The **Supreme Court's** decision has now cleared most obstacles in the government's path, and the Catholic Church has agreed to abide by the ruling.

## What does this move mean politically?

- The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), which is running Spain's minority government, plans to relocate Franco's remains to a less high profile location before the next general election in November 2019.
- The move could improve the PSOE's fortunes in the elections.
- It could invigorate Spain's far-right, for whom Franco's mausoleum has become a rallying point.
- In the last election in April 2019, the ultra-nationalist party obtained 10% of the popular vote, a first for the ultra-right since Franco's death.

**Source: The Indian Express**

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