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# SOCIAL SCIENCE

## UNIT 2. SPAIN: POLITICAL ORGANISATION

Exam Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## UNIT 1. SPAIN: POLITICAL ORGANISATION

In this unit we are going to learn about:

1. The Constitution
  - 1.1. Rights and responsibilities
  - 1.2. Territorial organisation
  - 1.3. The Government
  - 1.4. Separation of powers
  - 1.5. The Institutions
  
2. The Government and Political Institutions
  - 2.1. The government
  - 2.2. Political institutions and separation of powers
  
3. The organisation of a democratic state
4. How citizens participate: elections

### MY VOCABULARY

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# 1. THE CONSTITUTION

Seven people from different political parties were chosen to write the Constitution. Afterwards, it was debated in the **Cortes Generales**. Members of the Cortes asked for 1000 changes to be made. There are still parts of the Constitution that cause disagreements. It was endorsed by a referendum and then sanctioned by King Juan Carlos I on **27<sup>th</sup> December 1978**.



It was voted by Spanish citizens in a referendum on **6<sup>th</sup> December 1978**. In 1978 Constitution established Spain's democratic principles and established a **parliamentary monarchy**.

The Spanish Constitution is the most important law in Spain. All the other laws, including laws passed by the Autonomous Parliaments, must be in accordance with the Constitution.

The Constitution establishes **the rights and obligations** (or responsibilities) of all citizens and the **territorial organization** of the country. It also **regulates the political system**, that is, the form of government, the **separation of powers**, and the **national institutions**.



## RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- All Spanish citizens have rights and responsibilities.
- RIGHTS: equality, freedom of speech, peaceful protests, healthcare and education, legal protection, freedom to work and travel, adequate housing.
- RESPONSIBILITIES: pay taxes, respect the law, be tolerant towards other people's religion, culture, gender or race, take care of the environment, respect public services.

## TERRITORIAL ORGANISATION

- Spain is divided into autonomous communities and cities.

## THE GOVERNMENT

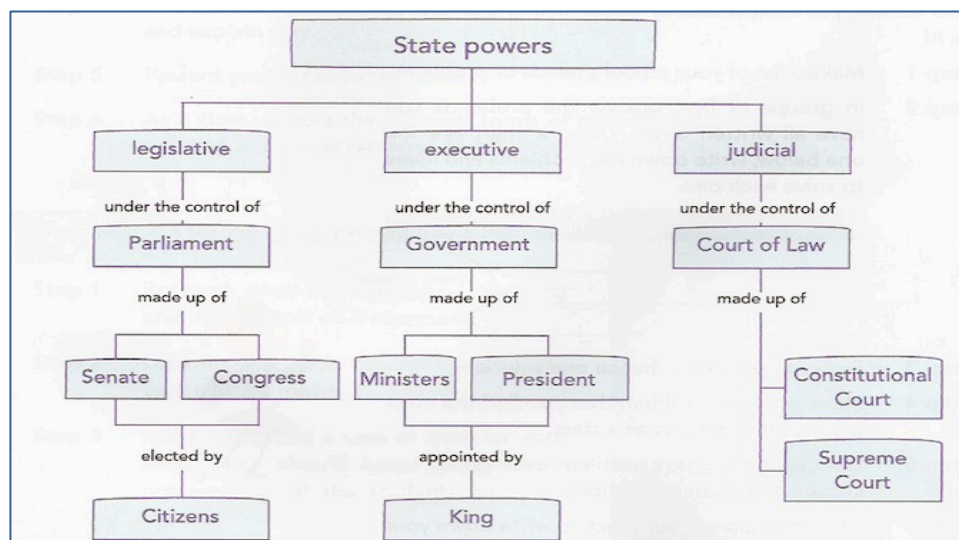
- Spain is a **Parliamentary Monarchy**.
- Spain is a democratic state, based on **national sovereignty**.

## SEPARATION OF POWERS

- The **legislative** branch: approves laws and the government budget.
- The **executive** branch: makes political and economic decisions for the country.
- The **judicial** branch: makes sure everyone obeys the law and penalizes those who don't obey the law.

## POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

The main institutions are the **Head of State** (the King), the **Parliament** (Las Cortes - Congreso de los Diputados - Senado), the **Government** (Presidents and ministers) and the **Courts of Justice** (Tribunal Supremo and Tribunal Constitucional)



## 2. THE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

### THE GOVERNMENT

Spain is a **Parliamentary or Constitutional Monarchy**, which is a form of government that combines a constitutional system with the figure of a monarch as the head of the state. This means King Felipe VI is the head of the state, but he does not make political decisions or establish laws. He must accept the decisions made by the Parliament. The king's main duties are:

- Commander-in-chief of the Spanish Armed Forces.
- To represent Spain in its relations with other countries

The Spanish Monarchy is hereditary: it is transmitted from parent to child.

### POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL POWERS

The Constitution sets out three powers: **legislative**, **executive** and **judicial**. Each of these is carried out by different people and held in different institutions.

### THE GOVERNMENT - EXECUTIVE POWER

The party that get the most votes in the elections forms the **Government**. It is responsible for governing the country in accordance with the laws approved by parliament. The government is made up of the Presidents and his ministers.



- The President is in charge of the government and must explain government's actions before the Congress of Deputies. The president is elected by the Congress of Deputies and named by the King.
- The ministers are appointed by the President of the government and approved by the King. There are ministers for different areas (Education, Culture and Sport; Interior; Defence; Public Works; Justice; Foreign Affairs and Cooperation...). They propose ideas that are voted on in Parliament.

## THE PARLIAMENT - LEGISLATIVE POWER

Parliament in Spain (*Cortes Generales* o *Las Cortes*) creates and approves the laws and controls the government. It represents all Spanish citizens, is divided into two legislative chambers.

### THE LOWER CHAMBER: The Congress of Deputies (*El Congreso de los Diputados*)

- The members of this chamber (350) are called *diputados* (deputies) and they approve and vet laws. They belong to different political parties; the number of deputies that each political party has in the congress depends on the number of votes they receive in general elections.



### THE UPPER CHAMBER: The Senate (*El Senado*)

- The members of this chamber (266) are called *senadores* (senators). They make sure the Autonomous Communities follow the Constitution.
- Senators can also pass laws but they cannot veto them.



The two chambers of Parliament make joint decisions on budgets and controlling the Executive. Members of the Parliament are elected **every four years** in general elections.



Congreso de los Diputados

In the Congreso de los Diputados there are **four members** for each province and **two** for Ceuta and Melilla (each of them)



Senado

## THE COURTS OF JUSTICE - JUDICIAL POWER

It belongs to **courts** and **tribunals**. These are composed of **judges** and **magistrates** who ensure that laws are obeyed and judge anyone accused of committing a crime.

The highest judicial bodies are the Supreme Court (El Tribunal Supremo) and the Constitutional Court (El Tribunal Constitucional).

### The Supreme Court

- It is the highest court in Spain. It can accept or reject sentences passed in the lower courts.
- It can start legal proceedings against ministers, senators and even the Prime Minister if necessary.



### The Constitutional Court

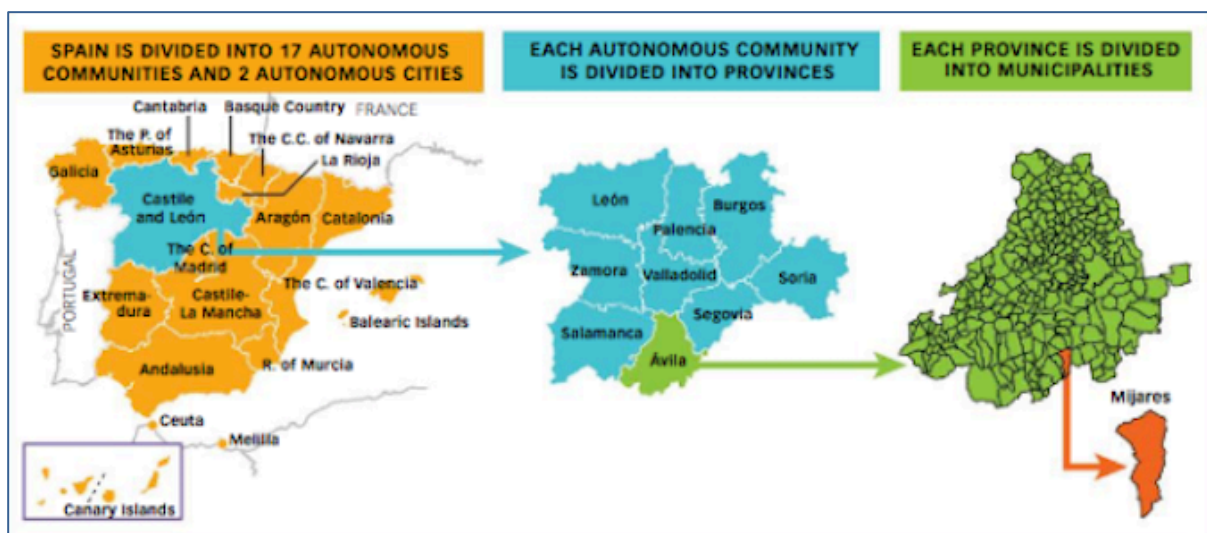
- It has the power to decide whether laws passed by the Parliament or the Autonomous Parliaments are in accordance with the Constitution. It can also reject decisions by the Supreme Court if human rights have been violated.



## 3. THE ORGANIZATION OF A DEMOCRATIC STATE

### HOW SPANISH TERRITORY IS ORGANIZED

The Constitution of 1978 establishes that the Spanish territory is organized into autonomous communities, provinces and municipalities (cities, villages ...)



Spain is divided into 17 Autonomous Communities and has two Autonomous Cities, Ceuta and Melilla, in the North African coast. Each administrative division has its own government institutions that share responsibilities with the Central Government.

- Autonomous Communities are divided into provinces and municipalities.
- They are governed by **Statutes of Autonomy** that, among other things, define their name, boundaries, symbols and language.

## MUNICIPALITIES

A municipality is the **smallest** territorial and administrative division. They have **one or more cities** and include the areas surrounding them. The area that is part of a municipality is called the municipal district. In Spain, there are over 8.000 municipalities.

Each municipality is governed by a **town hall or city council**, which consists of a **mayor** and **local councillors**.

## PROVINCES

A province is made up of the municipalities located in its territory. There are 50 provinces in Spain.

Most provinces have their own government, called a **Provincial Council**, which consists of a **president** and **provincial deputies**. It protects the province's interests, offers services and coordinates the municipalities. If an autonomous community is made up of only one province, it does not have a Provincial Council.

## AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITIES



An autonomous community consists of one or several provinces. Spain is organized into 17 autonomous communities and 2 autonomous cities, Ceuta and Melilla.

Each autonomous community has a **Statute of Autonomy**. The Statutes of Autonomy are the most important laws of the Autonomous Communities. Before the Statute becomes a law, the Spanish courts must approve it. The Statute of Autonomy defines the **institutions**, and the **areas** it can make decisions in, like education, health care, etc. The Statute of Autonomy also defines the **name**, **capital**, **territorial boundaries**, official **language(s)**, its **flag**, and other **symbols** of each community (anthem, coat of arms...).



Each autonomous community has its own government that shares administrative responsibilities with the central government. They are governed by an **Autonomous Parliament**, a **president** and a **government**.

The main responsibilities of the Autonomous Community Parliament are:

- Making the laws.
- Approving budgets.
- Electing the President of the Autonomous Community from among its members.

The President has the most authority in the autonomous community. The Presidents represents the Autonomous Community and also names the councillors to be part of the regional government.

## 4. HOW CITIZENS PARTICIPATE: ELECTIONS

Spain is a **democratic state**. In a democracy, citizens elect their political representatives in an election.

All the citizens in a **democracy** have the right to participate in matters of general interest. They can:

- **Form groups to defend their interests.** These include political parties, neighbourhood associations, trade unions and consumer protection groups.
- **Meet in peaceful assembly.** For example, they can attend peaceful demonstrations.
- **Vote in elections to elect their leaders.** All Spanish citizens, 18 years old and over, have the right to vote in municipal, autonomous, general and European elections.



### ELECTORAL SYSTEM

In a democratic society, citizens choose their representatives by voting in an election. In Spain there are national and municipal elections **every four years**. Elections are held every four years, although they can be held earlier under certain circumstances.

Before the elections take place, political parties **campaign** and explain their ideas for improving society. They also explain their plans and ideas in a document called a **manifesto**.

On election day, citizens vote putting a mark on a **ballot paper** next to the name of the **candidate** of the political party they want to support. These papers are put in a **ballot box**. At the end of the day, the marks on the ballot papers are counted and the party with the most votes wins.



Elections are very important because they allow people to express their opinions and help make important decisions in society.

Every citizen has the responsibility to vote in democratic elections.

- ✓ Spanish citizens who are older than 18 elect the politicians - deputies and senator- that represent citizens for a maximum of four years in the **Legislative body**.
- ✓ The **Judiciary body** is independent, but it is elected by deputies and senators.
- ✓ The most voted political party forms the **Executive body**, which consist of the President and the Council of Ministers.

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