
Transition, violence and anti-Catalanism in the Valencian Community (1975-1982): A synthesis

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This text is a summary of my research on political violence in the Valencian Community during the years of the Democratic Transition, which materialised in the doctoral thesis supervised by Ferran Archilés and Anaclet Pons entitled *La violencia política en la Transición valenciana (1975-1982)* (Universitat de València, 2021).¹

Focusing on the conspicuousness of the violence from the far right, the Transition in Valencia can be divided into four distinct stages. The first one, spanning from late 1975 until mid-1977, is rather unspecific in nature given that the anti-Catalanist movement had not yet emerged. This first stage encompasses many of the 30 attacks against bookshops on record. However, those attacks on culture were not limited to bookshops but also included cinemas. In early 1976, there was also a bomb attack against a school where a lecture by Felipe González was scheduled, only three days after the worker Teófilo del Valle, in Elda, became the first demonstrator killed by the police in the Spanish Transition.

Likewise, there were frequent attacks by the far right on bars where members of the opposition gathered, as well as street aggressions. It goes without saying that all of this was happening with utter impunity. Furthermore, the months immediately after Franco's death witnessed intense mobilisations in both the Valencian Community and the rest of Spain, which had a decisive influence on the overthrow of the pseudo-reformist government of Arias Navarro. However, the change in government did not stanch the repression; for example, a demonstration

1. An adaptation has been published: Borja RIBERA (2023), *Una historia de violencia: La Transición valenciana (1975-1982)*, Valencia, Tirant lo Blanch.

commemorating October Ninth (Valencian Community Day) was banned and harshly repressed. The referendum campaign on the draft law on political reform in late 1976 was also the backdrop of several episodes of repression and violence.

This first stage concluded just after the June 1977 elections, which led to an overwhelming win for the leftist forces in the Valencian Community. The opposition to the dictatorship won almost 60% of the votes in the province of Valencia, 55% in Alicante and a little over 45% in Castellón. Thus, the leftist forces had 25 parliamentarians, compared to just 16 for the right-wingers. Tellingly, the Valencian Community was the place where the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Worker's Party) earned the highest percentage of votes (36.4%), two-tenths more than in Andalusia, while the Aliança Popular (Popular Alliance), which was supported by many of the authorities left over from the regime, garnered its second worst results there (5.9%), just after its lowest showing in Catalonia (3.6%).

Thus was the second stage ushered in. Its most salient feature was the articulation of the anti-Catalanist movement, or the *blavers*. Only three days after the elections, on 18 June, the Consell Valencià (Valencian Council) was founded, which was later known as the Coordinadora d'Entitats Culturals del Regne de València (Coordinating Committee of Cultural Organisations of the Kingdom of Valencia) and was the true epicentre of anti-Catalanist associations. Towards the end of the summer, the Grup d'Acció Valencianista (Valencianist Action Group, GAV) was launched, a radical organisation geared at activism – sometimes violent – which was closely associated with the aforementioned Council. Soon thereafter, the Unió Regional Valencianista (Valencianist Regional Union) was created, a political party that was initially called to lead the movement but was later replaced by the Unión de Centro Democrático (Union of the Democratic Centre, UCD).

It was not until 1978 that *blaverisme* began to spread significantly, which occurred thanks to the coverage of the UCD and the newspaper *Las Provincias*. Between late February and early March, the newspaper and the centrist party, a curious pair, adopted the tricolour flag, that is, the flag with the blue stripe claimed by the anti-Catalanists (hence *blavers*, or “blues”). Until then, it was not unusual to find the phrase “senyera valenciana” (Valencian flag) in the pages of *Las Provincias*, referring to the four-barred flag without the stripe, while the centrists held an ambiguous position on this matter. In turn, the approval of the pre-autonomous regime in mid-March unleashed a series of destabilising actions on the part of the *blaver* movement, which was almost always identified with the far right. Even though similar episodes had occurred earlier, that was when this type of action targeted primarily against the leftist democratic authorities and intellectuals turned into a regular phenomenon.

At that point, when the anti-Catalanist movement was consolidated, the third stage got underway, which spanned from mid-1978 until early 1980; we could define this stage as the *blaver offensive*. In the last few months of 1978, there were bomb attacks against two key figures in nationalism, namely the writer Joan Fuster and the university professor Manuel Sanchis

Guarner, attacks which probably came from the circle of the far-right party *Fuerza Nueva* (New Force). This persecution of intellectuals is one of the unique features of the Transition in Valencia, and the scant reports about it in the media motivated this acerbic comment by the writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán: “If they set off a bomb against an intellectual from the PCE or PSOE, we’d still be constantly hearing about bombs and the powers-that-be would be talking about bombs all the time in the Parliament. In contrast, Fuster’s bomb just remained a bothersome anecdote.”²

The final phase of this third stage got underway after the general and municipal elections in 1979 and concluded in December 1979, when the centrists secured the presidency of the Pre-Autonomous Council. In the second half of 1979, the upheaval prompted by anti-Catalanism and the far right reached unheard-of virulence; the most paradigmatic example is the October Ninth celebrations, when different authorities, including the mayor of Valencia, were repeatedly attacked as the police looked on passively. Today we know that Rafael Orellano, councillor from the UCD and leader of the GAV, was one of the intellectual masterminds behind those incidents. Weeks later, in a climate of harsh clashes, the PSOE abandoned the Council and left the Pre-Autonomous Council in the hands of a UCD which – it is important to note – had lost all the elections.

The fourth and final stage, which got underway in early 1980, was defined by the retreat of the left and a contraction in the violence. The attempted coup d’état on 23 February of that year only accentuated a dynamic of retreat in the two main leftist parties – socialists and communists – which had started months earlier. Despite this supposed contraction in violence, it was briefly reactivated in the last months of 1981 with, on the one hand, bomb attacks against the *Universitat de València* and – again – the writer Joan Fuster and, on the other hand, a series of minor attacks against official buildings perpetrated by *Terra Lliure*. But while the presumptive members of the pro-independence organisation were arrested, the far-right terrorism carried on unpunished. In March 1982, given the suspicions aroused by the actions of the police and the civil governor, Rodolfo Martín Villa arrived in Valencia to show support for the governor: “He is the best governor Valencia has had and he’s not going anywhere.” The vice-president of the Spanish Government also took advantage of the occasion to announce his alignment with anti-Catalanism: “It’s clear that the term *Valencian Country* conceals a political debate that leads to the Catalan Countries.”³

Finally, the Statute of Autonomy of the Valencian Community was approved by the Congress of Deputies on 28 April 1982. This date marks the end of Valencia’s Transition *per se*, although it would still be a few months before the socialists won back the presidency of the Government of Valencia and one year before the first regional elections were held. With a few exceptions, it

2. *La Calle*, No. 37 (5-11 December 1978), p. 10.

3. *Diario de Valencia* (28 March 1982), pp. 1-3.

is difficult to see the outcome of the process of drawing up the statute as anything other than a victory for the right and for anti-Catalanism. In this regard, this political commentary published in *Las Provincias* the day after the agreement on the Statute was reached is worth reproducing: “The road travelled up to yesterday’s agreement has been long and hard. On this long journey, the Valencian people have left behind the four-striped flag, the Valencian Country, the Catalan language... and there have been many conquests. The name is the only aspect in which a total triumph has not been achieved.”⁴ Indeed, they had not managed to impose the name *Kingdom of Valencia* and this was the only major concession which dimmed the right’s “total triumph”. However, they had managed to outlaw the name that had been official until then: *Valencian Country*.

4. *Las Provincias* (22 April 1982), p. 5.