

# ETHNO-NATIONALIST MOBILISATION AND UNCIVIL PRACTICES IN SPAIN

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A report by Europol in 2020 (<https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>) indicates, in the section on terrorism of an ethno-nationalist and separatist nature, that the main incidents of this type took place in the United Kingdom (Republican Dissidents) and Spain (ETA and its aftermath).

While these groups have not crossed the red line of terrorist attacks, their actions are part of a continuing radicalisation that means that they deserve special attention from the point of view of prevention.

Violence in general and terrorism in particular are the result of collective practices that are part of a continuum which, in an upwards direction, encourage le passage à l'acte, the qualitative leap from rhetoric to using weapons.

## 1. Expressions of intolerance and radicalization in the Basque Country

The Europol report (p. 53) refers to a low level of terrorist activity in Spain in 2019 but this observation is offset to a certain extent by two factors: the discovery of ETA weapons and explosives together with pending murder trials, on the one hand, and the divisions within the so-called Izquierda Abertzale, Radical Basque Nationalism (NVR) and the appearance -in that space- of sectors with a radical discourse that sometimes leaves space for the taking up of arms, on the other.

### 1.1. Disarmament without deradicalization

On the continuum of violence, particularly regarding the decision to abandon its use, it is worthwhile clarifying the reasons for this choice. As regards ETA, the data back up the thesis that the abandonment responded to the fact that the military apparatus gave in to the political wing, which had been 'caught offside' by the sentence of the ECHR. Between the options of an internal split or abandoning the armed struggle, the latter was chosen, as María Jiménez says (<https://observatorioterrorismo.com/actividades/la-disidencia-emergente-de-eta-por-que-rebrota-la-violence-callejera/>). Furthermore, the decision was adopted by a small number of people without consulting the grassroots and without any demand for a review of either the criminal balance or the ideological basis for legitimation. This deficit was compounded by international stakeholders who became defenders of the 'peace process' from the perspective that ETA is the product of a secular 'conflict' between Euskadi and the Spanish and Basque 'States'; in effect, only the former, the area where the killings took place, with just one exception. It is important to bear this in mind: the removal/decommissioning of weapons without a 'review of people's minds' leaves the symbolic universe of the rationalization and justification of violence untouched and unharmed.

The clearest example of this continuity are the tributes to unrepentant members of ETA when they return to their towns and villages after serving prison sentences. The curve of the number of tributes reflects the tactical approach applied. In 2016 there were 520 of these tributes; the number dropped to 76 in 2017, when the staging of the disarmament occurred (mainly featuring 'Artisans de la Paix' and their deployment in French territory, where ETA only killed one

person in its long history, in a calculated manner); it bounced back to 198 in 2018, fell to 110 in 2019 and reached a record figure of 124 in the first six months of this year (<https://covite.org/observatorio/>). Tributes to ETA prisoners are a 'revictimization' of people affected by terrorism and they also multiply the pedagogy of terror because children and young people attend these events. Revictimization occurs every time the figures of the assassins are glorified; that is the case in Etxarri-Aranatz (Navarre), where a number of monoliths cultivate the memory of ETA members, with a banner showing the emblem of the dissident organisation ATA behind them. The tributes, however, are just a part of an attitude that can be called negationist because it is aimed at 'laundering' the history of ETA members.

To give an example, the trade union LAB requested the reincorporation of Iñaki Igerategi, an essential contributor to the killings of Joseba Pagazaurtundúa and Iñaxio Korta, into the Fire Service. Other collaborators were also welcomed in the Town Hall of Andoain, the town where the Ertzaina (regional police officer) Pagazaurtundúa and the journalist Luis López de la Calle were killed. Ainhoa Ozaeta was Deputy Mayor of the town at the time and went underground -as a member of ETA- a short time afterwards, which illustrates the close connection between the political and military wings of the NVR. Likewise, unrepentant former members of ETA have given talks in the University, with non-nationalists such as the Marxist Santiago Armesilla not allowing them to speak under the heading "Ez zara ongi etorri" (You are not welcome). We should not forget the exploration of the political subculture that terrorism fed in the form of attacks on the memory of victims, either in the form of plaques or commemorative monuments, either on the tombs, as in the case of Gregorio Ordóñez (PP), and a very recent one for Fernando Buesa (PSE).

The welcomes to terrorist prisoners are one side of the ethnic coin; the other consists of different forms of harassment and exclusion of people considered outsiders or enemies, and always 'fascists' in the language of the sectarians. Although the ultimate form of ethnic exclusion and cleaning -killing- has disappeared, all the others persist in their different forms, together with 300+ cases of killings that have not been solved.

Although it is difficult for external observers to understand the importance of these uncivil behaviours, they should not be dismissed from the perspective of prevention. For example, two scenarios are presented below, one of a civil or social nature and the other political.

- The first refers to an attack on two civil guards, who were accompanied by their girlfriends, in a bar in the town of Alsasua. Some spheres considered it as a mere barroom brawl without political connotations, but this explanation does not hold water if we take into account the fact that this town celebrates an event called Ospa Eguna (day of expulsion) every year at the end of August, with street lunches, dances, brass bands and a high level of participation by local people. The judge Ismael Moreno considers it a hate-based event that tries to create a climate of rejection of the Civil Guard with the aim of the force leaving the Basque Country and Navarre (El País, 11/11/2019).
- The second event worthy of note is the boycott of the activities of the political party C's in the Basque Country during the electoral campaign in May 2019. In line with the order issued by the Court of First Instance no. 4 of San Sebastián, the events for which pretrial proceedings were begun on 23 personas could be a) considered criminal offences against public order and b) electoral fraud. The pattern was repeated in Rentería and Miravalles: identity-based emblems that excluded individuals/groups, accusations of 'fascist' on posters, sirens and the

banging of saucepans to stop people speaking or others listening to them. These preparations revealed a strategy organised across the nationalist spectrum: i.e, that those who carried out electoral activity were being provocative. The Mayor of Rentería (EH Bildu) said that the people convening the rally had the intention of “inflaming the mood of the local people”, considering that other peaceful expressions were examples of the “wide range of sensibilities and people involved” in the town of Rentería (<https://www.eitb.eus/es/radio/radio-euskadi/programas/boulevard/detalle/6339915/alcalde-errenteria-julen-mendoza-incidentes-mitin-ciudadanos-/>). As referred to above, the insult of ‘fascists’ was repeated against them, as well as an attempt at lynching, blaming the members of the Liberal party for carrying out their (normal) electoral activity. Nevertheless, those who encouraged or justified the humiliation held rallies in Benidorm without anyone stopping them (El Correo, 17/04/2019). This raises the need for a case study on the subculture of political intolerance and the high potential for political violence that continues to persist in the Basque Country and Navarra.

- During the regional electoral campaign in the Basque Country in July 2020 the people threatened by attempts at lynching were members of the political party VOX.

## 1.2. Radical dissidence

The above elements are ascribed to the universe of the NVR. We should add that a part of that group that has split away and accuses it of being ‘conformist’, establishing a kind of competition between the official sector and the dissidents which encourages the radicalization of the nationalist political spectrum and manifests itself in an upswing of street violence (kale borroka in Basque). The dissidence began among the ETA prisoners, in line with what happened in Ireland. As a mirror of the splinter groups of the IRA (RIRA, CIRA, ONH; <https://observatorioterrorismo.com/actividades/la-disidencia-emergente-de-eta-por-que-rebrota-la-violencia-callejera/>) we have witnessed the emergence of groups such as IBIL (Iraultzaileen Bilguneak. Euskal Errepublikaren Sozialistaren Alde / Juntas Revolucionarias por la República Socialista Vasca), ATA (Amnistia Ta Askatasuna), Aurrerantz, Askatasunaren Bidea, Herritar Batasuna. GKS (Gazte Koordinadora Sozialista), Ikasle Abertzaleak or Jarki ([https://www.eldiario.es/euskadi/euskadi/ia\\_1\\_6031689.html](https://www.eldiario.es/euskadi/euskadi/ia_1_6031689.html)) in the Basque Country, but they are only operational in the Spanish part of the Basque territory, The most recent development has been the merger of some of these currents in Jardun, to strengthen the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist posture and the fundamentalist emphasis on identity. Despite their differences, there are common elements such as the rejection of participating in institutions (parliamentarianism) and a vindication of the active terrorism of ETA, defined as an “armed struggle” or “politico-military” strategy. The programme of Herritar Batasuna, to quote an example, is summarised in four principles: independence, socialism, the restoration of the use of the Basque language and reunification.

Once again, the target are adolescents and young people in general. Sometimes the particular inclination of certain places is taken advantage of, e.g. Etxarri-Aranatz or Alsasua, where the number of gatherings has increased. A rally in Pamplona on 23 May (2020) ended up with rioting and police charges, according to the Observatory of Radicalization. These gatherings have been extended in the form of protests of the street violence type: the painting of slogans on walls, the burning of garbage containers and, above all, attacks on the offices of political parties; by the end of May, there had been 13 attacks on premises of the PNV, 13 on the PSE-EE, 2 on Podemos and even on the odd ‘herriko taberna’ (Bilbao, Durango). Of these, the most

serious was the throwing of paint on the wall of the home of Idoia Mendia, Secretary-General of the PSE .

While their radical tone brings these expressions closer to other forms of violence, the content of the slogans can be clearly ascribed to ethno-nationalism, with their essentialist connotations, the abuse of the suffix 're' (so common in the inverse teleology of nationalism, determined to invent the past, such as the proposals for the 're-promotion' of the Basque language and for reunification: the construction of the Gran Euskal Herría) and the revindication of terrorism (with the name of gudarismo) with the Gudari Eguna as an essential symbol for many of them, for example the new organisation Jarki.

### **JARKI: JARDUN.**

This group's programme is representative of a process of radicalisation based on fostering the "activation of the revolutionary movement" (<https://eh.lahaine.org/jarki-nuestro-objetivo-es-conformar>). Jarki defends ETA's legacy and calls for an amnesty for 'political prisoners', because "the freedom of this people cannot be built without the activists who have fought in favour of Euskal Herria". This is why they claim that "those who chose the option of the struggle should see the legitimacy of their actions recognised, because an amnesty will only come about when the path they chose in the past becomes legitimate in the eyes of the people". This posture is clearly the opposite of that of de-radicalization by implicitly calling for a return to the armed struggle. Jarki has recently merged with ATA in Jardun.

### **1.3. A sociological continuum**

Although 'official' pro-independence radicalism (i.e. parliamentary vis-à-vis groups opposed to parliamentarism such as Jarki) has tried to distance itself from the most resounding actions, such as the attacks on the premises of political parties (some media point out that this could be a case of controlled dissidence, of a division of labour: <https://latribunadelpaisvasco.com/art/12094/la-disidencia-mas-radical-de-la-izquierda-abertzale-se-organiza-expande-y-fortalece>).

Here, we come across the weight of socialization marked by identity-based hate, which prevents a full-on critique of the terrorist past and calls for turning a dark page in which the responsibilities incurred exceed the scope of the behaviours defined in the Criminal Code. Not only this, it would appear that the very limited and opportunistic acknowledgment of errors and relative harm (Communique by ETA on 8 April 2018) has gone backwards and the most 'noble' pieces in the lexicon of the time (errors, victims, harm, forgiveness, pain, affliction, respect; Arnaldo Otegi even invoked a lack of empathy) have run their course, unfortunately backed up by recent electoral results (EH Bildu is the only party whose vote increased in the regional elections in June 2020).

If we examine these contextual variables some constant underlying features appear. The remarks made twenty years ago by the sociologist Javier Elzo are clearly seen in these radical groups now: "it is not a feature of an original psychological nature (they are not violent psychopaths) but a result, basically, of an endogamic phenomenon in the political, social and cultural sense that makes them impermeable to any ethical discourse that goes against their objectives and their vision of reality. What is more, any personal insult reaffirms them

in their approach and makes them feel even more alive, emotionally in control and even a sign of identification. For example, they are not offended -quite the contrary- that people call them 'Basque radicals'. No ambiguity or hesitation. Radicals. They consider themselves the 'only ones', the pure ones, the most aware part of Basque youth. Today they belong to "Segi", yesterday to "Haika", and before that, to Jarrai. Segi and Haika are the same thing. The change of name is tactical in an attempt to make things more different for the justice system" (<http://javierelzo.blogspot.com/2001/08/para-una-sociologia-de-la-violence.html>).

Basically, as long as this political culture that is diluted in the same identity-based notion of what is Basque is not examined in depth, with its supremacist features and a tendency towards intolerance, the temptation to resort to violence will continue to be an option for Basque youth. Precisely, the prevailing ethno-nationalism involves an implicit lifting the foot off the brake with which societies control the appeal of violence: inhibition for fear of social criticism, for the cost of criticism. As for the probability of the emergence of violence, this source of attitudes and belief that facilitate le passage à l'acte cannot be underestimated.

### **Features of Basque ethno-nationalist radicalisation:**

- a. The 'nationalisation' of society and the destruction of pluralism. The official identity and prestige of these communities excludes others: being a good Basque means being a Basque nationalist (what has been called 'obligatory nationalism'). Whoever does not share this vision has his/her freedom of expression in public restricted; this space has been monopolised by nationalism: "the streets belong to us" or "Spaniards out" are very clear examples in the differential presence of flags and symbols.
- b. Exclusion under the mask of noble language. Although in both cases references abound to democracy, dialogue, pluralism, tolerance or human rights, the reality is that a part of the population that does not share the ethno-nationalist creed does not have a voice, and is gradually expelled from the public sphere by more or less subtle means. Among the instruments used is the silencing of voices, thereby preventing pluralism. Stifling voices is a clear sign of authoritarianism.
- c. Stigmatization. As we know, violence starts with language. A common practice in these contexts is to call anyone who does not share their views a 'fascist'. ETA often called its victims -some of them left-wing activists who had suffered years of repression by Franco's regime or ex-members of ETA- "fascists".
- d. Victimism. The usual themes of grievance, oppressed nation or stolen destiny appear in the narrative repertoire of these nationalisms. At present, the theme of the prisoners (inappropriately called 'political prisoners') can be heard at both ends of the Pyrenees; it is the main vehicle of expression of victimism.
- e. The use of French territory as a screen to bounce off problems and avoid Spanish justice. Since the so-called Conference of Aiete, the promotion of the radical Basque cause has taken place in France and is headed by the so-called 'Artisans de la Paix' , coordinated with two organisations that are clearly identity-based, the Foro Social Permanente and Bake Bidea. There are reasons for the choice of France: some of the collaborators-facilitators were summoned by the Spanish justice system. Rallies, demonstrations or celebrations glorifying

things like the inauguration of a statue with the emblem of ETA, the farcical staging of handovers of weapons in bad condition and the discovery of arms caches, gatherings to support prisoners and activities of this type regularly take place in French territory and are not only given a stage by sympathetic media (Mediabask, Gara) but also general media (e.g. Sud-Ouest).

In February 2020, a propaganda documentary by ETA titled Pays Basque et Liberté was presented in the International Documentary Film Festival of Biarritz. It was broadcast by FR3 at the end of April, and only pressure from the Foro de Profesores and other actions led to it being taken off air. Despite the opposition from prisoners whose case it supposedly defended, last December the most radical supporters of the main football teams in the Basque Country and Navarre Herri Norte (Athletic de Bilbao), The RSF Firm (Real Sociedad), Iraultza 1921 (Deportivo Alavés), Indar Gorri (Osasuna) and Indar Armagina (Eibar) got together and marched to Mont-de-Marsan prison in France in support of ETA prisoners ([https://www.vozpopuli.com/espana/presos-ETA-rechazan-apoyo-Athletic-Real-Osasuna\\_0\\_1308470599.html](https://www.vozpopuli.com/espana/presos-ETA-rechazan-apoyo-Athletic-Real-Osasuna_0_1308470599.html)).

Basically, there are elements that characterise this historic moment from the perspective of radicalization. First, the existence of uncivil practices that are part of a continuum (telescoping) as forerunners of violence. Second, the convergence of a regression in terms of a lesser distancing from violence since the disappearance of ETA – one limited to the tactical objective of avoiding the illegalisation confirmed by the ECHR – with a multiplication of tributes to prisoners and increasing radicalization as a result of the formation of dissident groups within the pro-independence radical Left, which include the armed struggle as part of their agenda. The competition between both wings could give a boost to the most radical sectors.

### *Glossary of acronyms used:*

**ETA:** Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (in Basque, 'Basque Country and Freedom')

**NVR:** Radical Basque Nationalism

**ECHR:** European Court of Human Rights

**CS:** Ciudadanos (political party)

**VOX:** Extreme Right Party

**PNV:** Basque Nationalist Party (moderate)

**Segi:** In Spanish 'Seguir' (Follow), a youth organisation belonging to the so-called Abertzale (pro-independence) Left

**Jarra:** In Spanish 'Continuar' (Continue), a former organization of the pro-independence Left.

**Haika:** youth pro-independence organization

**Jarki:** youth pro-independence organization

**Jardun:** youth pro-independence organization based on the legacy of Jarki





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