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¡Basta Ya! The Basque Civic Movement and Nonviolent Resistance to ETA's Terrorism

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact that the Basque civic movement had in the civil resistance against the armed separatist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA). The 'civic' or 'constitutionalist' movement, whose best-known representative was the social movement organization *¡Basta Ya!*, emerged to demand the protection of Basque citizens' human and political rights, which were routinely abused by ETA and their sympathisers. The movement impacted on the cycle of contention against terrorism through the diffusion of democratic norms and anti-ETA political narratives, by sustaining civil resistance against terrorism while enduring persecution by their militants and sympathisers and by protecting the social fabric through the channelling of non-nationalist grievances into collective action that was pro-democratic and nonviolent. The case highlights the crucial parallels that exist between civil resistance to authoritarian regimes and non-state groups and the crucial role that civil society actors can play in the social delegitimisation of terrorist organisations.

Keywords

civil resistance – nonviolence – terrorism – ETA – Basque Country – ¡Basta Ya!

Introduction

The rapid growth in number of nonviolent mass movements across the world has attracted significant media attention (Wright 2019) and a flourishing scholarly literature (Schock 2005; Roberts and Garton Ash 2009; Chenoweth and

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Stephan 2011; Bartkowski 2013). This scholarship on civil resistance has had a tendency to feature contexts where a non-democratic regime is the oppressor and the oppressed are civilians who struggle non-violently against government forces. However, more recently, an emerging literature has started examining other expressions of resistance in response to non-state violence. In this vein, recent work has considered civilian resistance in contexts of insurgencies and civil wars (Kaplan 2017; Hallward, Masullo and Mouly 2017; Mouly and Hernández Delgado 2019; Avant et al. 2019, Masullo 2021), communal wars (Krause 2018), rebel governance (Arjona, Kasfir and Mampilly 2015; Arjona 2016), organised crime (Beyerle 2014; Dorff and Maves Braithwaite 2018; Moncada 2021) or large landowners' violent coercion in land struggles (Schock 2015).

This paper contributes to this growing body of work by looking at resistance against a terrorist organisation, a non-state political armed actor that targets civilians and does not hold territory. More specifically, it studies the impact that mobilisation by the local civic movement from the Spanish region of Basque Country had on civil resistance against the armed separatist group *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA) (Basque Homeland and Freedom). In its four decades of 'armed struggle', ETA carried out about 3,600 terrorist attacks that resulted in more than 800 deaths and 2,300 injured before the group announced a 'definite cessation of armed activities' in 2011 (Carmena *et al.* 2013).

The study examines specifically the historical context that gave birth in the late 1990s to an opposition movement that not only protested against violence but also promoted a particular political response to terrorism. This so-called civic movement, whose best-known representative was the social movement organisation *¡Basta Ya!* (Enough is enough!), rose to demand the protection of Basque citizens' human and political rights. Built on the existing mobilising structures inherited from the Basque peace movement, their activism was controversial for its partisanship: it was a new form of contentious politics that not only mobilised against ETA but also the excesses of Basque nationalism, which they described as the root cause of the conflict.

Civic movement leaders saw political unity against terrorism as a fundamental instrument for the protection of citizens' democratic rights, which were routinely abused by ETA and their sympathisers. They regarded the Basque Statute of Autonomy and the Spanish Constitution as the ultimate guarantors of democratic freedoms in the region and, in consequence, they coined the term 'constitutionalism' to refer to the movement's political project. By developing new frames founded on the complete rejection of terrorism by any actor (state or non-state) and the support of liberal democracy, tolerance, the rule of law and political freedoms, the new civic movement worked actively as norm entrepreneurs to socialise Basque citizens into these fundamental political values and to advance in the social delegitimisation of terrorism.

To analyse how the civic movement contributed to the anti-ETA cycle of contention,[1] empirical evidence was gathered through media reports and scholarly literature and, especially, the more than 40 semi-structured interviews carried out with activists and leaders of civic groups, peace organisations, victims' associations and other civil society actors in four visits to the field between 2016 and 2018. These interviews served to identify salient organisational factors in their activism, determine how the political opportunity structure[2] affected collective action, examine the ties to relevant local actors (the political class, media) and more. This was complemented with the analysis of internal documents and text, audio and video material (i.e. videos, banners, leaflets, pamphlets, magazines, etc.) retrieved from official archives, organisations' websites and interviewees' own personal records.[3] These documents are crucial to investigate the discursive and narrative dimensions of the civic movement's activism. Finally, survey data was used to trace trends in public perceptions about ETA and social views on the legitimacy of political violence.

The paper is divided into three main parts: first, a historical background section to contextualise the analysis followed by an overview of the civic movement's origins and discourse and then an exploration of the ¡Basta Ya! civil resistance campaign. It concludes with an assessment of the contribution that the civic movement made to ETA's delegitimisation and what the findings from this case tell us about the role civil society actors can play in the management and resolution of conflicts.

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[1] Defined as: 'a phase of heightened conflict across the social system, with rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors, a rapid pace of innovation in the forms of contention employed, the creation of new or transformed collective action frames, a combination of organized and unorganized participation, and sequences of intensified information flow and interaction' between challengers and opponents (Tarrow 2011, 199).

[2] Understood in the traditional sense of the factors in the political environment external to the movement that open up opportunities of success; such as changes in the political alignment of the polity, new avenues for access, the availability of allies or existence of splits in the opponent's camp (Tarrow 2011, 165).

[3] I am thankful to the participants in the project who very generously shared their documents and other material and to the staff at the Lazkaoko Beneditarren Fundazioa, Archivo del Centro Memorial de Victimas del Terrorismo, Centro Documental Fundación Fernando Buesa and Euskadiko Artxibo Historikoa.

Historical Context

The Basque civic movement has its roots in the process of social and political delegitimisation of terrorism that took place in Basque Country during the 1980s. These delegitimisation efforts were directed against all forms of political violence but especially the main perpetrator *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA).[4] The separatist armed group was born during the Franco dictatorship but 95 per cent of its killings were carried out following the end of the authoritarian regime (López Romo 2014, 39). Indeed, its 'armed struggle' reached a peak during the 1976–1982 transition period from the dictatorship to a democratic system (Domínguez 1998).

As the new democracy was solidifying, the provision by the new Spanish democratic state of a high degree of self-government to the Basque Autonomous Community had deep political effects. The implementation of devolution through a Statute of Autonomy in the first half of the decade, a process approved by Basque political parties and the population at large, won over support from moderate nationalism and its political representative, the Christian-democrat PNV (Basque Nationalist Party). It also meant that the revolutionary project by ETA's political movement, the MLNV (Basque National Liberation Movement) – also described as the *Izquierda Abertzale* (the Basque Patriotic Left) – started to lose its shine. As we know from the literature on rebel governance, satisfaction with local institutions shape civilians' responses to armed actors' demands for radical change: if institutions are seen as legitimate and effective, there will be a strong preference for preserving the status quo (Arjona 2015, 186).

The first serious attempt within civil society to delegitimate terrorism begins in the mid-1980s when we see the emergence of a cycle of contention led by a Basque peace movement. The year 1986 marked a watershed as a coalition of small pacifist groups from local churches allied to create *Coordinadora Gesto por la Paz* (A Gesture for Peace). This made *Gesto por la Paz* the main peace organisation in the region. Very quickly, from very humble beginnings,

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[4] During the transition to Spanish democracy, far right supporters of the dictatorship also carried terrorist acts in the region while police forces – still unpurged from Francoist elements and practices – were guilty of frequent and serious abuses during this period (Clark 1984; Sullivan 1988; Carmena *et al.* 2013; Fusi 2017). A state-supported death squad, the *Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación* (GAL) (Antiterrorist Liberation Groups), was still active in the French Basque Country in the mid-1980s, murdering 27 people (Miralles and Arques 1989; Baeza 1996; Morán Blanco 1997). Once the GAL murders stopped in 1987, ETA became the region's sole remaining terrorist organisation until its last killing in 2011 and final dissolution in 2018.

Gesto started to attract a large audience by engaging in classical mobilisation through marches and symbolic acts. Their *gestos* or 'gestures', small silent rallies organised after every political murder, started to proliferate across the Basque Country. At their peak in the 1990s, there were more than 160 Gesto por la Paz local groups scattered across the region. Each of these groups would organise their separate *gestos* and their own acts: marches, sit-ins, human chains, massive banners over bridges and public places and more. Their initiatives became a frequent feature in the landscape of the region (Funes 1998a, 1998b; Gómez Moral 2013; Bilbao, Merino and Sáez de la Fuente 2013; Moreno Bibiloni 2017; Gago Antón 2017; Argomaniz 2019).

A key aspect of these protests is that they occupied public spaces that were in the past controlled by the MLNV for their own political expression. In other words, peace groups started to challenge the use of the street as a mechanism for social control and contestation by members of the Izquierda Abertzale (the *abertzales*). Through their activism, they pushed back against the ominous 'spiral of silence' that was hanging over Basque society where ETA critics engaged in self-censorship due to fear for their own safety or the belief that opposition to radical nationalism was not a popular position (Linz 1986; Muñoz Alonso 1988; Funes 1998a; Domínguez 2003; Castells 2017a, 2017b; Llera and Leonisio 2017). The sociologist Maria Jesus Funes (1998a, 1998b) has described this process of normative change through popular activism as '*la salida del silencio*' (exiting the spiral of silence). Through their repertoire of contention, these actors signalled to the rest of society that the rejection of ETA was in fact the consensus view.[5]

In parallel, the signing on January 12, 1988 of the *Ajuria Enea* Pact represented a landmark in the political delegitimisation of terrorism.[6] Previous to this agreement, democratic forces were divided on the question of ETA. Whereas non-nationalist parties, such as the leftist Basque Socialist Party (PSE), saw terrorism as a criminal matter, moderate nationalists contended that ETA's violence was the consequence of a 'Basque political conflict' that could only be resolved through negotiations and political concessions from the state. But the increasingly indiscriminate character of ETA's violence (car bombs began to be used by the group around this time) brought the Basque political class together. So, following a brief period of very intense negotiations, the Ajuria Enea Pact was signed by all nationalist and non-nationalist parties represented in the Basque parliament – with the exception of the *abertzale* party *Herri Batasuna* (HB, 'Popular Unity'). The agreement called for the further development of devolution and, crucially, for the 'eradication of terrorism' as a fundamental common goal of all 'democratic institutions.' In time described as ETA's 'political defeat' (Aizpeolea 2013), Ajuria Enea forged a new political unity amongst democratic political parties. Reinforced by a decade of transversal PNV-PSE coalition governments, it imposed a *cordon sanitaire* around ETA's radical nationalist movement. ETA and the MLNV had become politically marginalised.

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[5] In 1989, 3 per cent of Basques 'totally supported' ETA, 5 per cent justified its violence, 9 per cent agreed with its goals but not the methods, 15 per cent supported them in the past but no longer, 3 per cent were indifferent, 4 per cent were afraid of the organisation and 45 per cent 'totally rejected' the group. Source: Euskobarometro series temporales (https://www.ehu.eus/es/web/euskobarometro/serieak).

[6] Ajuria Enea is the name of the Basque president's official residence.

Political unity against terrorism and peace movement's mobilisation, supported by the crucial contribution from other civil society actors (i.e. journalists, intellectuals, and more), propelled the marginalisation of ETA and its political movement. A virtuous cycle materialised as social and political delegitimisation reinforced each other. In fact, they were intertwined: while peace organisations mobilised popular support for the Ajuria Enea pact, Basque political parties formally supported (and their members participated) in some of the most significant pacifist actions. The changes in the political opportunity structure had facilitated the onset of the cycle of contention: the provision of a high degree of autonomy to the Basque Country had helped to address nationalist grievances and made ETA's ideological project unpopular, while the cross-party unity against the violence that followed encouraged citizen participation in collective action.

The cycle reached its climax on 10 July 1997 with the kidnapping of Miguel Ángel Blanco. Blanco was an unknown 29-year-old local councillor from the small Basque industrial town of Ermua that had recently joined the Spanish conservative People's Party (PP). ETA used his abduction as a bargaining chip, setting a 48-hour ultimatum for the government to carry out a full transfer of all their prisoners to Basque prisons. The young councillor's desperate situation prompted an eruption of popular anger against the militants but also a wave of empathy and solidarity: many thousands of Basques identified with the unassuming, ordinary working-class background of the victim and his family (Iglesias 1997; De Pablo and Mees 2005; Gómez Moral 2013). Despite two days of huge popular mobilisation, once the ultimatum expired Miguel Ángel Blanco was killed by his abductors.

His death led to largest demonstrations ever witnessed in the history of Spanish democracy. On July 14th and 15th more than 5 million people all over Spain took to the streets. On both these days 178,000 Basques joined these protests, 17,600 of them in Ermua. Previously, on 12 July 1997, the day the ultimatum expired, Gesto por la Paz and the Ajuria Enea parties had organised in the Basque city of Bilbao the largest demonstration ever recorded in Basque Country, bringing together half a million people (Iglesias 1997; Adell Argilés 2000).[7]

Clearly the murder had led to a boomerang effect: the perpetrators' demands were rejected, and they failed both to intimidate the Basque's political class, who responded to ETA in their harshest terms yet, and to coerce civil opposition, which instead reached record-breaking figures. Blanco's killing is an example of what the civil resistance literature has described as 'backfire', 'political jiujitsu' or 'paradox of repression' (Zunes, Asher and Kurtz 1999; Martin, Varney and Vickers 2001; Hess and Martin 2006; Martin 2007; Sharp 2013; Sutton, Butcher and Svensson 2014; Kurtz and Smithey 2018; Mouly and Hernández Delgado 2019). All these refer to a process when a movement's adversaries use coercive power against their opponents and this undercuts the perpetrators' legitimacy and standing among the population, increases sympathy for the protesters and, as a result, fuels resistance. In short, the assassination of civilians was turning public opinion even further against ETA and mobilising popular support in response.

It should be noted that Blanco's killing was just a single episode in an ongoing MLNV's campaign of blanket repression. To reverse their loss of social control, the MLNV had introduced in the mid-1990s the *Oldartzen* ('to charge') strategy, a campaign to terrorise domestic opposition to radical nationalism. Indeed, the strategy became known as the *socialización del sufrimiento* due to *abertzale* politicians' own description of this strategic shift: it was a way to 'socialise the suffering', to extend to the broader society, who they claimed was 'unconcerned' or 'indifferent' to the situation of ETA's members and their social environment, the same 'suffering' than the *abertzales* were 'experiencing' (Domínguez 2003, 218).[8]

The strategy required redirecting ETA's attacks against civilians and activating a large network of militants from the base of the movement, especially those from the youth group *Jarrai* (To persevere) and the pro-prisoners release organisation *Gestoras Pro-Amnistía* (Pro-Amnesty Committees). They would be tasked with amplifying and extending the violence to a broad set of targets from civil society: politicians, local councillors, civil servants, public officials, judges and lawyers, journalists, intellectuals, academics and teachers, civil society leaders and more.

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[7] Remarkably this represented a quarter of the full population of Basque Country in 1997 (about 2.1 million).

[8] Just one illustrative example of this position comes from HB politician Joxe Mari Olarra, who declared in 1995: 'So far, only we have suffered but they are now seeing that the suffering has begun to be shared' (López Romo 2014 88).

This asphyxiating campaign of intimidation was based on the deployment of an array of techniques of violence. As ETA focused on Basque politicians as targets for assassination and the extortion of local businessmen, MLNV militants were tasked with organising sabotage campaigns against public and private property; mass riots and violent demonstrations involving barricades and the throwing of stone and molotov cocktails to police and bystanders; and, crucially, protracted campaigns of harassment of political opponents (graffiti threats, abuse, physical assaults, and more). Combined, these tactics served to shore up a series of strategic objectives for the movement: to silence and terrorise local opposition, strengthen control of everyday life and public spaces, convey an impression of power, defy the authorities, and raise the economic costs of the 'conflict'.

The *abertzale* spread of violence to all levels of society proved highly effective in intimidating wider society and supressing the political work and visibility of non-nationalist parties in some parts of the region. Furthermore, the political unity that had pushed the *abertzale* radical nationalist movement to the margins of the system (to become, in the words of Kepa Aulestia, 'a sub-culture of violence') collapsed in 1998. The end of Ajuria Enea was the result of a strategic shift by the PNV party leadership, who was concerned that the massive anti-ETA mobilisations following Blanco's murder would turn against Basque nationalism as a whole and felt anxious about the growing electoral strength of Spanish conservatism in the region (represented by the PP). So, in summer 1998, the PNV – and the smaller social-democratic nationalist party Basque Solidarity (EA) – agreed to ETA's secret offer of a political alliance: the organisation would announce a truce in exchange of a PNV-EA-Batasuna nationalist *entente* that would campaign for independence. To make this decision official, on 12 September 1998 the *Lizarra* Pact was signed, a formal agreement between the three political parties and other nationalist actors (i.e. small political parties, trade unions, a couple of peace groups). Inspired by the Northern Ireland peace process, the Lizarra Pact represented in practice the adoption of the *abertzale* political programme of independence by the rest of Basque nationalism to persuade ETA to leave violence behind.

The alliance between moderate and radical nationalism inaugurated by Lizarra gave birth to a new period of high political polarisation. The previous division between democratic parties and ETA's radical movement was transformed into two nationalist vs non-nationalist opposing camps. With the regional government in the hands of PNV politician Juan José Ibarretxe, non-nationalist political representatives found themselves between Scylla and Charybdis. On the one hand, although ETA declared a ceasefire that lasted 14 months, the MLNV's violent persecution never stopped in this time span

– in fact it had become increasingly asphyxiating – and, following the end of the ceasefire in December 1999, it intensified as ETA restarted its campaign of assassinations of non-nationalist politicians at every level (including local councillors in small towns).

On the other hand, non-nationalist complaints about Basque nationalist government's inaction and passivity towards the *abertzale* campaign of persecution were mostly met with indifference by the PNV leadership (Domínguez 2003; Calleja 2003b; Rivera 2019). Tension between the two camps reached its climax with the murder of socialist leader Fernando Buesa in February 2000 when three separate demonstrations marched separately in Vitoria-Gasteiz: one organised to protest the murder, a PNV rally in support of Basque president Ibarretxe and a more modest one by Gesto por la Paz calling for political unity – without success (Pérez 2007).

These divisions had a profound negative impact on the political delegitimisation of violence. Cross-party consensus on defeating terrorism, which had been so important to sustain the pacifist cycle of contention against ETA, was now gone; replaced by corrosive polarisation. As the political delegitimisation of ETA took a step back, anxiety about *abertzale* violence permeated Basque society (Gesto por la Paz 2000; Pérez 2005). Indeed, 65 per cent of Basques in 1998 and 70 per cent in 2001 reported being 'scared to actively participate in politics.' The same percentage (70 per cent) acknowledged that there was a widespread 'climate of fear' in society (Llera and Leonisio 2017, 47). From this challenging environment, a new movement would emerge to sustain civil resistance to ETA's terrorism.

The Origins of the Civic Movement

These political splits and the helplessness of non-nationalists facing MLNV violence are behind the rise of a new form of social contestation against ETA: the 'constitutionalist' or 'civic' movement. What separated them from Basque pacifism was the refusal to protest in silence[9] against violence on ethical and moral grounds, instead doing so vocally and forcefully while developing a political critique of the ideology of nationalism.

Another relevant aspect that distinguishes the civic movement from the peace activism that preceded them is the crucial role played by public intellectuals. Indeed, the embryo of the civic movement, the *Foro Ermua*, began as an initiative by a small group of professors from the Basque Public University

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[9] The pacifist *gestos* were silent rallies.

(UPV/EHU). Their inspiration was the overwhelming social response to Miguel Ángel Blanco's murder, the so-called *Espíritu de Ermua* (the 'Ermua spirit'). For these intellectuals, clamouring for peace was not enough: since terrorism was fundamentally a political problem, it required a strong political discourse as part of the response. As one interviewee explained:

> basically we believed that [pacifist] action was commendable but very insufficient because they approached the question of terrorism from a moral angle and without addressing the existing political and ideological questions. […] In Basque Country there was a need for a different type of response that would tackle those issues, no? The ideas and not only the events, no? And that is why we created the Foro Ermua.[10]

Their founding manifesto was drafted by a dozen university professors in the aftermath of Blanco's killing but it took 6 months of contacts, preparation and networking before the initiative could be unveiled to the public on 13 February 1998, at a central Bilbao hotel.[11] In this short, 6-point document[12] titled '*Manifiesto por la democracia en Euskadi*' (Manifesto for democracy in Basque Country) they articulated the need for a more vigorous social and political opposition to ETA's terrorism.

The manifesto contended that violence by ETA's political movement was facilitated by a lack of unity and resolve from the Basque political and institutional establishment, who was too willing to compromise with the radicals' demands. Instead, political representatives should reject any form of negotiation with ETA that would result in political concessions since, in a democracy, political projects should be validated by democratically elected representatives and not by the force of arms. Therefore, mainstream parties should refuse any form of collaboration with ETA's political wing, as pledged in the Ajuria Enea Pact, an agreement that was at that point already in crisis.

The Foro Ermua leaders saw the July 1997 mobilisations that followed Blanco's murder as proof that it was possible to combat ETA and their movement on the streets non-violently but vigorously. In their view, this response demonstrated that society was demanding new forms of opposition to what they described as a totalitarian movement that sought to impose through violence a political project (a Basque socialist state) that did not enjoy popular support. And this new form of resistance should not rely on 'testimonial silence' and 'pacifist gestures.' Instead, Basques should speak up to demand democratic rights.

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[10] Interview former Foro Ermua and ¡Basta Ya! member, 15-5-2017.

[11] The manifesto was signed by 300 intellectuals, artists, journalists, writers and public figures. About two thirds were academics from the *Universidad del País Vasco* (Pagazaurtundua 2015, 26).

[12] The full text is available at: https://www.elmundo.es/eta/documentos/foro_ermua.html.

Although the original February 1998 manifesto did not single out democratic nationalist parties in government, their radicalisation and alliance with violent nationalism in Lizarra started to shape the Foro's language, becoming more partisan. Their demands of protection from extremist violence to a passive regional government controlled by PNV and EA grew increasingly outspoken. The criticisms about political concessions to the radicals in return for ceasefires turned more vocal. Eventually, intellectuals from the Foro not only railed against ETA but also the ideology of Basque nationalism, which in their eyes provided ideological cover for the violence and facilitated the collaboration between mainstream politicians and violent radicals (Savater 2001, ¡Basta Ya! Iniciativa Ciudadana 2004, Ezkerra 2007, Martínez Gorriarán 2008). Constitutionalist intellectuals developed over time a broader critique of what they described as '*nacionalismo obligatorio*' ('compulsory nationalism'), a nationalist political project that sought to force – through the regional institutions they controlled – a homogenous and reductive Basque identity on a diverse, complex society (Martínez Gorriarán 2003).

The Foro's *Manifiesto* was the loudest wake up call for civil society and political class since the rise of Gesto and the peace movement (De la Granja 2003, 313). The Foro's arrival represents a watershed moment because it inspired a form of civil resistance that sought to combat ETA's ideology and political project (and not only their methods). Ultimately, the main contribution from this intellectual platform was the elaboration of a coherent discourse and a set of political narratives that were adopted and developed by other actors that joined them in what would soon be described as the civic movement (Martínez Gorriarán 2008, 110).

Between 1998 and 2001, the upward phase of the cycle of contention, the new movement would grow to encompass intellectual platforms, activist groups and victims' organisations. All these actors were united by political narratives, mutual solidarity, a common base of support and, sometimes, even shared leadership. Prominent examples are the Basque victims' association COVITE, the small Catholic church group *Foro El Salvador,* think-tanks such as *Fundación para la Libertad* (Foundation for Liberty) and political foundations established in memory of well-known ETA victims such as *Fundación Miguel Ángel Blanco*, *Fundación Gregorio Ordoñez*, *Fundación José Luis López de la Calle* or *Fundación Fernando Buesa.*

Furthermore, the movement's principles influenced a good number of Basque individual politicians from the non-nationalist PP and PSE, who gravitated towards the civic movement, adopted their interpretive frames and started lobbying their parties to create their own constitutionalist front. As the two parties adopted the 'constitutionalist' moniker, the media began to use it as shorthand to refer to the Basque political parties that opposed the nationalist *entente*.

¡Basta Ya!: the Constitutionalist Movement and the Civil Resistance Against ETA

No other organisation from the civic movement could match the visibility and public footprint of ¡Basta Ya! (Enough is Enough!), an activist group born with the goal of mobilising Basque citizens against ETA. Established in 1999 in Donostia-San Sebastián, it put into action the Foro Ermua constitutionalist discourse through public activism: '[Foro Ermua] is passive, very passive. And ¡Basta Ya! is much more dynamic, more activist. […] It became a mean of expressing the anguish and the necessity to sustain a resistance'.[13]

As della Porta and Diani (2006, 115) remind us, social networks are great facilitators of collective action: participants join movements thanks to previous social links, forge new ones as members and these new-found links shape the development of other collective actors. Indeed, collective action is generally built on the foundations set by pre-existing social networks (Oberschall 1973, Tilly 1978, McAdam 1986). This is clearly the case here: although most of the original precursors came from the Foro, ¡Basta Ya! was built on existing connections developed within the constitutionalist movement and pacifist groups in the region of Gipuzkoa. Thurber (2021, 28) has described how social ties 'shape a challenger organizations' abilities and willingness to engage in civil resistance'. In this respect, organisations that are able to integrate members with ties to diverse actors are better prepared to initiate a civil resistance campaign. Accordingly, ¡Basta Ya! benefitted greatly from existing interpersonal connections linking the core of university professors and Foro Ermua veterans to other social and political actors in the region.

A connection that proved decisive was with veteran activists from the peace organisation *Denon Artean* (All Together) who had become dissatisfied with the pacifist silent demonstrations and the reactive Gesto's model of mobilisation: they did not want to wait until ETA killed someone to protest.[14] As explained by a former Denon Artean member: 'There was a social frustration

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[13] Interview former ¡Basta Ya! member, 21-7-2016.

[14] Interviews with former Denon Artean and ¡Basta Ya! members: 15-5-2017, 23-5-2017, 26-5-2017, 30-6-2017.

[with radical nationalism] so the formation of ¡Basta Ya! is related to this sense of frustration. We couldn't take this any longer. Silence was not enough.'[15] Their long activist experience became a huge asset for the new group. Moreover, due partly to the fact that some of these activists were themselves victims of terrorism, victims' solidarity became a key priority and fundamental guiding principle for ¡Basta Ya![16]

Another visible cluster were Basque politicians from PSE and PP who agreed with the constitutionalist principles and thought necessary a more vigorous social opposition to the radical turn by Basque nationalism.[17] Finally, an important contribution was made by communists and socialists with experience in the fight against Francoism and by former *etarras* (ETA members) from the 1970s who knew ETA from the inside, so were not blinded by a glorified image of the organisation, and who had first become dissidents and then prominent critics of the armed group.[18] Similarly, the base of the organisation was mainly non-nationalist, and professional backgrounds were common: trade unionists, liberal professions, civil servants, teachers, students and other anonymous citizens (Pagazaurtundua 2015 29).

As commonly seen in other civil resistance contexts (Beyerle 2014; Krause 2018; Hallward, Masullo and Mouly 2017; Mouly and Hernández Delgado 2019; Avant et al. 2019), ¡Basta Ya! was the opposite of a formal, hierarchical organisation. Its founders sought the most minimalist structure possible[19] and the group operated under limited resources: a small office, a single phone line, an amateur website, and an electronic address. It had no paid staff, only volunteers, and no complex hierarchy, simply a small committee made up of about twenty people working informally, whose leadership was 'basically intellectual and moral' (Martinez Gorriarán 2008 131).[20] The lack of a formal membership structure was not only to preserve the agility and dynamism of the group ('we wanted ¡Basta Ya! to only exist as an organisation when we were on the street demonstrating')[21] but also due to security considerations: anonymity was necessary to protect activists and donors from *abertzale* retaliation.

A benefit from having a light structure is that the group needed only limited funds to operate. Because it was not a legal entity, they could not apply for public subsidies, so ¡Basta Ya! was financed through donations and contributions by sympathisers. Its greatest international recognition, the awarding by the European Parliament of the prestigious Sakharov Freedom of Thought Prize in the year 2000 for their work in the defence of human rights, represented a welcomed injection of money that paid for their activities ′for a long time.’[22] It also provided the organization with an international profile that was sustained by their press conferences abroad; contacts with the UN, the European Parliament and international human right organisations; and their reports in English to raise awareness about ETA’s terrorism and campaigns of repression. A ‘name and shame’ approach that is often followed by those community actors affected by internal armed conflict who seek to diminish the reputation of armed groups abroad (Kaplan 2017).

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[15] Interview with former Denon Artean and ¡Basta Ya! member: 23-5-2017.
[16] ¡Basta Ya! official bulletin *Hasta Aquí*, issue 1, Sept-Oct 2001.
[17] Interviews former ¡Basta Ya! members: 17-5-2017, 26-5-2017, 14-7-2017.
[18] Interviews former constitutionalists: 21-7-2016, 27-7-2016, 20-6-2018.
[19] Interviews former ¡Basta Ya! members: 15-5-2017, 19-5-2017, 23-5-2017, 24-5-2017.
[20] Interview former ¡Basta Ya! members: 19-5-2017, 24-5-2017.
[21] Interview former ¡Basta Ya! member: 24-5-2017.

¡Basta Ya! Mass Mobilisation

Yet what made ¡Basta Ya! significant was their activism on the streets and the fact that their ‘repertoire of contention’ represented a departure from traditional pacifism. It was a more proactive form of mobilisation where, instead of waiting for a killing to take place to come out to the streets, they would take the initiative with demonstrations and smaller symbolic acts at the time of their choosing. The opportunity to plan strategically and their understanding of the performative dimension of mobilisation explains why ¡Basta Ya! was behind some of the most spectacular examples of activism of the period. Importantly, their work was also controversial for their partisanship. Their criticism of nationalism (in contrast to Gesto’s non-partisan approach) fueled nationalist politicians’ contempt, Basque nationalist press scorn and *abertzale* aggression (Savater 2001; Beobide Ezpeleta 2003,2005; Pagazaurtundua 2015).

Their most memorable activities, the mass demonstrations between 2000 and 2003, came early in the life of the group. Their first rally on 19 February 2000 was challenging in several ways. Not only was it the first major event organized by the group, but it also became the first-ever march against ETA accused of being an ‘anti-nationalist plot’ by the Basque government (Juaristi 2007). Regardless, under the pouring rain, 10,000 people marched in Donostia-San Sebastian under heavy protection from the Basque police (*Ertzaintza*). Ertzaintza presence was required to separate the marchers from the hostile harassment by *abertzale* counterdemonstrators. It still proved insufficient, however, as the act was marred by numerous incidents and clashes between protestors and counterdemonstrators (Savater 2001 216; Pérez 2007 184; Martínez Gorriarán 2008 125).

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[22] The prize was about 48,000 € (Martínez Gorriarán 2008, 138).

Still, the group saw it as a success and it became a useful rehearsal for their next large rally that would take place half a year later, on 23 September 2000. It went ahead under a slogan that encapsulated the traditional rallying call of the constitutionalist movement: 'For the right to life and [political] freedoms, let's defend what unites us: The Statute [of Autonomy] and the Constitution.' (Savater 2001, 21; Martínez Gorriarán 2003, 13). In this occasion, ¡Basta Ya! leaders underestimated the huge desire within the non-nationalist community to protest since as many as 100,000 people turned up. It was the largest rally ever recorded in Donostia-San Sebastián, a city of just 180,000 inhabitants (Gastaminza 2000). This represented a huge accomplishment for the young organisation and one matched two years later, as approximately the same number of people marched on October 19th behind the banner 'Yes to the Constitution and Statute of Autonomy. No to compulsory nationalism' (Martínez Gorriarán 2003 13, 2008 134, 140; Castells 2017a 374). Their last mass demonstration took place in December 2003, also attracting a similar crowd, and organised to oppose not only ETA but also president Ibarretxe's unilateral proposal to implement radical changes on the Statute of Autonomy.[23]

Through their extraordinary size, these demonstrations proved that the movement was a force to be reckoned with, and that the non-nationalist side of society had found a political voice. It was now willing to throw off the shackles of conformity and silence that had, for years, stifled opposition to controversial nationalist policies. Furthermore, their symbolic value was remarkable: firstly, they took place in Donostia-San Sebastián, the Basque city hit hardest by terrorism, which meant that individual protesters had to overcome the fears of *abertzale* retaliation. Secondly, few flags were carried by demonstrators (the organisers sought instead a colourful and joyful display of handmade signs and large balloons – a sign of the irreverence that often characterised their activism). Yet those few flags present were both Basque and, crucially, Spanish; a hitherto stigmatised symbol in Basque Country that was tarnished by association with old Francoist Spanish nationalism. The presence of Basque and Spanish flags was an exercise of tolerance and a signal that both identities could peacefully coexist in the region under a democratic system.

At the same time, as Castells (2017a, 374) highlights, there was a key differentiation between these instances of mobilisation and those that came before. The slogans in anti-violence demonstrations were changing: whilst previously the leitmotivs were rather cautious and allegorical (in the mass protest against Blanco's murder it was 'Peace now and forever'), they are now much more forceful. And the 'target of claims' (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly

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[23] See: https://www.bastaya2020.info/historia.

2001) is now made explicit: the simple, unmistakable 'ETA No' becomes the motto *du jour*. At the same time, other principles than peace and nonviolence, such as 'Liberty' are brought to the forefront ('For liberty, ETA No') to make visible the absence of political freedoms for constitutionalists. The widespread use of the term 'Liberty' – and 'Enough is Enough' – represents what Castells (2017a) describes as the 'conquest of the language' that had started with Ajuria Enea: exposing clearly and without doubts who is the challengers' adversary. Notably, constitutionalist discourse also shaped the slogans of the many other protests organised by a diversity of political actors[24] in the aftermath of the ETA murders that followed the end of the 1999 ceasefire.

A factor that strengthened constitutionalist mobilisation was what Thurber (2021, 31) has described as 'grassroots' social ties. Strong grassroots ties served for the ¡Basta Ya! core to link together and mobilise separate social groups that shared a profound dissatisfaction with the political alliance between mainstream and violent nationalism. But grassroot ties are not only fundamental to initiate a campaign but also to spread and sustain it. They help overcome barriers to collective action by generating personal rewards for the individual, they serve as channels to share grievances, ideas and calls for mobilisation and they bring together different skillsets that help to diversify the tactics (Ibid, 32–34). Once mass mobilisation was achieved with the first demonstration, snowball effects helped to encourage participation in following mass events, especially because large numbers offered anonymity and therefore protection from *abertzale* repression, which was harder to guarantee in smaller actions.

A New Repertoire of Contention

¡Basta Ya! activism surged in the short 2000–2003 period before experiencing a steep decline. During these four years of activity, it is their demonstrations that made the major headlines. However, the group's 'bread and butter' was their smaller rallies and one-off activities, a majority taking place in Donostia-San Sebastián (Martínez Gorriarán 2003 13).

For instance, during 2001 and 2002, ¡Basta Ya! held monthly rallies in the three Basque regional capitals: Bilbao, Donostia-San Sebastián and Vitoria-Gasteiz. These served as ¡Basta Ya!'s own political rituals characterised by chants of 'liberty!', rounds of applause and a chorus of '¡ETA NO!' (Pagazaurtundua 2015, 31). Likewise, these rallies had to bear the insults, death threats and sabotage attempts from ETA sympathisers, as activists soon required Ertzaintza protection (Calleja 2001). It is instructive that constitutionalists responded to the counterdemonstrators not with a stoic pacifist silence but with their own chants and 'forceful language' (Martínez Gorriarán 2008, 138).

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[24] Political parties, the Basque and the Navarrese government, local authorities, national and regional federations of local councils and civil society organisations such as Gesto por la Paz.

Furthermore, unlike the pacifists, the *resistentes* targeted areas with a strong MLNV presence, including opposite the local offices of ETA's political wing, Batasuna (Unity). In these actions, they signaled their complicity with ETA and *abertzale* violence. This is illustrated by a couple of examples: in June 2002 the socialist councillor in the Gipuzkoan town of Andoain José Luis Vela found copies of their home keys in their own letter box, a gangster-like *abertzale* threat. In response, ¡Basta Ya! organised a rally opposite a Batasuna party office where they dropped hundreds copies of old keys.[25] In another instance, on 15 September 2000, constitutionalist demonstrators blocked with their own march the route of an *abertzale* protest that was taking place the same day in Donostia-San Sebastián. The stand-off lasted for four long hours until the *abertzale* demonstrators were dispersed.[26] Therefore, ¡Basta Ya! introduced a more confrontational approach that would meet a common goal of nonviolent civil action: to delineate more clearly the groups in conflict and to stimulate those who were previously uncommitted to take sides (Sharp 2013, 83).

Some of the ¡Basta Ya! actions had a strong performative dimension to communicate the existence of an unjust and intolerable situation. In other words, they followed a 'logic of bearing witness' to injustice (della Porta and Diani 2006, 176–177). The best example is a March 2001 protest at the President of the Basque Government's official residence in Vitoria-Gasteiz where fifty activists covered their heads with an orange hood reminiscent of the uniforms worn by death row inmates in the US. Slowly and silently, walking in circle for thirty minutes, they held signs with the names of all those collectives (local councilors, journalists, judges and more) under threat (El Mundo 2001). It was a dramatic protest against the impunity enjoyed by *abertzale* persecution and the nationalist Basque government reluctance to see the *socialización del sufrimiento* for what it was: a highly organised form of mass coercion.

A similar 'logic of bearing witness' permeated an emotional rally organised to protest ETAs murder of ¡Basta Ya! activist Joseba Pagazaurtundua in February 2003 when 3,000 ¡Basta Ya! activists gathered under heavy rain at the

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[25] 'Concentración frente a Batasuna', ¡Basta Ya! internal document, 3 July 2002 and ¡Basta Ya! magazine *Hasta Aquí* (Thus Far) issue 6, Jul-Aug 2002, pp 12–13.

[26] Interview former ¡Basta Ya! members 30-6-2017.

Basque Government President's office. The slogan: 'ETA Kills – Basque government culprit'.[27] ¡Basta Ya! leader, the scholar and public intellectual Fernando Savater, remarked in his speech how Pagazaurtundua, a Basque city police officer, had been transferred by the Basque interior ministry against his wishes to Andoain, a Gipuzkoan town with heavy MLNV presence, despite the fact that he was an ETA target due to his activism. There he suffered a persistent harassment campaign and anonymous death threats before his killing (Calleja 2003a, 25). This rally represented the first time that the regional authorities had been accused not only of dereliction of duty but also of complicity with terrorists (Martínez Gorriarán 2008, 144). These examples not only show how the 'logic of bearing witness' shaped some of the most memorable constitutionalist acts but also reveal the crucial fact that mobilising against ETA had become high risk collective action.

High Risk Collective Action

¡Basta Ya! and other constitutionalist activists carried out their work under an overwhelming campaign of persecution, harassment and violence. At a time when the *socialización del sufrimiento* was in full swing, the leaders of activist groups, intellectuals and politicians who raised their voice against ETA and their accomplices became priority targets for the MLNV.

Persecution affected members of the movement to varying degrees. At the lowest level, political engagement could result in being ostracised by some in their social network, sometimes due to ideological differences but, far more often, for fear of becoming 'collateral victims' of violence. In more serious cases, this could lead to *violencia de persecución* ('violence of persecution'): long-term hate campaigns of harassment against individual critics carried out by the *abertzales* (Flor 1998; Gesto por la Paz 2000; Pérez 2005). Relentless persecution by ETA sympathisers resulted in some activists losing their jobs, having their professional career frustrated or being forced to shut down their business and leave the Basque Country.[28]

Personal costs for activists could be very serious. Prominent members of the organisations in the civic moment received death threats, found their name in ETA's hit lists, and were, as a result, forced into a hugely restrictive police protection programme set up by the authorities. Living under 24/7 bodyguard service, a situation affecting more than 1,500 people in the region, could last for several years and often longer than a decade.[29] Police protection had an immense impact on their personal lives. The mere presence of protection officers served to mark and stigmatise the individual, to separate and detach the person from the rest of society (Hidalgo 2018 81). Their daily lives were deeply affected: social relationships were restricted, family lives upended, daily precautions stuck to, routines avoided, former daily habits eradicated and those parts of the city popular with the *abertzales* became off-limits. An interviewee referred to how instances of discreet individual support could be experienced together with a painful absence of solidarity from colleagues and neighbours:

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[27] See: https://aunamendi.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/en/basta-ya/ar-647/#.

[28] Interview former Foro Ermua and ¡Basta Ya! member: 15-5-2017. Interview former Gesto por la Paz member: 3-7-2017.

> Almost all of us who were more involved with the leadership or showed our face more had bodyguard protection. I lived four years with armed escort(.) [he and other colleagues] were told we could not teach any longer at the university (.) there were people at the university who complained about the escorts being armed(.) and when you saw colleagues at the department, most people looked the other side, people with whom you had a cordial and close relationship suddenly they distanced themselves [even friends or relatives] and you never knew if it was because of fear or ideology.[30]

So, in most cases, aside from the stress and paranoia induced by being mentioned in ETA's kill lists, this type of protection was a punishment in itself: a form of confinement that resulted in isolation, loneliness, seclusion and the destruction of the person's social life (Bezunartea 2013; Azurmendi 2016; Montero 2018). In the worst instances this situation would produce dejection and despair, anxiety and depression (Barbería and Unzueta 2003, 132).

Unsurprisingly, some civic leaders were forced to go on exile to other parts of Spain or abroad due to the suffocating pressure of *violencia de persecución*.[31] What made this campaign of coercion so effective is that death threats were by no means empty: some activists were forced to leave following

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[29] Between 1990 and 2011 there were 1,619 ETA targets under bodyguard protection (Intxaurbe, Ruiz Vieytez and Urrutia 2016: 10). The programme involved about 4,000 armed escorts recruited from the state and Basque police forces and private security companies (25 per cent). These figures excluded around 200 businessmen who employed their own private security (Barbería and Unzueta 2003, 69). Since even non-nationalist councillors from small towns required protection, the list included postmen, gardeners, farmers, housewives, cleaning ladies and similar people from working-class backgrounds.

[30] Interview former Foro Ermua, ¡Basta Ya! and Fundación para la Libertad member: 19-5-2017.

[31] Interviews former constitutionalists: 22-5-2017, 23-5-2017, 4-7-2018.

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ETA's assassination attempts.[32] In other instances, constitutionalists paid their anti-ETA activism with their lives. José Luis López de la Calle (journalist and founder of Foro Ermua and ¡Basta Ya!) was shot several times by terrorists in the Gipuzkoan town of Andoain on May 2000. His murder came three months after the socialist politician and former deputy Basque president Fernando Buesa was killed with a car bomb; he had joined the first demonstration by ¡Basta Ya! three days earlier (Alonso, Domínguez and García Rey 2010). Also in Andoain, Joseba Pagazaurtundua, PSE and ¡Basta Ya! member, had his car and house firebombed, was physically assaulted and received dozens of death threats before being shot three times at a local café on 8 February 2003. These murders had a chilling effect on the resistance movement (El Mundo 2021).

We see here obvious parallels with other forms of coercion that Sharp (2013, 89) described nonviolent resisters would potentially face from an authoritarian regime. Clearly anti-ETA campaigners suffered what he described in his work as 'direct physical violence' and 'severe psychological pressures': verbal abuse, ostracism, threats of various types, making 'examples' of a few, retaliation against family and friends of protesters or other innocent people.

Furthermore, the Basque case also meets Sharp's assumption (Ibid 92) that repression 'will tend to grow as the nonviolent struggle movement becomes stronger and when the earlier repression has not resulted in submission' but the opponents 'means of control and repression' may still 'prove to be insufficient or ineffective in face of massive defiance' (129). Indeed, even the intimidation of ETA's opponents could not stop Basque society's widespread and growing repudiation of the militants and the continuation of anti-ETA demonstrations.

In this regard, a mechanism that helped activists to sustain defiance in the face of violence was a culture of resistance. George Lakey has argued that nonviolent activists 'create narratives that provide meaning for their risks, injuries, suffering, and losses, helping them to transform pain and fear into opportunities for mobilization' (Kurtz and Smithey 2018, 19). In the Basque Country, many older leftist *resistentes* drew on their past clandestine struggle against the Francoist regime as a collective frame for this new fight: 'My father [historic socialist leader Fernando Múgica Herzog, murdered by ETA in 1996] always said that we must resist. Always resist, that was his motto. Resist the Francoist dictatorship, that he couldn't stand, and ETA's own dictatorship. He was a democrat by necessity' (Iglesias 2016). This became what Hidalgo has described as the socialist 'code of resistance': a narrative of a socialist duty to press for democracy and freedoms, first against Franco and then against ETA (Hidalgo 2108, 71 and 109). The code is based around the idea that these hardships were met because they were necessary to defend the political rights of a large section of Basque society. Resistance was required to protect a functioning democratic system that had taken so much effort and so many years to build and was then under threat in the region.

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[32] For two examples see: *El País* (2000) and Calleja (2001).

Another important factor that traditionally helps to sustain high-risk collective action is strong social ties within the core (or 'internal ties') that serve to enhance organisational cohesion under pressure (Oberschall 1973, della Porta and Diani 2006, Staniland 2014, Krause 2018, Moncada 2021, Thurber 2021). The close degree of intimacy and intense interpersonal relationships that were nurtured within the ¡Basta Ya! leadership functioned as a source of solidarity, support and camaraderie that helped the core to persevere with their activism in the face of violence.[33] This confirms the well-known argument by Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (2000, 77) that shared feelings of injustice but also the emotions of mutual affection and friendship can foster solidarity, togetherness and mutual trust within a collective and, in the process, keep the struggle alive.

Discussion: the Decline, Failure and Successes of the Civic Movement

Despite its rapid path to prominence, the constitutionalist surge was short-lived. By the mid-2000s the civic movement was exhausted and in terminal decline. Its most visible representative, ¡Basta Ya! ceased to exist in 2007. Basque constitutionalism exemplifies one of the most common causes for a social movement's demobilisation: changes in the political opportunity structure. More precisely, realignments in political parties' relationships translated into fractious internal dynamics within the leadership of the civic movement.

The catalyst was intense electoral competition between the Spanish PP and PSOE previous to the 2004 general election and then furious PP rejection of the socialist government's decision in 2005 to initiate informal talks with ETA. An important consequence of the severe political tension in Madrid was that it threw into crisis the PP-PSE constitutionalist front in Basque Country. It also began to corrode the civic movement, split between those who wanted to throw their weight behind the PP and those who opposed it. Factionalism at the leadership level derived into a crisis that the movement could not overcome.

Internal tensions were compounded by the fact that the original drivers of constitutionalist mobilisation had started to lose their importance – precisely due to other developments in the political opportunity structure. Following the defeat of the PNV secessionist project, the party leadership was replaced with moderates, and this opened the door to a more positive relationship between mainstream nationalists and socialists. All this occurred as the security situation greatly improved: a weakened ETA entered negotiations with the government in 2005 and agreed a ceasefire in 2006 while the structures for the *violencia de persecución* that the MLNV had activated (i.e. Jarrai, Gestoras Pro Amnistia, and others) were banned and gradually dismantled by the Spanish judiciary. This alleviated the asphyxiating pressure on citizens and made mobilisation far less urgent in the eyes of many. Obviously, it is not possible for activists to maintain high levels of effort, time, commitment and passion *ad infinitum*. And civil resistance requires something to resist against.

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[33] Interviews former constitutionalists: 4-7-2017, 17-5-2017, 22-5-2017, 26-5-2017, 30-6-2017.

This opens up an interesting discussion about 'regime ties' and civil resistance. A well-evidenced claim is that the success of a civil resistance campaign is enhanced when members of its organisational core have direct personal relationships with individuals in government or groups within state institutions because these ties increase the cost to the regime of using repression (Thurber 2021, 36). But what if the adversary is a non-state actor or when it is unclear what the term 'regime' represents? Is it the nationalist Basque government and political elites that lashed out against the constitutionalists? Or the two main Spanish parties that did, initially, support these groups? In principle, this case shows that ties with third party political (i.e. parties) or institutional (i.e. central/regional government) actors are beneficial regardless of the level of government (state or local) because allies provide valuable resources (intangible – visibility, influence – and tangible – material support –). Yet having strong regime ties with third parties can be a double-edged sword: if severe political polarisation creates splits between institutional supporters, divisions can be transferred to the movement itself and have a serious corrosive effect in their internal cohesion.

With the demobilisation of the movement and the changes in the political environment, the 'constitutionalist' ideal that was embraced by the civic movement ceased to exist as a meaningful political label. It died with a movement that lasted no more than a decade: even if a few of the groups that were created during this time still exist, they are not part of a common political project any longer. This is an exemplary case of the fragility of new political identities. Indeed, we should not forget that, as Goodwin and Jasper (2009, 374) maintain, collective identities are 'not "natural" or given once and for all' as they are 'culturally constructed and continually reconstructed.'

So the civic movement shone brightly but briefly. It failed to survive as a long-term movement that would act as a counterweight to nationalism or to propel a change of government in the Basque Country. However, this does not mean that their action was inconsequential. First, the movement achieved their initial organisational objectives by becoming a significant player in Basque politics and, second, it met some of its strategic goals by contributing to the social delegitimisation of ETA.

To explain the movement's success in becoming a prominent political actor, we need to turn first to the changes in the political opportunity structure: when the Foro Ermua released their manifesto, the *abertzale* persecution of their political opponents and broader society was at its peak, which produced fear but also entrenched long-term frustration amongst the population. As claimed by Smithey and Kurtz (2018, 12), militants may 'sometimes benefit from the 'paradox of repression', but their own use of violence can undermine and diminish support within their own communities.' ETA's attempt to repress opposition through the *socialización del sufrimiento* backfired as public views on the Izquierda Abertzale hit rock bottom and opposition to violence crystallised, as shown by the reaction to the assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco. Hence, Blanco's killing itself was a 'transformative event' (Sewell 1996, Shultziner in Smithey and Kurtz 2018), an act of repression that energised mobilisation and became a catalyst for the new form of contention that the civic movement represented.

Given this context, the alliance between mainstream and violent nationalism came as a shock to many, particularly to those politically active who did not identify as nationalists and would eventually constitute the base of the civic movement. Nonetheless, participation relied on constitutionalists encouraging 'cognitive liberation' in this target audience; the cognitive shift where activists perceive both that a situation is unjust and that an opportunity exists to bring about change through protest (McAdam 1982). At the same time, collective action frames need to resonate with the beliefs, values and daily experiences of potential recruits and target audiences to be successful (Benford and Snow 2000). Hence, changes in the external environment facilitated cognitive liberation: constitutionalist criticism of nationalism as an ideology of division and othering rang true at a time when a Basque president, for the first time, seemed far more interested in an alliance with radical nationalists to push for independence than to protect non-nationalists from repression.

An organisational strength of the civic movement was that it was built on the foundation of existing mobilising networks articulated by the peace movement. Many members were former pacifists or had participated in anti-ETA demonstrations and/or pacifist mobilisation – and some continued doing so. However, the civic movement was born to supersede these preceding forms of mobilisation and to energise the cycle of contention. What distinguished them from their pacifist predecessors was, first, a repertoire that was designed to take the initiative (the pacifist *gestos* were always in response to political murders) and the decision to substitute vocal protests with a clear target of claims for the pacifist practice of silence. This is consistent with an ethos that was not based on a moral belief in nonviolence but predicated instead on the defence of fundamental political rights. But perhaps the main point of departure was an unashamedly partisan discourse where the blame for the violence was laid firmly at the door of Basque nationalism, a far cry from Gesto's guiding principle that any democratic projects are valid as long as they are not defended with violence.

A well-known type of opportunity in collective action is the availability of allies (Tarrow 2011, 165). And the civic movement gained significant partners in the non-nationalist parties, who initially promoted the participation of individual politicians and party members in their initiatives. An even more important ally was the national and regional non-nationalist printed media, which began early to report – sympathetically, in general – on their initiatives, communiqués and activities. They were the sounding board that ensured the rapid dissemination of the constitutionalist messages, which served to attract interest, support, and new members.

A diverse internal composition was also a factor: the presence of former peace activists at the core of ¡Basta Ya! provided the necessary experience and skills that intellectuals and political figures lacked and were sorely needed for collective action. Although this meant they could display a varied repertoire of contention, it was the initial demonstrations by ¡Basta Ya! that made the biggest impact: their large size demonstrated that this was a popular movement that had to be taken seriously, which served to attract more support. Consistent with Chenoweth and Stephan's (2011, 39) emphasis on the importance of mass participation in nonviolent resistance (large, diverse campaigns are more likely to succeed than small ones), the movement's public influence rested on its capacity to bring supporters to the street. Therefore, when the levels of violence went down and the incentives for mobilisation diminished, the decline in participation led to a major loss in popular legitimacy and influence.

In sum, backlash from widespread *abertzale* repression and changes in the political alignment explain the formation of the movement. But organisational success was a consequence of activists' skill in constructing successful collective frames, the availability of pre-existing mobilising structures, the presence of allies, the existence of snowball effects, and grassroots social ties producing a diverse activist core and cross-cutting support within the non-nationalist side of society.

In terms of their substantive goals, constitutionalism strengthened the social delegitimisation of terrorism through three mechanisms: by sustaining civil resistance against ETA at a time when *abertzale* repression of society was at its peak and political delegitimisation was faltering; through the diffusion of norms and discourses that challenged ETA's violent narratives; and by channelling non-nationalist grievances in a pro-democratic, non-violent form.

Indeed, a fundamental achievement of the civic movement is that it helped to keep alive the anti-ETA cycle of contention at a time when nationalist parties in government were allied with ETA's political wing and temporarily stopped supporting social mobilisation against the organisation. Constitutionalist collective action sustained the momentum when political delegitimisation of the organisation wavered due to the end of cross-party consensus on the violence: '¡Basta Ya! is about the need of a channel for the expression of the anxiety [non-nationalists felt] and for sustaining the resistance (.) there was a feeling of helplessness and fear and we had to confront it somehow'.[34] In this difficult context, their activism served as an outlet for the expression of a *cri de cœur*, a popular repudiation of the violence and the alliance between moderate and violent nationalism: '[we had] the need to breathe and to feel Basque and not-nationalist and constitutionalist, no? Because we felt crushed by the nationalist boot, that is the truth.'[35]

Secondly, over the years intellectuals from the movement helped to shape a discourse against ETA that explicitly defended the legitimacy of the existing democratic system and values such as freedom of expression, pluralism and the rule of law. By developing an intellectually robust set of interpretive frames, they strengthened the capacity by opponents of the Izquierda Abertzale to challenge more effectively, not only their methods, but also their worldview and political project.

Finally, at a time when the regional government authorities looked at the other side while constitutionalists were suffering overwhelming *abertzale* persecution, the civic movement served as a refuge by a large non-nationalist sector of the Basque society who were politically active and felt abandoned and unwelcomed by the Basque government: 'We gave voice to many people who had the same beliefs, it is not that we created something in a vacuum, not at all, we were a valuable channel that served to give practical expression to ideas and initiatives that many people wanted to put on the table and make visible.'[36] They formulated in a constructive, empowering manner the feelings of weariness, betrayal, abandonment and frustration that existed within the non-nationalist community. These were sublimated into the promotion and support of democratic norms, liberal values and the rule of law.

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[34] Interview with former Foro Ermua member: 21-7-2016.

[35] Interview with former Denon Artean and ¡Basta Ya! member: 23-5-2017.

[36] Interview former Foro Ermua and ¡Basta Ya! member 15-5-2017.

As Masullo (2021,1851) has theorised, when mobilised by political entrepreneurs, ideational factors – 'identities, ideals (that can be expressed as structured ideologies), narratives, interpretative frameworks, and normative commitments' – not only impact on the way actors understand the world but they can also shape the collective decision of how opposition to armed actors will be carried out (i.e. violently or non-violently). In this case, there was a danger that grievances about radical nationalist repression would have found expression in a belligerent backlash against the MLNV and this could have potentially fed into greater polarisation and spirals of violence. So the fact that the civic movements channelled these grievances through democratic and non-violent means helped to avert this possibility. Preventing the escalation of political conflict into violent forms of confrontation is a well-known feature in the relationship between civil resistance and peacebuilding (Vinthagen 2015, Dudouet 2017). The civic movement's contribution to the preservation of the fabric of society and increased community resilience is therefore one of its achievements.

By the time the cycle of contention dispersed, the strength of the social delegitimisation of ETA was evidenced by public opinion polls of this period. In 2006 only 3 per cent of Basques supported or justified the actions of the group as more than 60 per cent 'totally rejected' the organisation. While just 5 per cent described ETA members as 'patriots', 64 per cent of the sample used terms such as 'madmen', 'fanatics' or 'criminals' to refer to the *etarras*. And only 2 per cent of Basques disagreed with the statement that in Basque Country 'all ideas can be defended without violence.'[37] Furthermore, repudiation of ETA's violence spread within its own political movement: from 1995 to 2007, 'total support' of ETA within the Izquierda Abertzale went down from 20 to 2 per cent and 'critical justification' from 34 to 8 per cent. Whereas half of the *abertzales* described the militants as 'patriots' in a question from a 1999 survey, only 18 per cent did in 2007 (Eguiguren and Aizpeolea 2011, 263). Given this widespread popular rejection and ETA's severe military weakness, it was only a matter of time before the armed group announced a definitive ceasefire in 2011 and their disbandment in 2018.

To conclude, the Basque case reinforces the recent claims in the literature about the need to examine civil resistance in contexts other than popular struggles against authoritarian regimes. In line with these studies, we find that dynamics identified by scholars who look at unarmed challenges to authoritarian regimes also apply to campaigns of resistance against violent non-state actors. Clearly, similar practices and repertoires of contention can be deployed by collective actors in the struggle against non-state armed organisations; especially what Burrowes (1996) describes as methods of concentration: rallies, marches, large demonstrations, sit-ins and more.

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[37] Source: Euskobarometro series temporales (https://www.ehu.eus/es/web/euskobarometro/serieak).

Other analogous dynamics include the high personal costs that come associated with this activism, the types of sanctions that violent opponents can deploy and the ways in which the use of repression can backfire against the activists' adversaries.

Similarly, the Basque case shows how, in the struggle between civil society groups and their violent adversaries, political stakeholders can fundamentally impact not only on the capacity of civil resistance to form cross-cutting alliances but also its own raison d'être, ethos and even long-term future. It also shows that the discursive work and mobilising efforts by civil society activists are central to the social delegitimisation of actors other than a repressive state.

Likewise, some of the opportunities and constraints discussed in the contentious politics literature do certainly shape mobilisation against violent non-state actors: the presence (and loss) of allies and the changes in the alignment of political actors were very important for this case. Moreover, this scholarly tradition emphasises the importance of action-oriented cultural frames, a varied repertoire of contention and dense social networks to lower the cost of mobilisation, build confidence and infuse claims with meaning (Tarrow 2011, 33). All these conceptual tools provided much explanatory power in understanding the onset and evolution of the civic movement.

A final point of interest for the broader literature is in connection to criticisms of pro-democracy civil resistance movements that describe them as 'trojan horses' manipulated by Western interests and pawns of global neoliberalism. In contrast, this case adds further weight to the claim that movements in defence of democratic rights have indigenous roots, represent the popular will and, in some instances, may arise to protect political freedoms threatened by a campaign of violence.

With these and other findings, the analysis the Basque case can contribute to the emerging body of research on resistance to non-state violence. Broadening the scope of the field and providing a greater diversity of insights and empirical evidence, the new scholarship on non-state actors as perpetrators has the potential to make a lasting impact on our understanding of civil resistance.

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