

Tim Phillips [00:00:00]:

Today on VoxTalks Economics, the long shadow cast by the Spanish Civil War. The Spanish civil war that ended in 1939 was brutal and destructive. Does it still affect how Spanish people think and behave today? Felipe Valencia Calcedo of the University of British Columbia and Ana Tur Prats of University of California, Merced are the authors of a new paper that argues that this short but savage war still casts a shadow. Welcome to VoxTalks Economics, both of you. Hello, Felipe.

Felipe Valencia Calcedo [00:00:45]:

Hi, Tim. Nice to see you again.

Tim Phillips [00:00:46]:

Nice to see you again, too. And Anna, hello. Welcome to you.

Ana Tur Prats [00:00:49]:

Hello, Tim.

Tim Phillips [00:00:51]:

First of all, some history. The war starts in 1936. How does it start? What did the two sides in the war believe?

Ana Tur Prats [00:00:59]:

The war started with the military uprising.

[Voiceover] [00:01:07]:

Rise of a revolution, July 18, 1936. And Madrid, Spain, becomes a seething city as revolt in Morocco by troops under then governor Franco spreads to the Spanish mainland.

Ana Tur Prats [00:01:18]:

So he was coup by the military. So it was led by part of the military that was supported also by right wing forces.

[Voiceover] [00:01:29]:

Women prepared to take active part in battle. And suspected rebel sympathizers in the city are rounded up.

Ana Tur Prats [00:01:34]:

Fascists, religious conservatives, monarchists, and who was plotted against the democratically elected government. The second Spanish Republic, which was governed by a left leaning coalition.

[Voiceover] [00:01:50]:

Men fall by the hundreds as Madrid struggles for survival.

Ana Tur Prats [00:01:54]:

The main cleavage of this war was ideological, with the military bebel, also called nationalists on the right and the republicans on the left side of the political spectrum.

Tim Phillips [00:02:07]:

And when this war starts off, how did ordinary people in Spain and the communities that they lived in, how did they respond to it?

Ana Tur Prats [00:02:15]:

The response was highly heterogeneous and reflected the complex political and social dynamics of Spanish society already at that time. Many people, especially those with strong political convictions, volunteered and joined the militias. Others, especially in big cities, joined demonstrations or protests. There were others that went instead into hiding or sought refuge as soon as violence escalated and spread across the country. So highly heterogeneous. But what it's true is that the conflict deeply divided the nation. It pitted neighbor against neighbor, and it tore communities apart.

Tim Phillips [00:02:57]:

During this war, I described it as short but savage. How many people died, and how was that divided between soldiers, combatants and the civilians?

Ana Tur Prats [00:03:09]:

The exact number of deaths, it's still a matter of dispute, but the estimation is around half a million, 600,000 people died during the three years war, and that's out of a population of 23.6 million in 1930. So around 2.5% of the Spanish population died. And now you mentioned how many soldiers, how many civilians. And that's also a fact of the Spanish civil war. That it affected massively, civilians. So it's estimated that around 200,000 civilians were dead due to political violence, to repression against civilians. And around 200,000 soldiers were killed in combat. And then there is an indeterminate number of deaths due to hunger, bombings and other related incidents.

Tim Phillips [00:03:59]:

After three years of this, the war comes to an end. When did it end? How did it end? What sort of peace came after this war in Spain?

Ana Tur Prats [00:04:10]:

The war officially ended in April 1st, 1939, with the victory of the nationalist side of the rebels that were led at that point by General Franco. Francisco Franco.

[Voiceover] [00:04:23]:

Two and a half years of siege have ended. Madrid, the heroic capital of the Spain of yesterday, has surrendered to the forces of General Franco.

Ana Tur Prats [00:04:31]:

Franco established a dictatorship that lasted almost 40 years until his death in 1975.

[Voiceover] [00:04:39]:

Now, in the spring of 1939, government resistance has ended.

Ana Tur Prats [00:04:45]:

So the quote unquote, peace in Spain after the civil war was characterized by Franco's regime, which was authoritarian and used a lot of censorship and repression. And it was only after his death and with the subsequent transition to democracy that Spain was able to break free from this past and embrace democratic principles and values.

Tim Phillips [00:05:08]:

You call it a quote unquote peace. Was there any attempt afterwards to come to terms with what had happened during this time where people within communities were pitted against each other? Or did people, at least on the surface, try and forget about it, get on with their lives?

Ana Tur Prats [00:05:27]:

Not in the aftermath of the war and certainly not during Franco's dictatorship. But that's because the regime sought to reinforce a narrative of national unity and basically imposed collective amnesia and collective silence. So discussion of the war was taboo in public discourse, and attempts to investigate or memorialized victims were met with repression. There were, of course, some private acts of remembrance within families, but those were kept in private, sometimes in secrecy, because could be seen as form of resistance against the regime. Right. So it was only after Franco's death and the transition to democracy that this process really started in Spain. And Spain started to confront their past a bit more openly. And that was a key point during this transition in 1977 with the amnesty law that granted a blanket amnesty for political offenses that happened both during the war and during Franco's dictatorship. And the law emphasized forgiveness and forgetting. It has been highly criticized because it did not really address the issue of accountability for the crimes committed during the war, during the dictatorship. So that has led to a lack of justice for victims and their families.

[Voiceover] [00:06:50]:

We previously spoke to Felipe about his research into the effects of a covert war from 50 years ago that is still causing collateral damage today. Listen to our episode The Secret War in Laos from November 2020.

Tim Phillips [00:07:11]:

Okay, so in this paper, you set out to study what you've called the long shadow, the influence of the war on social political outcomes, much later, eight decades later. But let's start with the short run effect. What do we know happened in the short run? The effect on social capital.

Felipe Valencia Calcedo [00:07:30]:

Obviously, there is a devastating effect of war in the short run, and I guess we have seen that in the news, unfortunately, very lately. In terms of the economics, what do we know? Perhaps one of the most famous meta studies, does war foster cooperation posits that maybe war could have a positive effect on cooperation, altruism and even trust in the short term. And as you were saying, what we're trying to do in this study is to look at what happens in the very long run. So once the dust settles, even 80 years after the war, as Ana was mentioning before, this is a civil conflict. This is affecting the civilian population. Is this good or bad for trust? That is the question of the paper.

Tim Phillips [00:08:13]:

You are economists, so you have to empirically measure these effects. Is it difficult to do this eight decades later?

Felipe Valencia Calcedo [00:08:22]:

Yes, it is. And these types of studies have to parse historical data, and have to complement it with modern sources. Some of these modern surveys of the Spanish sociological institute, voting, and of course, as you know, Tim, we try to isolate what caused what in these types of studies.

Tim Phillips [00:08:41]:

First of all, you're looking at the long run impact on trust. There are theories about that, aren't there? What are these theories that made you think there would be an impact on trust that's transmitted through generations at this point?

Felipe Valencia Calcedo [00:08:55]:

Yeah. In this one, it's only three, but they're papers that go even further back in time. For instance, Nathan Nunn and Leonard Wantchekon have a famous study looking at the relationship between mistrust and slavery in Africa. So regions that exported more slaves have less trust today. There's other researchers that have looked, for instance, on the long term impact of the Stasi spying apparatus in Germany. So we have something similar in mind, something that happens in the past that destroys the social fabric of a place, in this case, Spain.

Tim Phillips [00:09:25]:

And so, of course, to do this, you need to have some kind of measure of the intensity of the conflict, some kind of proxy for that, and some kind of measure of trust as well. How did you do that? What did you use?

Felipe Valencia Calcedo [00:09:39]:

For the Spanish case, actually, there's very rich data, geo located data on the mass graves. So this is a bit of gory details, but there are exhumed mass graves, so we not only know their location, their number, but even the number of victims that are found there, because obviously there was an exhumation process. So that we have at the very detailed level. And what we did

that was to merge that with this data that I was mentioning of the Spanish Sociological institute that asks questions on generalized trust, but also questions like, do you trust the state, the church and other institutions?

Tim Phillips [00:10:12]:

You read anything about the history of Spain in the 20th century? It's very obvious in Spain that conflict doesn't just happen in random places. It happens in places where people have grievances and people are set against each other. How do you cope with that if you're trying to get a causal effect?

Felipe Valencia Calcedo [00:10:28]:

Yes, correct. So this is important both historically, as Ana was mentioning before, but also economically. This is the crux of the matter in these types of papers. So in this case, we use instrumental variable strategy. So put simply, in words, what we exploit are deviations, deviations from the plans of attack. So we know what the plan of attack was going to be, but we also know when and how troops deviated, kind of like as a plausibly exogenous variation.

Tim Phillips [00:10:55]:

So putting all this together, what aspects of the war did have an impact on trust? And trust in who? Trust in what?

Felipe Valencia Calcedo [00:11:02]:

We are mostly focused on political violence, which our main proxy here would be exhumed mass graves. And we find that this has a negative and significant impact on generalized trust, but also on trust in institutions that are more associated with the war. Think about the civil guard, even the church, and not institutions that were created after the 1975 democratic transition that Ana was mentioning, like the ombudsman and other types of constitutional courts.

Tim Phillips [00:11:33]:

You also tested the political impact on the war. Again, why might people generations later vote differently? Because of what happened in the civil war?

Ana Tur Prats [00:11:44]:

Yes. So first, for answering that, we will need to understand why people change their political identities due to the repression exerted during the war. Our hypothesis that we test in the paper is that people adapted their political ideologies to the ones that were promoted by the ruling regime. And this was done purely to maximize survival chances and to avoid reprisal. There was this very intensive use of political violence that we've mentioned, and this was targeted against people that were thinking differently than the ruling regimes. So people just started to change their behavior and they really deter their expressions of dissent. They act more obediently. And what we argue is that this eventually shaped also their political preferences. And then you also ask, but why do we observe these three generations later? Right? So we also do an exploration of these potential mechanisms of transition over time of persistence and conclude that collective

memory, along with anti Franco sentiment, is a plausible channel through which these initial effects of conflict were reinforced and perpetuated over time.

Tim Phillips [00:13:07]:

So to be clear on this, in the areas where, for example, the nationalists were dominant, then people still vote according to what they were sort of forced to vote in the past.

Ana Tur Prats [00:13:22]:

You got it exactly right. We have this natural experiment. The most important battlefield in Spain was the front line of Barakamon. So in that region of Barakamon, it was basically split in half. And for almost two years, national troops were stationed on one side and republican troops on the other side. So we apply a regression discontinuity analysis there and we compare how do people vote since we have democracy again in Spain on both sides? And we see what you were exactly mentioning, that on that side in which the nationalists stayed for almost two years, people today are voting more for the right. And on the other side, when republican troops were left leaning state for almost two years, they're voting more for the left.

Tim Phillips [00:14:11]:

Did this surprise you? I would have thought that there might be feelings of revenge, feelings of resentment, especially considering the level of violence that happened to civilians in the war. Yet we see the opposite.

Ana Tur Prats [00:14:24]:

Yes, exactly. I think it's explained by this really deeply ingrained fear of reprisals and this very long dictatorship that continued the repression and with the help of this political propaganda, this collective memory that was formed. What political scientists have explained also is that when the violence exerted is not indiscriminate, but it's selective, then instead of generating this revenge that you're talking about, Tim, it might actually deter disloyalty and make you obey. And this is what we're finding in our context.

Tim Phillips [00:15:04]:

This is fascinating that you have found not just an effect, but quite strong effects in these cases. Both of you have studied the history of conflict and the effects of conflict. Were you surprised to find these large effects 80 years later?

Ana Tur Prats [00:15:20]:

I remember when I first started investigating this topic, I interviewed the son of who was the republican mayor in my hometown. One of the things that stuck from that interview was when I asked him, do you think this still lasting? And he said, it's gonna last for three generations. He was right. The wounds of the past remain open still for many Spaniards.

Felipe Valencia Calcedo [00:15:55]:

One thing to remember here is that it's not only the war itself, and I think that this is another

general lesson from this study, but the way that the collective memory works. And this is not only true for the Spanish civil war, but also for the US civil war, for the China, and Japanese confrontations during World War Two. What is the narrative that you start telling about this conflict? Who shapes this narrative? The Francoist won. Franco was in power for several decades. What is the narrative of this historical event and how is that shaped through the state, through citizens? Till the two thousands, there were streets in Spain that would have pro Franco or Franco related names. Every day you will be reminded about this conflict. It happened long ago. He's still here with us today, at least in Spain.

Tim Phillips [00:16:59]:

When I read this paper a couple of months ago, it sent me straight back to all the literature that came out of Spain's experience in the 20th century and then also sent me to look at what happened with the exhumation of the mass graves. And that really does show why there is a long shadow. Thank you very much, Felipe. Thank you, Ana.

Felipe Valencia Calcedo [00:17:22]:

Thank you very much, Tim.

Ana Tur Prats [00:17:24]:

Thank you, Tim.

Tim Phillips [00:17:33]:

The paper is called The Long Shadow of the Spanish Civil War. Authors are Ana Tur Prats and Felipe Valencia Calcedo.

[Voiceover] [00:17:47]:

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