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A map of terror for the last phase of the years of lead: State Security Force victims in the Basque Country (1982-1994)

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On 20 October 2011, the terrorist organisation ETA announced a definitive ceasefire of its armed activities. After the end of terrorist violence, a new scenario opened up in which the pacification of the Basque Country became not just an objective, but an end within reach. Very quickly, and in the heat of these circumstances, there was a notable increase in the volume of literature and audio-visual media around ETA, its actions and its victims. With these developments, an old debate was rekindled —that of the narrative—, which has since engulfed civil society in an acrimonious battle in which different political sectors struggle to impose a certain narrative around what exactly the “Basque conflict” was.

In Spain, the boom in academic monographs, novels and cinema/TV productions around this topic has been enormous, with works such as *Patria* (Fatherland) and *Historia y memoria del terrorismo en el País Vasco* (History and memory of terrorism in the Basque Country) all contributing to the elevation of the memory of terrorism into public debate. And although much progress has been made, there are still significant shortcomings when it comes to the victims of terrorist acts.

This work aims precisely to fill a part of this historiographical gap by centring on the mortal victims of the State Security Forces (FCSE) in the Basque Country between 1982 and 1994 (the period of democratic consolidation) from a territorial perspective. The FCSE were the main target of both *ETA militar* (ETA-m) and *ETA político-militar* (ETA-pm). For both groups, the police, military and civil guards were considered as invading fascist forces. Indeed, even after the Constitution of 178 came into force and the Statute of Gernika was approved the following year, ETA maintained a confrontational attitude towards the Spanish Government and its security forces in the Basque Country.

ETA was the main group that attacked the FCSE. It sought to justify its actions by implicating the FCSE in the repression of the late-Francoist and Transition eras, in the continuation of states of exception, and the response to workers’ protests and the coup d’état of 1981. According to ETA’s logic, the Spanish Government was the enemy of the Basque people. The new regime was in reality a military dictatorship in disguise. It was a fascist government that used the FCSE to impose its will.



ETA's discourse had an impact on Basque society. Even though it was born more out of fear than ideological conviction (notwithstanding the existence of a significant number of people who were close to its political wing, Herri Batasuna), ETA's actions contributed to an evident distancing between society, the military and the police. In the short to medium term, this led to the reification of the victim and the proliferation of the mantra that "he must have done something", which indirectly justified terrorist actions. Basque society withdrew and retreated into silence.

Along with these factors, there was another determinant: the mistrust of the political class, principally the opposition and extra-parliamentary parties, towards the FCSE. This situation, in addition to a lack of appropriate equipment, the inexperience of many agents, as well the absence of a clear police strategy in the fight against terrorism in the early years of democracy, meant that the atmosphere for confronting terrorism was not favourable. The result was the following: between 1983 and 1995, ETA assassinated more than 200 members of the various police and military forces, with its actions being particularly virulent in the Basque Country.

OBJECTIVES

Starting from a territorial perspective, special emphasis is placed on the background of the victims, the location of their assassination and the security forces to which they belonged. The aim is to map out the impact of terrorist actions on the State Security Forces in the Basque Country between 1982 and 1994. Data on victims who were civil guards, police and military personnel is analysed and compared using a descriptive and positivist methodology, with the objective of verifying which police or military force was most affected by terrorist violence. In the same way, those Basque municipalities, regions and provinces with the most FSCE fatalities are identified, as well as the background of each of the victims.

METHODOLOGY

This research is based on the available literature, press and archival sources of some of the municipalities where the attacks were carried out. It draws on the analyses of De la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca (2004) on the selection of ETA victims; Sánchez-Cuenca's (2009) research on variations in the lethality of ETA; López Romo's (2015) report on the historical context of terrorism in the Basque Country and the social consideration of its victims; and the works of Llera and Leonisio (2015), Company Alcañiz (2016), Jiménez (2019), and Jiménez and Marrodán (2019) on the victims of ETA.

Guided by these models, and utilising the information obtained in various local municipal archives in Guipúzcoa, Biscay and Álava where lethal attacks took place, a historical, territorial and statistical analysis of FCSE victims during the period of democratic consolidation is carried out.

A positivist, quantitative and descriptive analysis is offered, but not without interpretation. The object of study is framed in its corresponding context while methodologies and approaches from social history and new political history are also used to try to establish a complete overview of the violence unleashed against the FCSE between 1982 and 1994.

MAIN RESULTS

Throughout the period of democratic consolidation, ETA and the CAA killed 63 civil guards, 54 police officers and 20 members of the Armed Forces in the Basque Country. These figures are remarkably high for a period of little more than a decade but are lower in comparison to earlier periods. Likewise, Guipúzcoa was the deadliest territory for the FCSE during this period, followed closely by Biscay, with both accounting for a 90% concentration of FCSE deaths between 1982 and 1994, and the remaining territory of Álava only accounting for a marginal number.



While the highest number of civil guard victims died in Guipúzcoa, Biscay registered the highest number of police officer casualties with 25. This territory was also the deadliest enclave for the Armed Forces, although the highest percentage of high-ranking military officers killed at the hands of terrorist was in Guipúzcoa. Therefore, if we look at the geographical distribution of the attacks, we can conclude that most of them were located in the urban areas of the maritime Basque provinces.

The analysis of the background of the victims provides significant data concerning their profiles: the majority of agents killed in attacks by the terrorists cited in this study came, firstly, from Castile and León; secondly, Andalusia; and thirdly, Galicia. These three autonomous communities constitute the origin of 50 per cent of total FCSE deaths attributable to acts of terrorist violence. These data reinforce the idea that the Civil Guard and the police were a favoured target during the Transition and democracy. The situation of soldiers was different. Most were born in the Basque Country, followed by Andalusia and Galicia.

CONCLUSIONS

Between 1982 and 1994, 137 members of the FCSE were assassinated in the Basque Country. The deadliest provinces were, in the following order: Guipúzcoa, Biscay and Álava. Likewise, considering the geographical distribution of these murders, it can be stated that the highest number of fatal attacks was concentrated in the urban areas of Guipúzcoa and Biscay. Regarding the provenance of victims, Castile and León, Andalusia, Galicia, Extremadura and the Basque Country were the autonomous communities of origin of most FCSE victims in the Basque Country. Most of the civil guards and police officers, originally from these places, died in Guipúzcoa and Biscay, the most populated territories. More specifically, they died in Bilbao and San Sebastián (as well as Vitoria): the provincial capitals. These cities, together with other municipalities in the wider Donostialdea and Biscayan regions, located in the industrial and urban districts of Donostialdea, Lower Bidasoa and Greater Bilbao, were the most affected. More than three quarters of fatal attacks against the FCSE were carried out in these areas, showing that terrorism in the Basque Country was indeed a fundamentally urban phenomenon between 1982 and 1994.