

## **Contentious Politics during a Period of Transition to Democracy from an Authoritarian Regime: The Spanish Cycle of Protest of November 1975-December 1978**

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**Abstract :** When a country experiences a period of transition from authoritarianism to democracy, involving an earlier process of political liberalization and a later process of democratization, a cycle of protest usually outbreaks, as there is a reciprocal influence between that kind of political change and the frequency and scale of social protest events. That is what happened in Spain during the first years of its transition to democracy from the Francoist authoritarian regime, roughly between November 1975 and December 1978. Thus, the object of this study is to show and explain how that cycle of protest started, developed, and finished in relation to such a political change, and offer specific information about the main features of all protest cycles: the social movements that arose during that period, the number of protest events by month, the forms of collective action that were utilized, the groups of challengers that engaged in contentious politics, the reaction of the authorities to the action and claims of those groups, etc. The study of this cycle of protest, using the primary sources and analytical tools that characterize the model of research of protest cycles, will make a contribution to the field of contentious politics and its phenomenon of cycles of contention, and more broadly to the political and social history of contemporary Spain. The cycle of protest and the process of political liberalization of the authoritarian regime began around the same time, but the first concluded long before the process of democratization was completed in 1982. The ascending phase of the cycle and therefore the process of liberalization started with the death of Francisco Franco and the proclamation of Juan Carlos I as King of Spain in November 1975; the peak of the cycle was around the first months of 1977; the descending phase started after the first general election of June 1977; and the level of protest stabilized in the last months of 1978, a year that finished with a referendum in which the Spanish people approved the current democratic constitution. It was then when we can consider that the cycle of protest came to an end. The primary sources are the news of protest events and social movements in the three main Spanish newspapers at the time, other written or audiovisual documents, and in-depth interviews; and the analytical tools are the political opportunities that encourage social protest, the available repertoire of contention, the organizations and networks that brought together people with the same claims and allowed them to engage in contentious politics, and the interpretative frames that justify, dignify and motivates their collective action. These are the main four factors that explain the beginning, development and ending of the cycle of protest, and therefore the accompanying social movements and events of collective action. Among those four factors, the political opportunities -their opening, exploitation, and closure-proved to be most decisive.

**Keywords :** contentious politics, cycles of protest, political opportunities, social movements, Spanish transition to democracy

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