



# Methodological approach to the evolution of a terrorist organisation: ETA, 1959–2018

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## Abstract

Founded in December 1958, *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA) was dissolved on 11 May 2018. During its almost sixty years of existence, ETA underwent phases of military offensive and then a decline in its operational activity. In order to understand the limits of these episodes and their reasons, we have created an original database listing all the actions of the armed group. Our analysis contributes to highlighting the strategic developments of the clandestine organisation and stimulating discussion of the conclusions previously drawn from the group's databases of fatal victims. We will thus consider the consequences of methodological choices on the interpretation of the history of a clandestine organisation.

**Keywords** ETA · Clandestine violence · Armed strategy · Basque country

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“Lepoan hartu ta segi aurrera” (Pick up the fallen comrade and keep moving forward)

## 1 Introduction

*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA), the armed Basque organisation, was founded on 31 July 1959. It was set up by Basque students working on *Ekin* magazine, who were tired of the passive attitude of the leaders of the traditional nationalism embodied by the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV). After 60 years fighting against the Spanish state for an independent socialist Basque country, ETA was dissolved on 3 May 2018.<sup>1</sup> Although it was officially founded in 1959, five years (1964) passed before ETA used explosives for the first time against plaques commemorating the Francoist dictatorship (Zunbeltz 1968, p. 105). We are often reminded that, in the course of these six decades, ETA caused more than 800 fatalities.<sup>2</sup> This was a particularly deadly period as the conflict as such caused a total of 1,004 deaths in the Basque country between 1960 and 2013, according to Basque government figures.<sup>3</sup>

The actions carried out by the clandestine group have been the subject of several quantitative studies, almost all of them by Spanish authors. A single exception is that of Clark (1984) who catalogued the 287 fatal ETA attacks (from 1968 to 1980) and provided some descriptive statistics on victim selectivity during this period. Later studies are incomplete, for the most part, because of the period in which they were carried out. This is the case, for example, for the quantitative data produced by Domínguez (1998) for the period 1978–1992. The main contribution to building a database of ETA’s fatal victims was by De La Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca (2004) then by Sánchez-Cuenca (2009). From an analytical point of view, statistical studies on ETA’s actions have been either descriptive (Domínguez 1998, chap. V), as well as covering an earlier period (1978–1992), or econometric (Barros 2003; Barros et al. 2006; Barros & Gil-Alana 2006), disregarding sociological considerations.

More generally, ETA and armed organisations in the Basque country have attracted the attention of commentators carrying out several types of study, including antiterrorism (Jaime-Jiménez 1998), the social response to violence (Funes 1998), strategies of terrorist organisations (Domínguez 1998a; b; Ibarra 1987; Sánchez-Cuenca 2001), and their discourse (Mata 1993; Alonso & Molina 2017), the militants themselves (Reinares 2001; Guibet Lafaye 2020a; 2020b) and the social movements that support them (Lacroix 2011; Leonisio et al. 2017).

Since ETA has already written the last chapter of its history, we wanted to adopt a dispassionate approach and return to its trajectory, consisting of political proposals, politico-military strategies and armed actions. We focus on armed actions and on the way they evolved, in line with a hypothesis similar to that adopted by De La Calle and Ignacio

<sup>1</sup> For a historical perspective of ETA and its actions, see Clark (1984), Sullivan (1988), Zulaika (1988) and Domínguez Iribarren (1998).

<sup>2</sup> Still in 2013, the number of victims attributed to ETA varied according to the sources (see Carmena et al. 2013, p. 14). In figures provided by the Basque government for the period 1960–2013, the perpetrators of actions that caused thirteen victims are still unidentified.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.euskadi.eus/gobierno-vasco/estadistica/>.

Sanchez-Cuenca (2004), whereby the frequency and type of military operation carried out reflect the group's strategic options. In particular, we shall compare the conclusions of previous studies, which focus on an inventory of the *victims*, with those that can be drawn from the analysis of a statistical series of *actions* carried out by the organisation during the whole of its history. By focusing on actions we can fine tune our approach to ETA's strategy, which may appear skewed when the focus is exclusively on the victims.<sup>4</sup> Not only are we then able to eliminate "mistakes" that the group may have made, some of which resulted in a large but unintended number of civilian victims, but also to take a different approach, given the very significant focus in the public debate on the victims. We shall also see, first, that the "Bidart raid", when the ETA executive were arrested in March 1992, can in no way be considered as "triggering the start of the decline in actions and in the organisation" (Sánchez-Cuenca 2009, p. 22), contrary to previously held conclusions. And second, we shall show that any phase of an armed offensive was in support of political negotiations with a view to settling the conflict in the Basque country. This combination of factors provides an opportunity to reconsider the image of the group, especially after the dissolution of ETA-political-military (ETA-pm). For from being the "terrorist gang" that the Spanish media liked to portray, ETA made efforts to intervene in the political arena as a player in its own right, instigator of a political strategy (politico-military), and to bring its actions to bear at political, military and social levels, albeit using illegal means of action.

To support this analysis, we first clarify the limitations of existing databases, explaining that we have preferred other methodological options. Next, we present the elements from which we built the database that we use, and finally we present the conclusions that we were able to draw from the statistical series.

## 2 Questions of method ICI

### 2.1 Theoretical framework: social movement and political violence

Part of the most recent studies on political violence is drawn from the tradition of social movement analysis. These are defined as "structures of preference directed towards social change" (McCarthy and Zald 1977) or as "a sustained, coordinated effort of collective claims-making by social movement organizations (the agents of contention) on behalf of shared interests, values, beliefs and solidarity through the use of strategies that include, but are not restricted to, contentious protest campaigns (the means of contention)." (Alimi 2011, p. 98–99) These strategic protests are aimed at fostering political change in which authorities can play the role of target or mediator (the target of contention). Social movements seek to obtain new rights (Tilly 1984). As such, they are in confrontation with the public authorities. To survive and sustain itself, any Social Movement (SM) must attend to the following tasks: forming mobilization potential, forming and motivating recruitment networks, arousing motivation to participate, removing barriers to participation (Klandermans and Oegema 1987). SMT theorists have also found when members of the movement look to recruit others, they operate as "rational prospectors." (Brady et al. 1999)<sup>5</sup> They

<sup>4</sup> On the role of victims of terrorism in the public debate and on change in penal policies in Spain, see Truc 2012.

<sup>5</sup> The two most prominent contemporary influences in SMT are 1. New Social Movement (NSM) Theory, which focuses more on macro/structural processes, and Resource, and 2. Mobilization (RM) Theory, which focuses more on contextual processes like group dynamics. A third school of SMT thought, Framing The-

want to be efficient and effective, so they seek to identify those most likely to agree to act, if asked, and to act effectively to further the cause. They proceed, as the Framing Theory suggests, through a recursive process in which the movement's idea entrepreneurs attempt to frame messages in ways that will best resonate with the interests, attitudes, and beliefs of its potential constituency: movements diagnose problems and attribute responsibility, offer solutions, strategies, and tactics (prognostic framing), and provide motivational frames to convince potential participants to become active. Snow and Benford (2000) have referred to this process as 'frame alignment'—the emergence of congruence between an individual's and an organization's interests, values, and beliefs. SMT generally and Framing Theory, in particular, might be useful for understanding radicalization because it focuses on processes.

The process of radicalization is not a determinate one. Not every episode of contentious politics initiated by a social movement produces radicalization (Alimi 2011, p. 115) neither political violence: "they are networks of individuals and organisations, with common identities and conflicting goals that use unconventional means" (Della Porta 2010, p. 273). Nevertheless, the tools developed to account for classical social movements can be used to reflect on forms of radical action (Della Porta 1995; Fillieule 1997; Goodwin 2006; Beck 2008) and even in terrorism (Gunning 2009). We will address these actions using the term "political violence" rather than "terrorism". The former allows for a sociological approach that focuses on "the socio-political sequences of action and contexts in which violence is embedded, and makes the naming of acts and the interpretation of their meaning an essential part of the analysis" (Steinhoff and Zwerman 2008, p. 213). Political violence will then be understood as "a radicalisation of means, not of ends, in conflicts that may pit ethnolnational communities, groups with a specific ideology and governments, or the defenders of rival ideologies against each other..." (Bosi 2012, p. 172).

Analyses of political violence suggest that three mechanisms are at play in the early phase: the intensification of repression against the protest movement, the intensification of organisational competition, and the activation of activist networks (Della Porta 2013). This first phase of radicalisation—in the sense that the notion has in the sociology of social movements—thus proceeds from an increasingly violent interaction with the state (repression triggering the mechanism of escalation (see Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule 2012; Demetriou 2007; Hafez 2003; Khawaga 1993), while, at the same time, tactical innovation and competition between groups militating for the same cause favour the adoption of increasingly brutal methods by the most radicalised component of the protest, which mobilises based on previous militant affinities. Violence then results from a trade-off between the opportunities and constraints that emerge in controversial episodes, to achieve short- and long-term political goals (Alimi 2011; Alimi et al. 2012; Bosi et al. 2014; White 2000).

Research on political violence in the social movement tradition suggests considering macro-contextual, meso-organisational, and micro-individual levels of analysis. It is at these three intersecting levels that the analysis of political violence and social movements must renew research on radicalisation processes (Della Porta 2010, p. 288). The study we propose is situated at the macro-sociological level of analysis and will adopt a statistical analysis perspective.

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Footnote 5 (continued)

ory, is also central (Snow & Benford 1988; Snow 2004). Rooted in constructivist assumptions, Framing Theory focuses on how movements and social collectives construct, produce, and disseminate meaning.

## 2.2 Creation of previous databases

For a better understanding of the contribution made by our database, we must first describe how the databases used for the main statistical studies on ETA were developed. In his study of the period 1968–2000, Barros (2003) collected annual data from three types of source. He recorded executions and kidnappings carried out by ETA between 1968 and 2000, based on the work of Abadie and Gardeazabal (2001) who propose 33 annual observations. The SIPRI-Yearbook,<sup>6</sup> produced by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, was also used, and the database of tourism statistics in Spain ([www.ine.es/inebase/index.html](http://www.ine.es/inebase/index.html)). In a later study covering 1968–2002, Barros et al. (2006) exploited the ITERATE database (<https://library.duke.edu/data/sources/iterate>) which partly overlaps the *Global Terrorism Database* (GTD). Barros and Gil-Alana (2006) used the same source.

A more systematic review of the victims was carried out by De La Calle and Sanchez-Cuenca (2004), based on very eclectic sources ranging from the Abertzale left (patriots) to the extreme right. These authors relied on a variety of sources, including the Association of Victims of Terrorism (AVT) database, the list of ETA victims provided by Calleja (1997), the *Euskal Herria y la Libertad* CD-ROM by Landa (1995), information taken from the daily newspaper *El País* from May 1976, the chronology published by *Egin* (1982) for the period 1977–1982, and that published by Equipo D (1984), a group attached to the extreme right, for the period 1973–1983. By using such a wide range of sources, De La Calle and Sanchez-Cuenca could consider that they had an exhaustive database of ETA terrorist victims (*Domestic Terrorist Victims*<sup>7</sup>). This work was completed by Sánchez-Cuenca (2009) who added 160 observations to these data between the first quarter of 1968 and the last quarter of 2007.

Finally, Martínez Herrera (2002) relied on police sources to produce his database. He took into account not only fatalities but also the injured. Unlike De La Calle and Sanchez-Cuenca, in his two articles (Martínez Herrera 2002, 2007) he used annual series of deaths from 1969 to 2001, resulting in a much less detailed approach than that of the other two authors. He wanted to identify the effect of Spanish polices, either antiterrorist or conflict resolution, on the actions carried out by ETA, the impact being inferred from the correlation between the number of operations carried out and the historic milestones in the political agenda. The two variables studied were “responsive policies” and “repressive policies” depending on whether they attack the executive branch of the clandestine group or result in the arrest of so-called ordinary members of the organisation.

### 2.2.1 Limitations of previous databases

The original feature of our database is that not only are ETA's *victims* listed, but we also identify the *actions* carried out by the group, which of course greatly increases the number of items to be taken into account. The database used by De La Calle and Sanchez-Cuenca (2004) then by Sánchez-Cuenca (2009), “the ‘Victims of ETA’ dataset”,<sup>8</sup> lists 596 actions,<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook>. The SIPRI-Yearbook is devoted to armaments, disarmament and international security.

<sup>7</sup> See [www.march.es/dtv](http://www.march.es/dtv).

<sup>8</sup> <http://recursos.march.es/web/ceacs/proyectos/dtv/datasets/the%20Victims%20of%20ETA%20-DATASET.sav>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://ic3jm.es/investigacion/proyectos/explaining-terrorist-and-insurgent-behavior/>.

the last of which dates back to 2006, or twelve years before the group was dissolved. Ours contains 3,096 actions which occurred between 1959 and 2011. It would certainly seem to be methodologically problematic to reduce an organisation that carried out over 3000 actions merely to its 837 victims. The strategy of a terrorist group, especially when it focuses so strongly on targeting its victims, extends far beyond causing fatalities. This is all the more true for ETA which defined its action in an original way as deploying on four fronts: political, cultural, military and social (5th ETA Assembly 1972). Since indiscriminate attacks are not the only actions terrorist groups carry out, we cannot study them based solely on the fatalities they have caused.

In addition to this temporal and numerical limitation, the victim database has another bias in that it aggregates, on the one hand, the actions of ETA-military (ETA-m) and ETA-pm,<sup>10</sup> and on the other hand, the actions of the Autonomous Anticapitalist Commandos (CAA), ETA-pm 8th Assembly (split from ETA-pm), and *Iraultza* and *Gatazka* (split from CAA), even though, as the authors themselves recognise, 93% of assassinations (773 out of 832) were the work of ETA-m. Similarly, the period 1968–1973 is excluded from the analysis of political violence by Sánchez-Cuenca (2006) since no fatal action is recorded during this time. For the same reason, the author ignores the period after 2003, which from an analytical point of view is debateable, since this decision amounts to considering that a clandestine organisation which causes no deaths has no political strategy, something that is denied by other illegal groups like *Iparretarrak*, who also operated in the Basque country.

### 2.3 Previously highlighted results

What conclusions can we draw from the aforementioned studies? In some cases, analysis of the actions carried out by ETA serves as a basis for an assessment of the Spanish state's antiterrorist policies from 1968 to 2000, especially in terms of dissuasion (Barros 2003). The approach suggested by Barros et al. is exogenous. However, an attempt at an exogenous study is proposed, based on a comparison of the periods of ceasefire and armed actions (Barros et al. 2006) but the results are for the most part disappointing, the main conclusion being that attacks by ETA appear to increase in the summer and decrease when other variables are taken into account, such as arrests, repressive policies, phases of negotiation with the government, and killings.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the correlations proposed by Martínez Herrera (2002, 2007) are usually negative.

When using the database created by De La Calle and Sanchez-Cuenca (2004) we can draw some more relevant conclusions concerning ETA's strategic behaviour, based on the assumption that variations in the characteristics of the organisation's victims reflect strategic changes in the organisation itself. A study of the victims can be a point of reference to test hypotheses about ETA's strategy. Likewise, the statistical series enabled Sánchez-Cuenca (2006) to identify, for the period 1973–2003, four phases in the evolution of the violence perpetrated by the group. Each of these periods corresponds to a stage in their strategic development (Table 1). (1) The first coincides with the Francoist regime (1959–1975) and is based on a strategy of action-repression-action. (2) The second period, covering the years 1977–1981 and especially 1978–1980, was notable

<sup>10</sup> At the 5th Assembly, a split developed between ETA-military, ETA-political-military and *Frente Obrero* (Workers' Front, which would become the LAIA).

<sup>11</sup> The authors do not specify the nature of the variable.

for an intense offensive against the Spanish state and coincides with the start of a war of attrition. (3) During the decade 1982–1992, the conflict continued and the war of attrition stabilised. (4) Finally, the arrest of the organisation's top leaders in Bidart (Pyrénées-Atlantiques) on 29 March 1992 marked the beginning of the decline in ETA's actions and in the organisation itself (Sánchez-Cuenca 2009, p. 22). On this 29 March, "operation Bidart" by the RAID tactical unit resulted in 11 arrests, including the Artapalo collective. This collective consisted of Francisco Mugica Garmendia, known as *Pakito*, José Luis Álvarez Santacristina, known as *Txelis*, and José Arregui Erostarbe, known as *Fiti*. These three men were considered to be the "ruling troika" of ETA (*L'Express*, 17/11/2008), the ETA executive.

Noting that ETA never again displayed similar levels of violence to that seen in the two previous phases (1977–1992), Sánchez-Cuenca believes that the arrest of the Artapalo collective permanently weakened the organisation at operational level, but does not consider the strategic changes that could be operating within the group, especially after the arrest of their executive. In contrast, we shall highlight strategic changes made by the organisation, in accordance with the hypothesis that the political prevails over the military, even though it is acting illegally.

Similarly, the lack of attention to knowingly and explicitly formulated strategic options and to ETA's desire to position itself as a fully-fledged political player led to some hesitation in interpreting the cycles of violence of the 2000s. Sánchez-Cuenca considers that the impossibility of reaching an agreement with the moderate nationalists led ETA to put an end to the November 1999 ceasefire, omitting the effect of the government's strategic-political measures. In October 1999, the government denied having received a letter from ETA setting out the conditions for a dialogue after the truce declared on 16 September 1999. On 25 October 1999, Belén González Peñalva, known as *Carmen*, who was representing ETA in discussions with government representatives in May 1999 in Zurich, was arrested in Pau. In the same vein, at the end of October 1999, the government disclosed to the media the mediating role played by the Bishop of Zamora, Juan María Uriarte who, following this announcement, withdrew from the negotiations (Casanova 2007, p. 321). These events led to a breakdown in the dialogue and were a factor in the violation of the ceasefire.

Based on the number of victims, Sánchez-Cuenca concludes that the cycle of violence that began in the early 2000s was of a more limited scope and duration than the previous ones, as the offensive was mainly focused on the last quarter of 2000 and the first two quarters of 2001. He considers that after 2003, the intensity of the deadly violence declined significantly, demonstrating that ETA appeared to have entered a terminal phase. The author attributes the reduction in actions to operations by the security forces (and to the absence of a strategy likely to replace the tactics of the "nationalist front", bringing together moderate and "radical" independentists), without taking into account the fact that the attacks of 11 September and those of 11 March 2004 in Atocha forced ETA to reconsider the strategic use of violence and the way it was interpreted by the population. Based on these elements, Sánchez-Cuenca (2009) concluded that violence was concentrated mainly in phases (ii) (1977–1981) and (iii) (1982–1992), those corresponding to the war of attrition, which amounts to seeing ETA's activity as a Gaussian curve and combining these periods without making any distinction between the two.

From an analytical point of view, there are other elements which seem questionable. The risks involved in underground activity are either overestimated (as in the Hipercor case) or underestimated, notably with regard to the logistical availability of equipment, the feasibility of the planned operations, the relative control over the consequences of the actions carried out. Next, like a number of authors who adopt an exogenous perspective,



**Table 1** Periodisation of the intensity of fatal actions by ETA according to Sánchez-Cuenca (2009)

Period	Context	Type of struggle
1959–1975	Francoism	Anti-Francoist struggle, action-repression-action strategy
1977–1981	Transition towards democracy	Offensive against Spanish state
1982–1992	Government elected, democracy stabilised	War of attrition
After 1992	Democracy stabilised	Fewer actions by ETA

Sánchez-Cuenca starts from the premise that the operational/military (rather than the political) dimension prevails in the organisation's strategic line. This analytical approach endorses the reductive interpretative premise according to which, for ETA-m, military action prevails over political action, the opposite of the political-strategic posture adopted by ETA-pm, which the abundant literature produced by ETA tends to reject. Finally, the criteria on which the proposed periodisation is based are uneven: the periods 1959–1975 and 1977–1981 are defined on the basis of a macrosocial and historic criterion (Francoism, the period of the transition government), where Sánchez-Cuenca is drawing on inter-relations between ETA and the Spanish government and on the effects of antiterrorism to define the phases in ETA's development.

Alongside this central contribution to the literature, other equally old studies by Spanish authors in a context where ETA had not yet laid down its arms, repeatedly focus on the effect of repressive policies on activities of the collective (see Barros 2003; Barros et al. 2006; Martínez Herrera 2002, 2007). While Martínez Herrera reaches more nuanced conclusions on the effect of repressive policies and mainly conflict resolution policies on the group's actions, this seems to be less the case when it comes to the effects of the arrest of "Artapalo" in 1992, deduced by De la Calle and Sanchez-Cuenca (2004). Consequently, from a Hispanic-centred perspective, we should question the importance of the Bidart disaster when interpreting the evolution of the group, and whether it could indicate a rupture, despite the fact that the armed organisation continued to exist for another 20 years.

### 3 Creating our database

#### 3.1 Description of the sources used

The database that we have produced, listing all the actions carried out by ETA, is based on several types of source:



- 1 Existing databases, such as the Global Terrorism Database (GTD).<sup>12</sup>
- 2 We also selected databases listing the victims of Basque terrorism, taking care to select only victims of ETA (ETA-m and ETA-pm) and excluding all other groups;
- 3 Information taken from national and regional daily newspapers, in Spanish, French, English and Basque (*Euskara*);
- 4 Press search (extracting information based on the term “ETA” and excluding all non-relevant items);
- 5 Government sources from the Spanish Ministry of the Interior;
- 6 Documents produced by the Abertzale left and by the underground organisation itself.

Sources were systematically cross-checked to deal with instances where no claim was made or where unclaimed actions were wrongfully attributed to the clandestine group. These sources are all listed in \\* MERGEFORMAT Appendix 1. We included not only military actions but also, especially for the first decades of ETA’s existence, all illegal actions likely to be the subject of a crackdown. The first illegal operations caused no casualties and may seem insignificant, as they involved graffiti, hanging the Basque flag (*ikurriña*), which was banned at that time, distributing leaflets, etc. However, the group’s founders<sup>13</sup> and the official documents point out the risks that the perpetrators were running.<sup>14</sup> These were the founding actions of the clandestine group. They raised the awareness of the population to the possibility of responding to/resisting repression. Because these were illegal actions, they unleashed waves of repression<sup>15</sup> which justifies their inclusion in our database.

### 3.2 Methodological and statistical contribution of this new database

Although it was our intention to be exhaustive, compiling a database from secondary sources is not without its methodological difficulties. The first concerns the reconstruction of actions carried out during a period that is difficult to document, the 1960s. Historians have established that before 1964, the newly formed group carried out several actions every week (Casanova 2007). Although these actions may not seem very remarkable from today’s standpoint, hoisting the *ikurriña*, which was banned at that time, painting graffiti as

<sup>12</sup> We had to carry out data cleaning on the GTD database as well as adding supplementary material since, on the one hand, there were no data collected for 1993 and, on the other hand, as we have highlighted, it included at least 79 actions that were not by ETA (but could be attributed to IK, *Iraultza*, *Gatazka*, *kale borroka* (i.e. the urban guerrilla movement between 1990 and 2000)) or it combined actions by ETA with those of extreme right paramilitary groups (e.g. attacks on 29 May 1994 in Muskiz and Artxanda) which resulted in the deaths of ETA members. In this database, there are 321 actions that cannot with certainty be attributed to ETA.

<sup>13</sup> See Madariaga, “Así nació ETA”, *Punto y Hora*, 25 Aniversario, 13 July 1984, p. 7–9; Zunbeltz 1968, p. 106–107.

<sup>14</sup> “La quema de la bandera en un edificio oficial, a plena luz del día, en un San Sebastián donde el veraneo reunía a lo más selecto del Régimen y del aparato fascista, suponía una operación madurada, calculada y con cierto riesgo.” (Jon Nicolás, *Documentos Y*, 1979, cited in Nuñez, 1993, vol. I, p. 60).

<sup>15</sup> One example is the adoption of decree 1794/1960 on “Military rebellion, banditry and terrorism” (*Rebelión Militar, Bandidaje y Terrorismo*) of 21 September 1960. This increased military capabilities in matters of public order and banned any form of demonstration, meeting or strike. It came into force after the first actions by ETA where explosives were used, in December 1959, in this case three homemade bombs went off at the civil government headquarters in Gasteiz, at the offices of the phalanx newspaper *Alerta* in Santander and at the police station in Indautxu (Bilbao) (Casanova 2007, p. 17).

a reminder of the Basque identity, and handing out leaflets were liable to be very harshly punished in the Franco era and hence their importance, in this context, should not be underestimated.<sup>16</sup> They were short-lived and therefore difficult to document precisely. A large proportion of them have undoubtedly eluded us. Likewise, operations carried out in support of or by exiled ETA militants in Argentina, Venezuela, and Mexico in the second half of the 1960s cannot always be identified precisely, although they were very real. Consider, for example, the releasing of *ikurriñas* from a helicopter over the Spanish embassy in Mexico. This type of problem also occurs in the 1970s. The secondary literature points out that in 1979 ETA-pm was responsible for “punitive actions against employers and [for] certain actions against the FSE [Spanish security forces]. Some initiatives were also undertaken in support of social struggles and against official facilities” (Casanova 2007, p. 173) but with no further details. It is not only difficult to identify any specific characteristics but even more so to cross-check this information with another source to validate it definitively. Some of this information has therefore been omitted.

Identifying actions rather than victims, in order to achieve exhaustivity is a delicate matter, in that virtually all victims have been documented, whereas this is not the case for all actions. Dramatic actions leave traces in the daily newspapers, but this is not always true for acts on a smaller scale. At the same time, access to local newspapers—rather than the nationals—where sabotage operations may be reported is more difficult.

A second difficulty, in contrast, concerns actions that had a dramatic impact, although their main object was not to kill any victims. The Hipercor attack is a case in point. A car bomb in the car park of the Hipercor shopping centre in Barcelona on 19 June 1987 left 21 people dead and 45 injured, although the police and the store had been warned that there was a bomb.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the human cost, the event took on a considerable political weight. Yet these were not deliberate victims. Since the coding attributes the same weight to each event, this effect is limited.

A third difficulty is inherent in the sources, which are porous to the effects of government or anti-government propaganda. The case of the struggle against the construction of the nuclear power plant in Lemoiz is a typical example. In August 1981, the Iberduero company, which was primarily involved in this project, claimed to have been subjected to 250 attacks since the beginning of the year (*El País*, 15/07/1981), with almost a hundred further attacks in the following months (Casanova 2007, p. 199). However, it was impossible to document any more than 82 actions against the company between January and August 1981. Other sources too mention 1000 acts of sabotage (Casanova 2007, p. 296) with the pace accelerating in 1997. We were able to validate fewer than about twenty for 1997.

Given these difficulties, we favoured several methodological options. First, we selected all ETA actions that were confirmed by two independent sources. In this way the “victims” effect could be weighted and the entire period of the group’s activity could be considered more uniformly. Second, while there was a risk of underestimating the number of the organisation’s actions during the first twenty years of its existence, unintended victims tended to increase the number of actions in the same way but without considering the true intention, in relation to the strategy adopted. For this reason, the database only includes

<sup>16</sup> The most spectacular action in this period was the attempt to derail a train in Usurbi (Guipúzcoa) carrying Franco supporters to San Sebastian, on 18 July 1961, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the dictator’s victory in the civil war.

<sup>17</sup> Hipercor was not evacuated. ETA apologised for the consequences of the explosion (see *Communiqué from ETA to the Basque People*, 21 May 1987).

actions, in the strictest sense, and not situations where a police officer or a civil guard was killed in an exchange of fire, nor where an explosives expert was killed attempting to defuse a bomb, when the location had been disclosed by the organisation.<sup>18</sup> To the extent that we have tried to understand the strategy of the organisation, reference to the intention behind the actions is used as a discrimination criterion for selecting them or excluding them from the database. With these methodological choices it was not necessary to distinguish between intended victims and accidental or collateral victims,<sup>19</sup> intentional actions and “mistakes” on the part of the organisation resulting in death, targeted actions and indiscriminate operations.

The originality of the analysis we propose here is based on several approaches. First, it uses data that cover the entire period during which ETA was active, from its creation to its dissolution, whereas the most comprehensive victim database covers 1973–2003 (Sánchez-Cuenca 2006). Second, it was our intention to take into account not only killings but all actions carried out by the group. This gave a much clearer understanding of ETA’s strategic options without overstating their deadly actions, especially when mistakes were involved. The organisation’s strategy is reflected in all of the operations carried out, rather than solely in executions and killings, as each operation can have an effect on stakeholders in the conflict and on the stance adopted in the political game. Lastly, one of the original features of this work is that it combines a social sciences interpretation with statistical analysis, which has not always been the case in the existing literature (see Barros 2003; Barros et al. 2006).

#### 4 Empirical results: phases of the political-military offensive

The collected data reveal two series that define ETA’s military actions, as shown in \\* MERGEFORMAT Fig. 1 (\\* MERGEFORMAT Appendix 2) and \\* MERGEFORMAT Table 2. The first differentiates between 1977–1986 and 1988–1991 when the level of military activity was unprecedented in the group’s history, with an annual number of actions in excess of 100.<sup>20</sup>

These highlights of armed activity provide an insight into ETA’s military strategy, an understanding of how the group intervened in the political life of the Basque country and Spain. They also show that military action was absolutely subordinate to the group’s strategy, even after the dissolution of ETA-pm in 1982 and against reductive interpretations not only of the actions of the organisation but of terrorism in general.

<sup>18</sup> This means that we have cleaned up the lists proposed by sites such as *Mapa del terror*, *Mapa del Olvido*, those devoted to victims of the *Ertzaintza* (Basque autonomous police) or produced by the extreme right (e.g. *Nacional Socialismo sin censura*). 64 actions, resulting in 43 deaths, were therefore excluded from the GTD.

<sup>19</sup> De la Calle and Sanchez-Cuenca (2004) group collateral or accidental deaths and those resulting from blind or indiscriminate attacks into the same category. They differentiate (i) deaths caused intentionally (of security forces as well as the army and civilians); (ii) deaths where ETA was mistaken over the victim; (iii) deaths that were not necessarily intentional, such as those which occurred in armed clashes between the police and ETA, or when police officers died trying to defuse a bomb, and (iv) collateral, accidental or indiscriminate deaths.

<sup>20</sup> As we have pointed out, there could well be continuity between 1977 and 1985 because the year 1981, with the struggle over the Lemoiz power plant, could count for many more actions than those shown in the table.

#### 4.1 1977–1981: the struggle for the Statute of Autonomy

There are several factors that account for the intensity of operations in 1977–1979, the main one being the campaign for the referendum on the Constitution and that for the Statute of Autonomy. The Abertzale left rejected the terms of the Constitution as it had been drawn up and in January 1978 it produced a new version of the KAS alternative (Socialist Abertzale Coordination) based around five points.<sup>21</sup> Supported by ETA, KAS opposed several constitutional proposals, such as the reform of the monarchy, the adoption of the capitalist system, the absence of freedom of expression and opinion, the continuation of Francoist structures after Franco's death, the denial of the right for the self-determination of nations, the antiterrorist law, the division of the Basque country, the obligation to learn Spanish, the process of making the Basque language disappear, and the lack of freedom. Not only did the new Constitution deny the rights of minority groups and give the armed forces the role of defending national unity (Article 8)<sup>22</sup> but it was also based on “the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation” (Article 2), which made it unacceptable in the eyes of many Basques.

However, the Constitution was approved by a referendum on 6 December 1978 although with a participation rate of 38.74% in the Basque country and a record level of “no” votes in this region of 33.66% (abstention was 29.22% in Navarre).<sup>23</sup> These results reflect the position of a large proportion of inhabitants of the Basque country with regard to Spanish constitutional change. For these reasons, the struggle continued, with the ultimate goal being the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque country. A preliminary draft of this Statute, which excluded the demands relating to language, territoriality and the forces of order put forward by KAS and HB,<sup>24</sup> was presented to the Madrid government on 29 December 1978. During this period, military action by ETA (ETA-m and ETA-pm combined) did not waver. ETA-m made its position clear in a *Communiqué by ETA to the Basque People* of 30 July 1979 in which the group denounced the agreement reached between the PNV and the central government with the phrase, “El abrazo de la Moncloa”. In a later interview, ETA clarified its position against the Statute of Autonomy by highlighting the refusal of the right to self-determination, the exclusion of Navarre, the lack of parity between the Basque and Spanish languages, the FSE remaining in the Basque country, and the structures of economic domination, the nature of which was contrary to the interests of the working classes. The military strategy adopted by the group consisted in a form of systematic harassment of

<sup>21</sup> It involved an amnesty for all Basque political prisoners in Spain; the legalisation of all political parties, including independents; expulsion of Spanish state police and military forces from the Basque Country; improvements in the living and working conditions of the working class and the immediate satisfaction of demands in socioeconomic matters expressed by their representative bodies; an enhanced Statute of Autonomy, recognising the national sovereignty of *Euskadi*, its right to self-determination, including the right to create an independent Basque State; recognition of *Euskara* as the official and dominant language in *Euskadi*; the creation of civil defence units, replacing the forces of repression, these units to be created by and dependent only on the Basque Government; recognition of economic, social and political rights to ensure the well-being and progress of the Basque people (ETAk Euskal Herriari, ETA-m communiqué, January 1978).

<sup>22</sup> Article 2 of the Spanish Constitution states: “La Constitución se fundamenta en la indisoluble unidad de la Nación Española...”, and Article 8: “Las fuerzas armadas... tienen como misión garantizar la soberanía e independencia de España, defender su integridad territorial y el ordenamiento constitucional”.

<sup>23</sup> [https://constitution-europeenne.info/special/espagne\\_ref.pdf](https://constitution-europeenne.info/special/espagne_ref.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> See ETA communiqué to the Basque people, 30 November 1979.

**Table 2** Peaks of ETA's armed offensive

Year	Number of actions	Period	Number of actions
1977	105	1st half-year	77
		2nd half-year	28
1978	<b>153</b>	1st half-year	72
		2nd half-year	<b>81</b>
1979	<b>173</b>	1st half-year	<b>107</b>
		2nd half-year	66
1980	<b>153</b>	1st half-year	70
		2nd half-year	<b>83</b>
1981	<b>144</b>	1st half-year	<b>94</b>
		2nd half-year	50
1982	<b>224</b>	1st half-year	<b>92</b>
		2nd half-year	<b>132</b>
1983	<b>142</b>	1st half-year	42
		2nd half-year	<b>100</b>
1984	<b>176</b>	1st half-year	<b>89</b>
		2nd half-year	<b>87</b>
1985	<b>146</b>	1st half-year	<b>104</b>
		2nd half-year	42
1986	<b>139</b>	1st half-year	63
		2nd half-year	76
1988	<b>105</b>	1st half-year	43
		2nd half-year	62
1989	<b>136</b>	1st half-year	65
		2nd half-year	71
1990	<b>139</b>	1st half-year	64
		2nd half-year	75
1991	<b>166</b>	1st half-year	<b>86</b>
		2nd half-year	80

The most significant elements are underlined

the FSE and an increase in symbolic actions directed against material targets that embodied the armed forces (see Table 3).

The Statute of Autonomy of the Basque country (known as the Statute of Guernica) was nevertheless adopted by referendum on 25 October 1979 and approved with 53.1% of votes. The political front is not the only one on which ETA was focusing as it was also during these years that the group decided to support mobilisation against the Lemoiz nuclear power plant. The company Iberduero was particularly targeted, suffering at least a hundred acts of sabotage between 1980 and 1981. The year 1980 also saw a strategic change in the group, which carried out its first action against drug trafficking,<sup>25</sup> thus opening the “drug

<sup>25</sup> The actions forming part of this dynamic were not decisive in terms of their numerical weight, as they consisted of targeted operations focusing on specific individuals.

front”, against which ETA chose to fight, as they considered that drugs were being used to weaken young people and divert them from sociopolitical struggles. ETA considered that drugs acted as a “complementary weapon against the different forms of apparatus of repression”. In these two distinct ways, the action of ETA came to be directed not only towards the political field, but also to the social field. This strategic development is also illustrated, in political-economic terms, in the “summer campaigns” aimed at destabilising tourism in Spain and hence the Spanish economy. Above all, however, ETA had to face the antiterrorist politics and the repeated actions of paramilitary groups supported by the Spanish state against the Basque population and the Abertzale left. At the same time, discussions began in October 1980 on the disarmament of ETA-pm (Casanova 2007, p. 188).

## 4.2 1982–1986: responding to the “dirty war”

The group’s military action intensified in 1982–1986, following on from the previous period. These years saw one of the most remarkable offensive phases in the history of ETA and coincided with some key political moments in Spanish history. During this period there were an average of 165 actions per year. The proliferation of operations at the beginning of the 1980s has to be considered in the context of the forthcoming general elections as the aim was, once again, to influence the course of events by focusing their attacks on military targets. The elections were held in October 1982, bringing in a socialist government. The purpose behind ETA’s actions was not only political, but also military, in that the fight against terrorism intensified at the same time, in some cases taking on the appearance of a civil war as so many illegal forms of state repression were applied.<sup>26</sup> Whereas in 1978–1979, ETA-m and ETA-pm had acted in concert, from 1982, ETA-m was the only one to be operative, but maintained a high level of military operations to continue the power struggle with the Spanish state.<sup>27</sup> After the coup d’état known as 23-F,<sup>28</sup> ETA-pm chose political stability and constitutional democracy, while ETA-m opted for confrontation with the Spanish state which, for its part, was expanding its plans and strategies for antiterrorist actions.<sup>29</sup>

The violence of ETA’s activities in 1983–1986 coincided with an intensification of the fight against terrorism, in this case the “dirty war” (Guittet 2000) waged on both sides of the border. During 1985, the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) endorsed the antiterrorist policies proposed by the socialist government and the PSOE. On 30 January 1985, an anti-terrorist cooperation agreement was signed between José María Txiki Benegas and the *lehendakari* (President of the Basque government) José Antonio Ardanza, following elections in the Autonomous Region. The agreement was inspired by the terms used by the PSOE during the election campaign (Nuñez, tome VII, 1993, p. 12–13; see also

<sup>26</sup> From January 1980, paramilitary groups such as the Spanish Anti-Terrorist Groups (GAE) and the Basque-Spanish Battalion (BVE), increased their actions against civilians.

<sup>27</sup> Some militants from ETA-pm joined ETA-m after the split, namely “ETA-pm 8th pro-KAS Assembly” (the *milikis*).

<sup>28</sup> On 23 February 1981, Lieutenant-Colonel Antonio Tejero, supported by a group of civil guards, entered the Spanish Parliament during the vote on the leadership of the Spanish government.

<sup>29</sup> This involved the creation of two mandates: MULA (*Mando Unificado de la Lucha Antiterrorista*) and MULC (*Mando Único para la Lucha Contraterrorista*) following on from an agreement reached between King Juan Carlos I and the head of the Spanish armed forces. The state of emergency was approved by Congress. From March 1981, the army was given the task of border control in the Basque country (Casanova 2007, p. 192). In February 1983, the ZEN plan (*Zona Especial Norte*) was launched.

**Table 3** Periodization of ETA operations

Periods	Annual average of operations	Contexts	Dominant <i>modus operandi</i>	Preferred targets
1959–1976	12	Francoism	Fires, low intensity explosives, handguns	Public buildings, symbolic actions, thefts
1977–1981	146	Democratic transition	Handguns, automatic weapons, explosives	FSE (civil guards), public buildings, anti-nuclear fight
2nd semester 1982–1986	165	Constitutional monarchy, socialist government, dirty war	Handguns, car bombs	Banks, French interests, FSE and paramilitaries, tourist targets (“summer campaign”)
1987–1988	98	Truce, search for a dialogue with the socialist government	Explosives, car bombs	French interests, FSE
2nd half of 1988–1st half of 1992	128	Socialist government	Letter bombs, car bombs, explosives	FSE, French interests, motorway project in Leizarán
2nd semester 1992–1st half 2000	35	Socialist government then PP after 1996	Explosives, car bombs	FSE including Basques and soldiers, political and journalistic staff, “summer campaign”
2nd semester 2000–2001	80	PP government	Explosives, car bombs	Government targets (public buildings), FSE, political staff
2002–2009	29	PP government until 2004 then socialist	Low intensity explosives	Material civil targets (“revolutionary tax” imposed to companies), government (public buildings), FSE, tourism targets, symbolic actions
2010–2018	Less than 1	Socialist government until 2011 then PP until 2018	Low intensity explosives	



*Deia*, 20 January 1985). The PSOE and the PNV demanded that the law be respected and came together in the struggle against terrorism and violence.<sup>30</sup> The seven-point agreement included Article 2 on violence, terrorism and democratic living together (*convivencia*), revealing a change in the policy followed until that point by the PNV. They recognised that no type of violence was justifiable, that—contrary to its previous options—social reintegration measures needed to be developed, and that the Basque conflict could only be resolved by political forces with parliamentary representation. This antiterrorism cooperation was strengthened both in the Basque country, since on 30 May 1985, the PSOE submitted to the PNV an eight-point plan relating to the fight against terrorism, but also between Spain and France, and also with Europe. In June 1985, Spain took part for the first time in the TREVI Group meeting on “European Security”, and in July 1985, anti-terrorist cooperation with France was confirmed during a visit to Paris by King Juan Carlos I and the Minister for Foreign Affairs Francisco Fernández Ordóñez, formerly a senior official in the Ministry of the Economy during the Franco era (*Le Monde*, 11/07/1985). In this context, the Antiterrorist Liberation Groups (GAL) stepped up their action.

In contrast to this stance by the PNV, ETA explicitly declared that it was maintaining its objectives and its attacking strategy against the security forces and their collaborators, drug traffickers, French and Spanish economic interests, and the levying of the revolutionary tax from those it designated as the Spanish or Basque oligarchy (*Zuzen*, no. 41, January 1985; Table 3).<sup>31</sup> During 1985, ETA’s strategy evolved. They carried out their first car bombing in Madrid on 25 April 1985, then at the end of April they began their campaigns against tourism in Spain’s Mediterranean region (Casanova 2007, p. 223) using mainly car bombs in its attacks against the security forces. The actions carried out not only had a reactive virtue but they also contributed to affirming the organisation’s strength, in a context where it continued to call for negotiations. In October 1985, in a message to its militant members, ETA nonetheless envisaged the possibility of peace, based on the KAS alternative (*Zutabe*, no. 42, October 1985).

The \\* MERGEFORMAT Table 3 shows the differences from a periodization based on the Spanish chronology and nourished by a statistical base made from the actions of the organization (\\* MERGEFORMAT Table 1). Without neglecting the modification of the balance of power within the Basque movements in the evolution of ETA strategies, nor the fluctuations of Spanish national policy or even the repressive strategies of successive governments (GAL, torture, executions, etc.), we will show how these periods make sense from the history of ETA and its strategic reconfigurations.

#### 4.3 1988–1991: the “Algiers discussions”

The desire to position itself as a political player in a power relationship with the Spanish state was reinforced at the end of the 1970s, and was demonstrated in the period 1988–1991 when ETA carried out an average of 137 actions per year. 1989 witnessed significant political turmoil, whether it was in the declaration of a bilateral ceasefire at the start of the year,

<sup>30</sup> This confirmed their determination to “trabajar coordinadamente, desde las exigencias de un Estado de derecho, en la lucha contra la violencia y el terrorismo”.

<sup>31</sup> See also the declaration by ETA in *Zutabe*, no. 41, May 1985. They recall that the “direct enemy” is indeed the Spanish government while the PNV is merely the “political adversary”.

then the “Algiers discussions” and the campaign to claim the right to self-determination led by the Abertzale left from February 1989 (Casanova 2007, p. 246).<sup>32</sup> As soon as the truce was broken, ETA embarked on an offensive in the second quarter of 1989, from 7 April 1989 to be precise. Their aim was to assert a position of strength alongside their gestures of openness to negotiation, expressed first in April (see *Egin*, 13 April 1989) then in December 1989. The resumption of their offensive stance was the subject of a clarification by ETA, as was the widening of their target base to include prison officers, an instrument of repression in their eyes (see *Zuzen*, no. 49, July 1990). Following the collapse of the Algiers negotiations and the violation of the ceasefire, ETA reaffirmed its place and its presence on the political stage by confronting the Spanish state and in 1991 it looked to Spain’s prospects for 1992, which was to be an exceptional year for the country,<sup>33</sup> in order to act and provide themselves with a basis for possible negotiations with the government. In 1991, we counted 166 actions carried out by the group. Because Spain was guaranteed international exposure as a result of all these upcoming events, ETA focused some of its actions on foreign targets to ensure that they would also be seen as players on the international scene. It was during this period that the largest number of operations outside the Basque country and Spain were recorded. Targets were bank headquarters, cultural centres, diplomatic representations, in Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and Turkey (Elorza, 2000, p. 365).

#### 4.4 2000–2001, 2005: reaffirming their existence

An illustration of this type of strategy can be found in the last period of high intensity action by the group, although to a lesser degree. After the 1990s, ETA’s main offensive, given that their rationale was to avoid causing casualties, was in 2000–2001 then 2005. During this period, they once again focused on the strategy of influencing negotiations with the Spanish state. The national context was similar at that time because a general election had also been announced for March. The truce that began on 18 September 1998 was broken on 3 December 1999, which had the effect of pushing ETA towards a resumption of military action, with the aim of reasserting itself in the face of its political interlocutor. Like 1989, 1999 was also defined by intense political activity between ETA and the government (with attempts at negotiations within the framework of the truce), between ETA and civil society institutions and within civil society. In the early 2000s, attacks against the Abertzale left took the form of legal bans on parties (*Herri Batasuna*), associations (*Jarrail/Haika*, *Segi*, *Xaki*, *Gestoras Pro Amnistía*), the assembly of mayors and municipal councillors (*Udalbiltza*), trade unions (*Langile Abertzaleen Batzordeak*—LAB), newspapers (*Egin*, *Gara*, *Ardi beltza*, *Euskaldunon Egunkaria*) rather than being aimed at paramilitary capabilities. They were also embodied in the “Pact for Liberties and against Terrorism” signed between the Popular Party and the Socialist Party on 12 December 2000 in Madrid. Finally, the Spanish government’s antiterrorist offensive took advantage of the 11

<sup>32</sup> See also the so-called *Bidez Bide* march, to claim the right to self-determination, which consisted of several columns marching throughout the Basque country, starting on 17 March 1989 and converging on Pamplona on the day of *Aberri Eguna* (Casanova 2007, p. 247).

<sup>33</sup> In 1992, Spain was preparing to host the Universal Exposition of Seville, to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America, the Barcelona Olympic Games and Madrid as European Capital of Culture. At this time, the country was also involved in the process to enter the European Community and NATO.

September attacks to mobilise the European Union in its favour. The press took part in this offensive, which resulted in an increase in the number of journalists, and also politicians, targeted by ETA (see Table 3).

Nevertheless, in the course of the survey we carried out in the Basque country between 2017 and 2020, which gave us the opportunity to meet 69 former underground militants (see Guibet Lafaye, 2020a), it was repeatedly pointed out that after the indiscriminate attacks of 11 September 2001, it was no longer possible to conduct this illegal struggle in the same way.<sup>34</sup> Although ETA continued to maintain a considerable level of armed activity post-11 September and then after 11-M,<sup>35</sup> their *modus operandi* changed significantly: explosives were of a much lower intensity, calls were systematically made to the local DYA (emergency centre) and to the press to warn of their existence and their location; they were often indicated by signs. There were very few victims from each operation. Although the number of actions declined for reasons perhaps internal to the organisation, but certainly after 2001 and 2004, as a result of macrosocial factors, the rationale behind them remained similar to that which motivated their earlier armed action.

## 5 Conclusion

This original database covering the ETA clandestine organisation showed up results relating to phases in its history and its strategic options that had not been brought to light previously, due to divergent methodologies. In terms of methodology, and because this was a clandestine organisation where access to sources is complicated, this article highlights the interpretive discrepancies that certain epistemological choices can cause. As we have already mentioned, analysing the strategic development of a group like ETA by focusing on fatalities among its *victims* rather than exploiting the statistics relating to *actions* can lead to some remarkable differences in interpretation. Whenever an underground organisation resorts to using explosives—rather than executions with handguns—the results of its actions take an unpredictable turn, despite precautions by the perpetrators, when it is not their intention to cause the largest possible number of victims. The intention to kill or not to kill targets is part and parcel of the strategy of an illegal political group but the number affected cannot be planned beforehand.

On the other hand, the intensity of the phases of the group's activity was by no means random, as we can see from its strategic development.<sup>36</sup> The periods of sustained armed mobilisation are associated with some political moments that are extremely significant for the Basque country, such as the transition to democracy, where the region's political status played an important role, or the phases of negotiation with the government in the early 1990s. These periods are also linked to a momentum to reaffirm their presence on the political scene (as was the case in the 2000s) after failure to resolve the conflict, moving through a stage where weapons were used less and then the mobilisation of civil society for a large proportion of the 1990s. From the beginning to the end of its history, through its

<sup>34</sup> As summed up by Etan, "it became more and more difficult after 2001 to establish recognition". "The attacks on 11 September 2001 marked the turning point. They changed the frame of reference."

<sup>35</sup> On 11 March 2004, several bombs exploded in Atocha station, killing 191 people. Although the Aznar government accused ETA of being behind the operation, responsibility was claimed by Al-Qaida.

<sup>36</sup> Irrespective of the logistical constraints that the organisation faced, but which are difficult to penetrate due to its clandestine nature.

military actions and its political proposals, ETA endeavoured to take its place on the public scene, as a political player. It did this in various ways: either by increasing the intensity of its actions after a truce had been broken, or to influence the “balance of the dialogue” before negotiations; or during elections, when democratic structures were just beginning to be established in Spain, *i.e.* in the 1970s, and in the early 2000s, or when political negotiations were being held in civil society so that they could influence the search for a solution to the conflict. For the armed organisation, it was a question of establishing a power relationship with the government, in a political framework, in order to be able to negotiate. The subject of these negotiations evolved over time, ranging from the issue of a political status for the Basque country, amnesty for prisoners, their rapprochement with the Basque country or even their freedom. When ETA was in a context of negotiation with the Spanish state, it carried out more actions abroad in order to attract the attention of other countries to the ongoing process. Since all opportunities for negotiations—whether with the State, through a significant involvement of civil society, through an intense military offensive or via ceasefires—had been exhausted, and the international context had also evolved due to the emergence of violent political Islam, it was inevitable that the organisation would eventually announce its dissolution.<sup>37</sup>

The increase in arrests between 1992 and 1994, then in 1996, contributed to the meso-social reasons that could account for the reduction in the organisation’s activities. However, the political choices made around 1994–1996 to abandon a rationale that consisted exclusively of resistance in favour of a momentum towards national construction also account for the decline in military activity. Thus, the Bidart operation in itself is far from being the sole key factor to explain ETA’s operational evolution after 1992. Political strategy is better able to account for changes in the group’s military action than simple operational reasons, as confirmed by some of the communiqués published by ETA.<sup>38</sup>

## Appendix 1

References for sources used to compile our database.

1. Global Terrorism Database (GTD)  
<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>
2. Sources listing victims of the conflict in the Basque country:  
Database created by De la Calle and Sanchez-Cuenca: [www.march.es/dtv](http://www.march.es/dtv)  
List of ETA’s victims published by Calleja (1997).  
Victim associations: Association of Victims of Terrorism ([www.avt.org](http://www.avt.org)).  
Victims of the security forces:  
<https://mapadelterror.com/en/>  
<https://mapadelolvido.blogspot.com/>  
<https://ertzaione-1.blogspot.com/>  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20090202121213/http://www.guardiacivil.org:80/terrorismo/acciones/estadistica07.jsp>  
<http://especiales.elperiodico.com/graficosEEPI/VICTIMAS/tablavictimas.html#ARRIBA>

<sup>37</sup> Once again, irrespective of its ability to find new members.

<sup>38</sup> See that of 1993 in Elorza, 2000, p. 392.

Victims of the Abertzale or Basque side: <http://www.euskalmemoria.eus/>

Other databases listing victims of terrorism:

<http://www.angelfire.com/pq/terroristas/>

<http://blogs.libertaddigital.com/in-memoriám/>

<https://victimas-de-eta.blogspot.com>

<https://www.abc.es/especiales/eta/victimas/11.asp>

[https://eu.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zerrenda:ETAk\\_hildakoak\\_\(1968-1979\)](https://eu.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zerrenda:ETAk_hildakoak_(1968-1979)).

<https://ns-markoss88.blogspot.com/>

3. National daily newspapers:

<https://www.elmundo.es/>; <https://www.elmundo.es/eta/historia/>

<https://elpais.com/>

<https://www.lavanguardia.com/>

<http://hemeroteca.lavanguardia.com/>

<https://www.elcorreo.com/>

<https://www.abc.es/>

<https://www.laverdad.es/>

<https://www.20minutos.es/>

<https://www.lainformacion.com/>

Regional daily newspapers:

<https://www.noticiasdegipuzkoa.eus/>

<https://www.eitb.eus/es/>

<https://www.elnortedecastilla.es/>

<https://www.elcorreogallego.es>

<https://www.diariodesevilla.es/>

<https://borrokagaraia.wordpress.com/>

French daily newspapers reporting the group's actions:

<https://www.liberation.fr/>

<https://www.lexpress.fr/>

<https://www.lejdd.fr/>

Sources in English:

<https://www.theguardian.com>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk>

<https://www.reuters.com>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk>

Basque language newspapers:

<https://www.naiz.eus/>

<http://gara.naiz.eus>

<http://www.diariovasco.com/>

5. Government sources from the Spanish Ministry of the Interior:

<http://www.mir.es/DGRIS>

<http://www.interior.gob.es/fallecidos-por-terrorismo>

6. Documents produced by the left-wing Abertzale and the clandestine organisation itself

<http://www.abertzalekomunista.net/es/relato-historico/historia-del-mlnv/v-asamblea/documentos-v-asamblea>

<https://borrokagaraia.wordpress.com/acabas-de-llegar-empieza-aqui/>

<http://www.ehk.eus/es/v-asamblea-cast/revistas-v-asamblea-cast/4292-barneko-gora-beherez-1-1968-cast;>

<http://euskaletxeak.org/lemoiz/inicio.html>

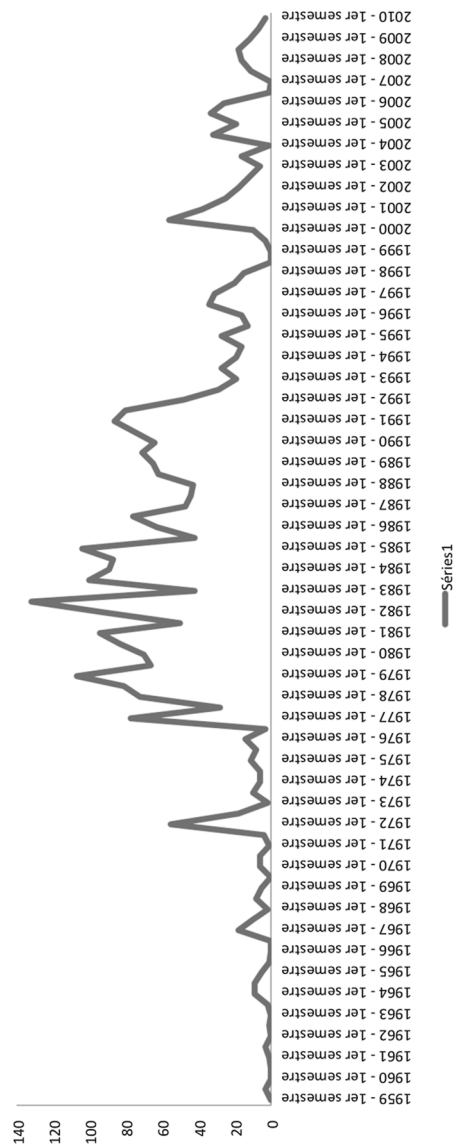


Fig. 1 Illustration of actions carried out each half-year by ETA from authors' database

## Appendix 2

See Fig. 1.

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