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MADRID — Spain's Supreme Court announced Thursday that an investigating magistrate could proceed with a case against a crusading judge known internationally for indicting [Osama bin Laden](#) and the Chilean dictator [Augusto Pinochet](#), according to court papers.

The judge, [Baltasar Garzón](#), is facing possible charges of abuse of power over his decision to investigate crimes committed during the dictatorship of Franco. If Judge Garzón is indicted he will be automatically suspended.

In its decision, the five-judge panel ruled against Judge Garzón's motion for dismissal, saying it saw no legal or procedural reasons to drop the proceedings. The case was filed by several conservative organizations that contend that he abused the powers of his office by investigating Franco-era crimes that were covered by a blanket amnesty issued by Parliament in 1977, two years after the strongman's death.

In 2008, Judge Garzón started investigating the forced disappearances of a few of the more than 100,000 people who were detained by government forces and remain unaccounted for. He has argued that the amnesty does not cover crimes against humanity.

[José Miguel Vivanco](#), the Americas director at [Human Rights Watch](#), said in a statement that "Spanish courts have routinely failed to investigate allegations of horrendous crimes of the past, but are being surprisingly active in prosecuting a judge who tried to push for accountability."

Judge Garzón has long been a polarizing figure in Spain, and this case is no exception.

Conservatives see him as a tireless self-promoter, while more liberal voices, like the left-leaning daily newspaper El País, call the legal proceedings against Judge Garzón “harassment” aimed at punishing him for reopening the wounds of the Franco era.

Judge Garzón has spearheaded much of the judicial pressure against the separatist Basque group [ETA](#) . He is also a hero among human rights groups that would like to see broader powers to prosecute international crimes against humanity.

Included in several high-profile cases he is currently investigating are the torture claims of former Guantánamo Bay detainees, criminal activity by Colombia’s [FARC](#) rebel group and corruption cases in Spain.

Judge Garzón is also facing court proceedings in two separate cases. In one he is suspected of receiving payments from Banco Santander for a series of lectures he gave at [New York University](#) while he was involved in a case against the bank’s chairman.

The other case is related to some phone taps Judge Garzón ordered of conversations between lawyers and defendants in prison in a broadly publicized corruption case incriminating top politicians of the opposition Popular Party.