**War and Politics in Early Modern Europe: Spain**

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Two Spanish states

In political history, early modern Spain is two widely different entities. The larger of these is, for lack of a more precise term, often called the Spanish Monarchy; the great European conglomerate state which existed from the late 15th century to the early 17th century. It consisted of several kingdoms and principalities on the Iberian Peninsula (Castile, the several Aragon kingdoms, Navarre, 1580-1640 also Portugal), in Italy (Naples, Sicily, Sardinia, Milan, parts of the coast of Tuscany, in all around half of present-day Italy) and in Western Europe, roughly present day Netherlands (until around 1580), Belgium, Luxemburg and (until 1678) also the region between France and Switzerland known as Franche-Comté. Castile and Portugal also had a wide colonial and commercial empire in America, Asia and Africa. Naples and Milan were gained and kept in a fierce geopolitical struggle with France (the Italian Wars, 1494-1559). Most of the European territories were unified under the ruling dynasty by marriages and inheritance, but warfare and the presence of superior armed force were frequently important or decisive to assert effective control of inherited territories and in some cases to extend them.

In a more limited sense Spain is the territories on the Iberian Peninsula which today form the Spanish state. They had been unified by the early 16th century when Navarre was added to the conglomerate state formed by Ferdinand (of Aragon) and Isabella (of Castile) by their marriage, their wars against domestic rivals and against Portugal and France, and finally their conquest of Muslim Granada in 1492. Castile was the most populous kingdom on the peninsula and in the Spanish Monarchy but it was only by the mid-16th century that it became obvious that Castile was the politically and financially senior part of the Monarchy. Under the Emperor-King Charles V (I) the large conglomerate had been Burgundian-German-Italian as much as Hispanic and it was only when his inheritance was divided between a Spanish and an Austrian branch of the House of Habsburg that a markedly Spanish-centred state formation process began. Madrid became the administrative centre of this state only in the 1560s.

After the break-up of the Spanish Monarchy during the Spanish war of Succession (1701-14) the Iberian peninsula became a more compact, centralised and at least from the outside, homogeneous European nation state. It still had a large transoceanic empire until the early 19th century when most of it was lost by local revolts. Spain has however remained a state with strong provincial identities, where especially Catalonia has had ambitions to achieve autonomy or independence. Present-day Basque resistance to Madrid is a more recent phenomenon. In the early modern period the Basque provinces were normally satisfied with their position as autonomous parts of Castile.

In historical syntheses the development of the Spanish state and the outcomes of the many wars it fought have often been written from a stagnation and decline perspective. Much
emphasis has been placed on revolts against the Monarchy (the Dutch Revolt, the Revolt of Portugal and the Catalans, various uprisings in Naples and Sicily). Spain is also often contrasted with the development of Britain and France, states which developed to a world power and a strong position on the European continent respectively. Explanations are focused on why Spain and Spanish state formation failed and the other two succeeded. Today, when these states primarily are three of the larger members of the European Union these traditional concepts are less relevant. It is more interesting to explain why the timing of success and decline were different, why Spain was more successful in warfare and state formation in the earlier period of the European "modernity" and why Spain was able to retain control of Europe's most complex conglomerate state during two centuries when more compact and homogeneous political entities like France, Germany, the British Isles, Russia and Poland-Lithuania for longer or shorter periods were dominated by civil wars or deep political crisis. Interesting comparisons might also be made with the Ottoman Empire, the other success story in 16th century state formation and empire-building but that would take us beyond early modern Europe.

A cyclical process

Early modern Spanish state formation and development of armed forces underwent two very marked cycles of growth and decline. The first period of growth was from the late 15th century to the early 17th century, when the Spanish Monarchy became the most powerful state in Europe with large military and naval forces acting in nearly all major wars of the age and operating on a wider geographical scale than any other armed forces in the world. From the mid-17th century followed a deep crisis and a drastic decline of the size of the armed forces. This decline had dramatic consequences for international politics as most other European states drastically increased their armed forces during the second half of the 17th century. In a few decades Spain fell from a semi-hegemonic position in Europe to a position of a middle-rank power with no ability to defend all its vast European territories against a determined great power. Even military efforts to bring Portugal back into the monarchy ended with major defeats. By 1700 Portugal (a useful benchmark for what an Iberian power might achieve at that time) had at least as large armed forces as the entire Spanish Monarchy with ten times as many inhabitants in Europe.

After the dismantling of the Habsburg Spanish Monarchy during the war of 1701-14, peninsular Spain under the new Bourbon dynasty rose to a fairly powerful state with considerable armed forces and an active Atlantic and imperial policy. 18th century Spain is in international political history usually not regarded as a great power, but that may be because that type of history is dominated by the rise of the five classical European great powers of the 19th century. 18th century Spain had however one of the world's three largest navies, it had the world's largest transoceanic empire and it could markedly influence the balance of power in the Atlantic as well as in the Mediterranean. Unlike the period 1660-1714 Spain was again an active and sometimes aggressive geopolitical competitor and warfare and state formation interacted. From around 1800 another drastic decline of the domestic and foreign power of this state took place. Most of the empire was lost, the armed forces declined to insignificant levels and in the 19th and 20th centuries civil wars and violent political conflicts became common. Like the former Spanish colonies in Latin America, the Spanish armed forces became armed political interest groups which used their power to coerce rather than protect the society. The armed forces were also usually divided between the different participants in the civil wars and generals frequently became strong men in Spanish politics. Periodically
there was no such thing as a Spanish state with a monopoly of violence enforced by loyal armed forces under its control.

Obviously Spain is not a case where wars have created the modern nation-state according to a straightforward European model. Warfare was however very important for the state which actually existed in early modern Spain, a state which was an early and successful enforcer of a monopoly of violence and often an efficient participant in the European power struggles. Warfare was important for bringing the several kingdoms on the peninsula together in a union, for the rise and dismantling of the composite Spanish Monarchy and for the rise and decline of the state and its armed forces during the Bourbon regime. But there is no clear causal link between threats and opportunities repeatedly creating situations where the need for increased armed forces and the demands of war form lasting political interest aggregation and promote the growth of a more integrated nation-state. Instead, the state was strong when it was military successful and lost much of its domestic power when it was defeated in foreign wars. The Spanish society treated the state as one political actor among others, rather than as the natural centre for political activities. The "normal" European state formation model with gradually growing states, concentrating more resources through alliances with local society, and with subjects who gradually take part in the decision process in this increasingly powerful state did not work in Spain.

In a bird's eye perspective mid-15th century Spain and Spain in the period 1808-1939 (or 1975) is strikingly similar in political structure and behaviour. There were repeated civil wars and rebellions against rulers, strong local interest groups demanding autonomy, a politically powerful Catholic Church and various members and lines of the royal dynasty acting as rallying points for various political factions. But while 15th century Spanish political behaviour was normal in contemporary Europe, 19th and 20th century Spain was largely an exception to the rule among old European states. It was more akin to what went on in Latin America in the formerly Spanish colonies or in some new European states created in the 19th and 20th century. 19th and 20th century Portugal and its armed forces show similarities with Spain. This is of interest as Portugal since the Middle Ages had been a fairly homogeneous nation-state with considerable armed forces, controlled by the rulers. It may be significant that this state underwent a change in a period when Spain, the only state which might present a threat, suffered from domestic problems that reduced its offensive potential. It indicates that lack of external threats due to geography may favour the type of political culture which existed in Spain.

Explanations

Early modern European states were primarily violence-controlling organisations, which maintained law and order, ensured domestic peace and fought foreign wars. They could not do that in a political vacuum. The resource extraction necessary to wage war and suppress armed opposition came from somewhere and it required support from human actors. Resource extraction was highly vulnerable to active or passive resistance as that increased transaction cost and reduced resources available to the central power. The fact that powerful military organisations existed is in itself evidence of that resources were extracted from various parts of the society and centralized under control of the central political authority. Absence of such organisation may reflect a low level of threats or blocked mechanisms for centralisation of resources.
State formation could be defined as the development of structures which raise and centralize resources from the society and use them in the interest of the central state. Through that process the state becomes the centre of political power which local and national interest groups must use if they wish to exercise influence and power. Spain ought to have been an interesting object of studies about state formation with sociological, political or economic theory. This is not the case however. Of recent international comparative synthesis none has devoted much interest to Spain. In Tilly (1990) Spain and the Spanish monarchy and its components (Castile, Catalonia, Sicily, the Netherlands) are frequently mentioned but state formation on the peninsula or within the Spanish Monarchy is not discussed and the special phenomenon with the cyclical behaviour of Spanish state formation is not seen as interesting. Downing (1992) dismisses Spain as an uninteresting case as he (erroneously) believes that Spain never had any kind of constitutional government. Ertman (1997) classifies the political regimes and state infrastructures of the whole Latin Europe as "patrimonial absolutism". He provides interesting arguments for that local interests and office-holders appropriated an increasing part of the resources of the state, and he claims that this system lasted until the upheavals caused by the French Revolution. This leaves us however with several questions. Why did other states in the same group, like France and Portugal have rather different paths of development, why did Spain after all revive in the 18th century and why did the Spanish state after the destruction of patrimonial absolutism around 1800 again decline dramatically?

Spanish historians have in later years presented a large number of studies about early modern Spain, especially about regional political, social and economic history. There are also several important studies of war and military organisations. The interaction between war, military organisation and domestic political activities is however still insufficiently studied. Even recent and seminal collections of articles about warfare and Spanish military and naval organisations leave the macro-political interaction between the centre and various groups in the society behind these organisations largely unexplored (for example Aranda Pérez 2004, Bowen & González Enciso 2006, García Hernán & Maffi 2006, Martínez Ruiz et al, 2001). Interest for the question may be growing (for example Bubnov 2005) but much remains to be done if the political history of Spanish state formation should be understood.

It has become common to explain the decline of Spain in economic terms. Early modern Spain was obviously not a centre of early modern economic transformation and growth, although the Spanish Monarchy did after all control some of Europe's leading economic regions, the southern Netherlands and Milan. There is however no strong co-relation between military power and economic strength in early modern Europe. Economic explanations of the Spanish development usually do not offer any more than general ideas about "lack of resources" (usually identified with tax incomes) but that actually explains nothing. Spain (the Monarchy but also the peninsula) was throughout the early modern period one of Europe's most populous political entities, it had considerable domestic natural resources and it controlled a huge empire with a wide variety of resources. The problem whether these resources were available for the central state through taxes was primarily political, not economic.

Institutions, organisations, threats and opportunities

The early modern state formation process consisted of both a transformation of the interaction process between central power-holders and local society and a transformation of the organisational forms of resource raising and resource utilisation for war. If it is accepted that war and violence is a human activity with an ultimate aim in gaining advantages by coercion
and protection (not necessarily the most rational of human activities, but with an understandable logic) it seems logical to focus studies of state formation and its causes on

- the changing rules of interaction (institutions) between local and central power
- the military and fiscal organisations which were the practical results of state formation
- the threats and opportunities which served as driving forces behind that process
- innovative human behaviour which combines the political potential of threats and opportunities with practical efforts to change institutions and create organisations.

In my opinion a central part of the European state formation process is the interaction between institutions and organisations. If centralized, large-scale, and complex organisation provide society with significantly better services (in early modern Europe protection and ability to promote private interests with violence against competitors), then political institutions tend to change. The centralized organisations become so important to local society that ambitions to control resources on the local level (autonomy or independence) are overtaken by ambitions to support the central state and strive for influence over that state. This interaction process is driven by threats and opportunities that make political actors consider alternatives and it is used by innovative actors who achieve new combinations. Institutions may also change in order to create organisations although that process is more likely to take place as an imitation of another state.

Early modern Spanish state formation started with the unification of Castile and Aragon in the late 15th century, formally by marriage, in reality by several years of wars and skilful political activities by Ferdinand and Isabella which provided them with sufficient resources to deter competitors from further resistance. The rulers then used the war of conquest of Muslim Granada as an engine of resource mobilisation and political integration in the recently unified Spanish kingdoms. The possibility to form a union and then to conquer an inferior non-Christian power were mainly opportunities for two ambitious rulers. To their subjects they became credible as eliminators of the (real) threat of continuous domestic unrest and the (imagined) threat from the Muslims. As credible rulers they were able to exercise authority and patronage and make powerful men act in their interest. They introduced reforms that centralised and coordinated existing resources and structures but they achieved no drastic change of the existing political and administrative structures on the peninsula. The great new source of income for the Spanish (Castilian) part of the Monarchy came as a windfall profit from America, especially the vast amount of silver that began to flow into Seville. It was a historical coincidence that these increased resources became available to a new state with a fresh combination of power structures and with political leaders with unusually strong ambitions to create permanent military and naval organisations.

The great Spanish Monarchy which was formed in the first half of the sixteenth century pioneered the organisation of permanent armed forces which mainly were based in strategic regions outside Spain. These forces were results of both opportunities and threats, and the ideas and experiences behind them were a mixture of the Spanish, Burgundian and Italian heritages which formed the Spanish Monarchy. Renaissance interest for Imperial Rome and its sophisticated state with permanent armed forces may have been important to generate ideas, although it required special circumstances and long-term efforts to recreate that concept of an "ideal" state. Isabella and Ferdinand, the Emperor Charles V (King Charles I in Spain) and Philip II were during more than a century determined and administratively competent builders of permanent organisations for war. They were able to channel resources raised from
many parts of the Monarchy for various purposes, usually defence against threats, into permanent structures that not only fought wars but also developed coherence and skills that made them superior to temporarily organized military units. The rulers, their ministers and bureaucrats and their permanent armed forces became partly autonomous in relation to the various parts of the Monarchy. To its various members it was a source of strength that this central structure existed and deterred powerful enemies from attacking them. From an Italian point of view it was for example not irrational to finance long wars with France or the Dutch rebels if that also maintained a large war machine that in another situation might defend Italy against the Turks.

In an analysis it is important to separate the interests of the ruling dynasty and those of the various local elite groups. One major geopolitical threat came from the expanding Ottoman Empire which might conquer Italy and at least harass the coasts of Spain. For the dynasty, however this provided an opportunity to become dominant in Italy as the organiser of large-scale and unified Spanish-Italian defence forces against the Ottomans. It also made the dynasty more important and powerful as rulers in Spain as the threat from the mobile Ottoman galley fleet could not be met by local defence organised by local communities. The Spanish involvement in Italy was however also very much a response to French ambitions to become the dominant power on this peninsula. That represented a threat to the Spanish dynasty but not to the Italian power groups who often allied themselves with France. The end result by the mid-16th century was that the Habsburg had created the most efficient Christian armed forces for Mediterranean warfare (the galley squadrons and the infantry tercios) and prevailed in the geopolitical contests.

From around 1570 the expansion of the Spanish monarchy's armed forces took place in the Netherlands and in the Atlantic. The Army of Flanders and the Atlantic fleet were both huge organisations for their time and they made Spain powerful against the Dutch Republic, England and France. They were responses to immediate threats, first the Dutch revolt, later English and Dutch attacks against Spanish Atlantic interests. Of these threats, the Dutch was the most persistent. It is important that this threat was primarily directed against the Habsburg dynasty, not against Spain (except the Atlantic trade) and certainly not against Italy. Once created, the powerful Spanish forces could also temporarily be used as threats and instruments of intervention in other wars, especially in France and Germany. It is possible to interpret Spanish (and Austrian Habsburg) policy from around 1580 to the 1630s as an attempt to use the opportunity to create a Habsburg-dominated Europe when France went through a long period of weakness. This interpretation was common in contemporary Europe and it has remained common in the historical literature. However, much of the military and naval forces in Spanish service in this period were in fact necessary for preventing further losses to the Dutch and to England and for forcing the enemy on the defensive in order to conclude a favourable peace. Spanish and Italian taxpayers were reluctantly willing to support that but the resources for an even more ambitious Habsburg policy of dominance was not available from them.

Can this Spanish (or Spanish-Italian-Burgundian) development be explained by a lasting transformation of political institutions (rules of interaction) within the Monarchy? To some extent yes, but the transformation was different than in most other early modern European states. The territories participating in the conglomerate Monarchy got used to the advantages of a common foreign policy and unified military and naval forces. Most of them were willing to pay for these forces even if they were not under immediate threat. Unified they formed large forces that could support a great power policy. But the conglomerate was no real state, it
was an alliance and in the end no part of it felt sufficiently attracted to the idea of pursuing a
great power policy when leadership from the monarch declined and finally disappeared in the
1660s. The political institutions had changed in the sense that several territories accepted that
it was only the ruler that provided defence and organized military forces. But without an
active and ambitious ruler no group, structure or organisation within the Monarchy stepped
forward to assume control and responsibility.

Local elites in the kingdoms of Castile and Naples (possibly in other regions too) were in the
later half of the 17th century still willing to pay taxes in order to pay interests on old loans for
warfare. This was natural as it to a large extent was these elites who had loaned the state
money in the past. But Spanish policy in the last four decades of the 17th century became
very un-ambitious. The armed forces within the whole Monarchy were markedly reduced in a
period when nearly all other European powers (Poland-Lithuania is the major exception)
greatly expanded these forces in competitions with each other. The elite groups in the various
parts of the Monarchy did not show any interest in taking part in that geopolitical competition.

The Ottomans did no longer represent a serious threat to Italy or Spain and one major
motivation for maintaining strong armed forces disappeared with that. Geopolitical
competition with other European states was apparently not identified as a threat by the local
elites. The Spanish Monarchy was in itself a major bone of contention in this competition but
that also created opportunities as the Monarchy could play off various powers against each
other. Austria, the Dutch Republic and (eventually) Britain were allies against French threats
and their large military and naval organisations provided much the same services to the
Spanish territories and lines of communication as the Monarchy's earlier powerful armed
forces had done. In some respects they were possibly better and without doubt cheaper for the
Monarchy's taxpayers. The elites of the Monarchy in Spain, Italy and the southern
Netherlands did obviously not see the repeated wars with France as something which
threatened their fundamental interests. Some even called in French help to support local
revolts (Catalonia, Naples, Sicily), and opposition to the new ruler in those border parts of the
Monarchy which were integrated with France from 1659 to 1678 seems to have been of little
importance. The elites on the peninsula largely accepted and supported the Bourbon
succession in 1700 as a practical and cheap solution to the monarchy's security problems.

What actually followed was not peace and security but a great war, the Spanish War of
Succession. For peninsular Spain that had far-reaching consequences as large parts of the
peninsula for the first time since the 15th century became a major battle ground. French and
Spanish forces loyal to the Bourbon king fought the armies of Britain, Netherlands, Austria,
Portugal and Spanish forces loyal to the Austrian pretender. The effects on Spanish political
institutions of that experience have not been the subject of much study but it is evident that a
change took place. It is possible that it was some kind of chock effect that lasted long enough
to give the new dynasty a window of opportunity to create something new. It is probable that
the civil war character of part of the war made it easier to eliminate old obstacles to dynastic
power as some upholders of old orders could be eliminated, primarily in the old Aragonese
kingdoms. The first Bourbon ruler Philip V was in no way a determined and skilful political
leader (rather the contrary) but under his long rule (1700-46) the new peninsular Spanish state
underwent many reforms which brought it in line with the modern concept of European
nation-states, primarily the French Bourbon model. The old kingdoms were formally
abolished in favour of a unified Spanish kingdom with an army of a new structure and a great
battle fleet navy. Spain again played an important role in European power politics and it was
largely able to defend its empire against British attacks. Considering that the British in the
18th century were able to oust France from North America and conquer considerable parts of India, this was no small achievement.

And yet, in a brief period in the early 19th century all this fell to pieces: the armed forces, the empire and much of the political order on the peninsula. From 1808, peninsular Spain was once more a battle ground between two great powers: France and Great Britain, and the Bourbon dynasty and their armed forces were utterly discredited. The local elites in the colonies as well as many of the elite groups in peninsular Spain began to search for regional political solutions to their problems. Just like in the late 17th century they appear to have accepted a low-budget security policy determined by the fact that the great powers would not allow that any of them gained control over Spain. This takes us beyond the early modern epoch but it is important to observe that the growth of the Spanish armed forces in the 18th century produced no lasting political results. The growth appears to have been driven by temporary threats and opportunities rather than any fundamental change of political institutions in relation to complex organisations. Spanish elite groups seem to have continued to regard large organisations as the rulers' private sphere of interest. They supported them with taxes as long as they provided advantages but when these were doubtful the great organisations were left to their fate as largely unnecessary.

Any general conclusions?

Long-term macro level studies of political institutions or political culture in Spain seem to be scarce. If they exist they have not influenced syntheses about Spanish history. Early modern European political bargaining is usually studied with some kind of socioeconomic stratification at least in the background. Rulers are interacting with the aristocracy, the nobility, burghers, financiers and merchants, state bureaucrats, officer corps, the church and the peasants. There is of course no consensus about what actually happened in Europe but there are more or less active discussions.

In contrast, there is a notable lack of systematic studies of how political bargaining on the macro level worked in Spain, both within the wider Spanish Monarchy and on the peninsula and how such interaction may explain the unusual cyclical behaviour of Spanish state formation. The question is seldom asked and explanations of rise and decline (especially decline) are usually supposed to be found in the economic sphere. There are several monographic studies of the state and its bankers, the state and individual provinces, the state and various representative institutions, probably also of the state and the Church (I am not familiar with them). There are also now a huge amount of recent regional studies about economy, social conditions and micro level politics. But the basic question why several interest groups during long periods did provide the Spanish state with considerable resources and trusted its ability to protect them, while they in other periods left the state with practically nothing to exercise power with is normally not asked.

It is possible that we in the future will see attempts to write syntheses and macro level studies where these micro and meso level studies may provide much of the empirical foundation. However, a few long-term and macro-level questions and hypotheses may be required for that.

1. Threats. What level of threat did peninsular Spain actually perceive? It is probable that the Muslim-Ottoman threat was seen as serious in the 16th century and that it made it easier to extract taxes and support permanent armed forces, especially in Mediterranean Spain. It is
also probable that the maritime threat from the English and the Dutch from the 1570s to the mid-17th century was seen as serious in Atlantic Spain. There is no doubt about that it resulted in increased taxation and much increased protection cost for the trans-Atlantic trade. France's role as a perceived threat is more uncertain and Louis XIV's policy of overawing and possibly absorbing the Spanish Monarchy was more frightening to the Dutch, the Austrians and the English than to the Spanish and Italian elites. The Bourbon dynasty posed a dangerous threat to competing rulers but to oligarchies and elites Louis XIV may also have been seen as an efficient ruler who could create social order without social upheavals. The cultural influence from France was also growing in Europe and Louis XIV's religious policy was strictly Catholic. This may be parts of the explanation for why broad elite groups in the Spanish Monarchy eventually preferred a Bourbon solution to the succession problem. In the 18th century political and economic threats from Britain to the transoceanic empire provided some stimulus to maintain strong armed forces, especially a strong navy. When the regional elites in the empire turned their back to Spain, that threat disappeared. 19th and 20th century peninsular Spain have been very much undisturbed by international power struggles, except the brief experience of 1898 when United States crushed the remains of the empire.

The main conclusion must be that Spain was, in a comparative perspective, a part of Europe which was exposed to rather few and markedly mild threats. The surprising feature of the history of Spanish state formation is then that the peninsula for a long period was the centre of a strong state, not that it in other periods had a politically, financially and military weak state.

2. The Church. The Spanish Monarchy and peninsular Spain was thoroughly Catholic, and the only region where Protestantism prevailed, northern Netherlands, left the Monarchy. This had certain important effects on Spanish state formation. The Church retained its autonomy. Church property could be heavily taxed in struggles against Muslims and Protestants and the Church could be relied on as a moral supporter of these wars in relation to the population. But the property of the Church was not confiscated as in Protestant countries (it was confiscated during a civil war in the 1830s) and the Catholic hierarchy retained a strong position as an autonomous interest group. The low level of religious conflicts removed one motive for the rulers to intervene and change the political structures and institutions in local society, except in the Netherlands where it was partially unsuccessful (northern Netherlands), partially successful (southern Netherlands).

The effects of the unchanged religion and the stable position of the Church on Spanish state formation may be equally interesting as the effects of Reformation in other parts of Europe. Religion was much used as an integrating force by the dynasty but that may have lessened normal state formation activities as it made "nation" and "state" less important as rallying points for integrative political activities and efforts to create social orders.

3. Participation. The myth that Spanish rulers ruled without any of participation from representative institutions has been thoroughly discredited by empirical research. The Cortes of Castile had for example an important role in deciding and implementing the increased taxation, especially in the latter half of the 16th century. It did however only represent towns, as the Church and the nobility negotiated with the ruler under other forms from the 16th century. The decline and disappearance of these representative institutions in the later half of the 17th century took place at the same time as the Monarchy's military capacity drastically declined. This is exactly the opposite to the traditional idea that the suppression of representative institutions was a prerequisite for the creation of strong states. It raises a few questions however.
Why did local elite groups not try to create stronger and more power-conscious representative institutions when the monarchy and its traditional power structures visibly declined, especially in the 1660s and 1670s? And why were the many noblemen uninterested in acting through an estate? Why did they abandon the state rather than use the dynasty's weakness and need of help as an opportunity to gain control of the state. 17th century local elites in Spain did apparently not live with a package of political, economic or legal reforms which they wished to have decided and implemented at a central level. They and the ruler had not much to bargain about except how to pay interest on the debts which the state had to investors in local society. Had the local elites become so used to see representative institutions as the forum for higher taxes in exchange for rather little of value to them, that they regarded systematic bargaining with the state as something that must be avoided? The 18th century Bourbon dynasty followed the French pattern and ruled without a central representative institution. It was created only during the dramatic upheavals after 1808, and then as an imitation of the early, constitutional years of the French Revolution.

The decline and disappearance of representative institutions may have resulted in that rulers and ministers became less skilled and less efficient as political actors and entrepreneurs. Viable representative institutions have in most European countries in the long run created a political culture where rulers, cabinets and various interest groups solve conflicts by compromises and bargain about how to counter threats and take advantages of opportunities. This development of a political culture takes time however and if the potential participants in political bargaining never meet, the opportunities for institutional change are reduced.

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