

Terrorism and Ethnonationalism: The Basques in Spain

Will Stallings
wjs2@email.sc.edu

I. Introduction

- The conflict presented here is that of the Basque (“Euskaldunak”) people of Spain, who have been a linguistic curiosity for much of their history, with evidence tracing the population back to at least 5,000 years ago, and further evidence suggesting an even more ancient origin.
- The Basque live in and around the Cantabrian Mountain range, in the counties of Vizcaya, Guipuzcoa, Alava, and Navarre in Spain, as well as in the border region of Southwestern France.
- For much of the 20th century, the Basque Country and its people have been involved with ethno-nationalism (with accompanying terrorism) that has resulted in conflict with the Spanish state.

I. Historical Information

- 1891: Basque ethno-nationalism begins with the formation of the PNV, or Parti Nacionalista Vasco (Basque Nationalist Party). This political organization united Basque middle-class urbanites with rural Basques in a reaction against non-Basque immigration into the region.
- 1939: The Spanish Civil War created tensions between the Basque people and the Spanish state. The Falangist Party, the fascist ruling party of Spain after the War, harshly repressed Basque ethno-nationalist movements in favor of Castilian nationalism.
- 1959: The Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), a terrorist group, formed out of frustration over oppression under Falangist rule as well as the passivity of the PNV government-in-exile.
- 1973: The ETA’s assassination of Francoist official Luis Carrero Blanco led to a succession crisis and was the highest profile terrorist action committed by the group.
- 1979: The establishment of the Basque Autonomous Community (Comunidad Autonómico Vasco or CAV) was met with disapproval; as much as 40% of the population refused to vote.
- 2011: After the Donostia-San Sebastian Conference, the ETA announced a halt to all offensive actions.
- May 2018: The ETA officially disbands. However, the conflict between many Basques and the Spanish State still remains. Throughout the organization’s existence, it killed more than 800 civilians and officials.

II. Language information

- It is known as “Euskara” to the Basque people.
- The Basque language is likely the oldest in Western Europe.
- It is unrelated to any other extant language on the planet.
- Their language and culture has survived multiple invasions over the past two millennia: The Celtic Invasions two thousand years ago; the centuries of Roman occupation; the Muslim occupation of the Iberian peninsula; and centuries under the Spanish crown.

III. What is ethno-nationalism?

What is terrorism?

- Ethno-nationalism will be defined as “A sense of consciously exalting one’s ethnic group over all others and placing emphasis on the exaltation of its culture and identity to one of international status.”
- According to the U.S. Department of State, terrorism is any “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.”

IV. Map of the Basque Country



V. Statistics of the Basque Country

Population and well-being:

- Basque-speaking population in the Basque Country is 979,163 and represents 2% of the total population of Spain.
- Total population in the Basque Country: 2,649,000 (people living in the French and Spanish Basque provinces but including some people who do not necessarily identify as Basque)
- HDI (2015): 0.916
- Life Expectancy: 83.15

Economy:

- Total GDP: \$81.05 billion total GDP (\$1.311 trillion for all of Spain)
- Per Capita GDP: \$37,330 per capita GDP (\$28,157 for Spain)

VI. Why am I talking to you about the Basques?

How do they represent ethno-nationalism?

- The Basques have demonstrated the sort of values characteristic of ethno-nationalist movements throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.
- Their situation is also representative of the difficulty in resolving these conflicts. Much of the Basque Country is not culturally Basque and does not speak Basque.
- Many of the symbols associated with the Basque, such as the name ‘Euskadi’, the flag of the CAV (the “Ikurriña”), and their anthem all are due to Sabino Arana Goiri, founder of the PNV in the late 19th century.
- The ETA called for the creation of a Basque nation state rooted in socialist elements and a Basque identity, using domestic terrorist actions in order to create pressure on the Spanish government to capitulate to their demands.
- The population is divided on the question of independence. Although the 1979 Basque autonomy referendum only registered about a 60% turnout, 95% of those voting registered a “yes” vote.
- Despite being a very well-off industrial region, they still represent an important case in understanding ethno-nationalism. They have a very high GDP and HDI, but defy expectations by harboring this sort of conflict.

VII. Flag of the CAV



VIII. Beyond the Classroom

- The research in this presentation was conducted in conjunction with Isabella Williams, a fellow student researcher and Honors College student.
- The Beyond the Classroom work was completed under the advisement of Stanley Dubinsky and Michael Gavin for the Internet Encyclopedia of Global Ethnolinguistic Conflict
- My work was sponsored by the University of South Carolina Honors College Exploration Grant.