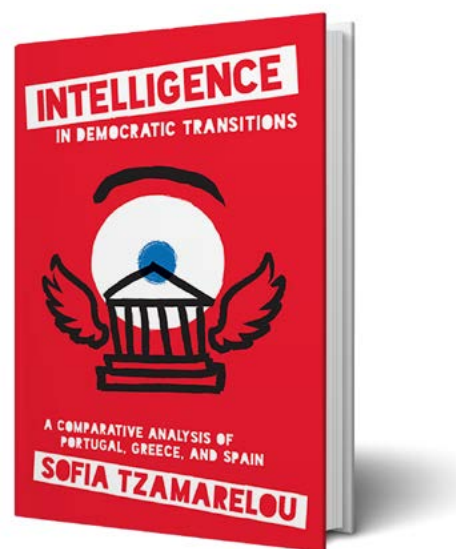


intelligence in public media

Intelligence in Democratic Transitions A Comparative Analysis of Portugal, Greece, and Spain

Reviewed by Anthony Sutton

Author: Sofia Tzamarelou
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Reviewer: Anthony Sutton is an analyst in the Strategic Futures Group of the National Intelligence Council.



Intelligence services in autocracies inevitably repress citizens, who cannot know them and must fear them. Intelligence agencies in democracies suffer the tension between secrecy and accountability but are properly tamed by laws, elected officials, and watchful societies.

Sofia Tzamarelou, a media and PR consultant with a doctorate in intelligence studies from Brunel University London, inspects transitions from autocratic to democratic intelligence work, documenting progress that has been considerable in Portugal, partial in Spain, and limited in Greece. The result is a useful slog for intelligence officers covering political arrangements in these or comparable countries.

Tzamarelou structures her inquiry using a preexisting academic framework called Security Sector Reform. SSR, as its practitioners style it, provides a five-part rubric for describing how far an intelligence service has democratized. Full democratization involves 1) lustration^a to remove autocratic holdovers among intelligence personnel, 2) control and oversight to ensure legal behavior, 3) targeting of national security threats rather than political opponents, 4) recruitment based on merit rather than political reliability or nepotism, and 5) civil society that engages and monitors intelligence services. Across the cases, Tzamarelou emphasizes lustration, reasoning that a thorough purge creates the conditions needed for other elements of democratization.

a. Tzamarelou defines “lustration” as “the process by which a state that is transitioning to democracy removes officials and other insiders from the previous authoritarian regime. These individuals are often identified based on their past involvement in repression, including violations of human rights, and their affinity for the old regime or authoritarian ideology.”

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Intelligence in Democratic Transitions

This framework serves well enough. The book does not offer any new theory^a or waste words debating narrow differences with competing frameworks.^b It follows the common method of measuring national cases against a theoretical yardstick. Contemporaneous articles even did so for Portugal,^c Spain,^d and Greece.^e Tzamarelou's unique contribution is primary research in four languages, plus the service of arraying cases with similar starting points and varied outcomes.

The most reformed case is Portugal. During the autocratic, corporatist Estado Novo era, António de Oliveira Salazar (in power 1932–68) and his successor Marcello Caetano (1968–74) held direct control over the main intelligence agency. That civilian outfit repressed society, but it had little insight into the military, where discontent grew with colonial wars in Africa. Intelligence thus failed to foresee the coup in 1974 that gained public support and inaugurated a democratic transition, breaking sharply from the old regime.

Public antipathy to the old autocratic intelligence service led Portugal to forgo any civilian intelligence until 1984. Democratic Portugal's eventual intelligence service thus suffered no autocratic holdovers. Building from nothing, the democratic regime legally limited intelligence activities and split oversight functions among the prime minister, two ministries, and the legislature. Broader laws giving public access to government documents, along with media attention to isolated scandals, cemented democratic control.

In the case of Spain, military intelligence emerged from civil war in the 1930s vigilant against internal enemies and vengeful against former opponents. Generalísimo Francisco Franco (in office 1936–75) stood up additional agencies that answered directly to him and likewise focused on domestic concerns.

Spain's democratic transition in 1976 created overarching protections for civil liberties while retaining intelligence officers in accordance with the "pact of forgetting." Thereafter, intelligence operated autonomously, with little oversight, close ties to the military, and a habit of hiring for political type and personal favor. Scandals intermittently roused the government to discipline its intelligence service, which failed to warn of a coup attempt in 1981, organized a reactionary death squad in the 1980s, and faced higher expectations after a terrorist attack in 2004. Slowly and partially, agencies recruited civilians, legislators controlled funding, laws restricted operations, and media identified malfeasance.

In the case of recalcitrant Greece, the autocracy's intelligence services, beginning with the 4th of August Regime (1936) through the establishment of the Third Hellenic Republic (1974), focused on domestic communists and reported directly to the national leader. Most intelligence officers were seconded from the military, and many had personal ties to the ruling junta.

Intelligence personnel stayed in place across Greece's democratic transition in 1974. Military and police continued to dominate the service, which remained a politicized tool of the executive despite laws pointing it against national-security threats and eventually establishing some judicial oversight. When partisan control of the government switched, the intelligence agency shifted loyalty to new leaders concerned with new domestic opponents. Decades after democratization, Greek intelligence remains only partially effective against terrorists and little trusted by the public.

Tzamarelou's case studies reinforce several notions in adjacent literatures. Coup scholars will recognize in Portugal's history the tendency for junior-officer

a. Security Sector Reform, an older and broader idea, had already been used to analyze intelligence democratization, as in Peter Gill, *Intelligence Governance and Democratisation* (Routledge, 2016).

b. The main competing framework is Civil-Military Relations (CMR), as in Florina Cristiana Matei and Thomas Bruneau, "Intelligence Reform in New Democracies: Factors Supporting or Arresting Progress," *Democratization* 18, no. 3 (2011).

c. Andres de Castro and Enrique Fernandez-Carrera, "Portuguese Intelligence under Salazar's Estado Novo," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 37, no. 3 (2024).

d. Antonio M. Diaz-Fernandez, "Spanish Intelligence in the Early Days of Late-Francoism: Fault Lines and Continuity," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 37, no. 3 (2024).

e. Eleni Braat, "Democratization of Intelligence: Demilitarizing the Greek Intelligence Service after the Junta," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 37, no. 3 (2024).

coups to reshape regimes more thoroughly,^a whereas transitions, such as Spain's, made through agreement rather than revolution typically preserve prerogatives for autocratic elites.^b Democracy scholars will recall that each country's stock of experience with democracy predicts good governance,^c just as this study finds media investigations and public pressure helped restrain intelligence gradually and reactively. And Europeanists will notice how EU and NATO candidacies motivate structural reforms, although in these cases sometimes also with a preference for technical competence over accountability.

For style, the book reads like the PhD dissertation it was,^d carefully applying an established technique to novel cases while demonstrating mastery of the related academic literature. Which is to say the writing is sometimes clunky and the structure interferes with the

narrative. Meticulous procession through the theoretical framework splits each national case into 12 pieces, making it difficult to follow the plots.

Still, an intelligence officer willing to put in the work will acquire generic measures for the democratization of intelligence, an appreciation for the variety and mutability of national outcomes, and perhaps a renewed commitment to their own professional ethos. Tzamarelou, describing the subordination of intelligence to democracy, directs little attention to why a society might prefer more competence and less abuse from its security services. All the same, readers who pledged fealty to a constitutional order might use these comparative cases as an opportunity to meditate on the roles of their own agencies in maintaining and protecting a democracy. ■

a. Holger Albrecht, Kevin Koehler, and Austin Schutz, "Coups, Agency and Prospects for Democracy," *International Studies Quarterly* 65 (2021).

b. Michael Albertus and Victor Menaldo, "Gaming Democracy: Elite Dominance during Transition and the Prospects for Redistribution," *British Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 3 (July 2014); James Loxton, "Authoritarian Successor Parties," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 3 (July 2015).

c. John Gerring, Strom C. Thacker, and Rodrigo Alfaro, "Democracy and Human Development," *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 1 (January 2012); John Gerring, Philip Bond, William T. Barndt, and Carola Moreno, "Democracy and Economic Growth: A Historical Perspective," *World Politics* 57 (April 2005).

d. Sofia Tzamarelou, "Intelligence Democratization: A Comparative Analysis of Portugal, Greece, and Spain," Brunel University PhD dissertation, 2021.