

# LEGITIMIZATION OF TERRORISM: OPINION OF BASQUE UNIVERSITY YOUTH AFTER THE DISSOLUTION OF ETA

## LEGITIMIZACIÓN DEL TERRORISMO: OPINIÓN DE LA JUVENTUD VASCA UNIVERSITARIA TRAS LA DISOLUCIÓN DE ETA

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**Abstract:** This article presents the results of a survey carried out in December 2020 in which a questionnaire was answered by Basque university youth on the topic of the legitimization of ETA terrorist violence. Contrary to previous surveys, this study was carried out after the official dissolution of ETA in 2018. 1,067 valid responses were obtained from young women and men between 18 and 25 years old residing in the Basque Country. The results confirm that most of the answers reject the use of violence as a political tool, but the youngest generations and those who identify themselves as only Basque express less forcefulness and less determination in the delegitimization of the existence of ETA.

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**Resumen:** Este artículo presenta los resultados de una encuesta realizada en diciembre de 2020 en la que un cuestionario fue respondido por jóvenes universitarios vascos sobre el tema de la legitimación de la violencia terrorista de ETA. A diferencia de encuestas anteriores, este estudio se realizó tras la disolución oficial de ETA en 2018. Se obtuvieron 1.067 respuestas válidas de jóvenes de entre 18 y 25 años residentes en la Comunidad Autónoma de Euskadi. Los resultados confirman que la mayoría de las respuestas rechazan el uso de la violencia como herramienta política, pero las generaciones más jóvenes y

quienes se identifican como solo vascos expresan menos contundencia y menos determinación en la deslegitimación de la existencia de ETA.

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## I. Introduction

### I.1 Legitimization of violence by terrorist groups. The case of ETA in the Basque Country

The legitimization of political violence is a difficult subject for any society; as Apter affirms, “political violence not only divides people; it polarizes them around affiliations of race, ethnicity, religion, language, class.” (Apter, 1997: 1). Terrorist groups are faced with a dilemma when implementing violence and terror to achieve political goals; as Sabucedo, Rodríguez and Fernández explain, such acts may be an efficient way to achieve an end, but at the same time they inflict a fatal wound in the ethical and moral codes of any society (Sabucedo, Rodríguez & Fernández, 2002: 72). Terrorist groups need to elaborate a discourse which legitimizes their actions, and Sabucedo et al. mention the following elements which are used in the construction of such discourse: “The existence of a conflict which is of great relevance to the group, blaming their adversaries for the existing state of violence, delegitimizing victims, and victimizing the aggressor group.” (Sabucedo, Rodríguez & Fernández, 2002: 72). The elaboration of a discourse is fundamental to provide a sense to the human suffering that is inevitably connected to violent attacks and to achieve a positive image of the group in the public opinion of the community (Snow, Hunt & Bendford, 1998).

The study of the strategies employed by terrorist groups to create an opinion

conductive to support violent activities in society and of the factors on which such favorable angle depends have received theoretical attention in the last decade (see, among others, Malečková & Stanišić, 2011; Crenshaw, 2011 and Rosenfeld, 2011). Davis, Larson, Haldeman, Oguz and Rana offer a classification and defend that public support for terrorism depends on four top-level factors: effectiveness of the organization, motivation (contribution to a worthy cause and nationalism), perceived legitimacy (for religious, ideological, or political reasons along with revenge), and acceptability of costs and risks. Additional factors include shared grievances and aspirations, psychological and emotional influences, and other environmental indicators such as international relations, economics, instability, and culture (Davis, Larson, Haldeman, Oguz & Rana, 2012: 16). Other fundamental studies have advanced the knowledge in the field focusing on specific cases; the purpose of this article is not to develop a theoretical exploration of the notion of public support for terrorism, but there is extensive literature on the topic. To mention three representative cases, Hayes and McAllister focus on Ireland and defend that that exposure to violence serves to enhance public support for paramilitary groups; Krueger and Maleckova conclude that economic conditions and education are largely unrelated to support for terrorism in Israel and Palestine; and Mousseau argues that terrorists draw strength from “in-groups” whose values and beliefs legitimate the use of violence against the civilian populations of “out-groups” in the Arab world.

The particular case of the terrorist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Freedom, hereafter ETA) has received specific attention regarding both the strategies developed to obtain social support and the discursive practices

to promote a sense of legitimation. ETA is a terrorist group that demanded an independent and socialist Basque nation-state in Northern Spain and Southern France. Founded in 1959, it announced its full and final dissolution on May 2, 2018.<sup>1</sup> During its existence, this terrorist group killed more than 800 people, around 2,600 were injured, and used street violence, financial extortion, and other actions to achieve its goals. The strategies, methods and discursive tactics are complex and respond to the theoretical models previously described. The denunciation of the existence of a nationalist political conflict, marked by the oppression of the Spanish and French nations should be mentioned in the first place, along with the vindication of the ethnical component to reinforce Basqueness.<sup>2</sup> In that sense, Llera defines the ideological basis for ETA's actions as "a brand of nationalism that is based on exclusivity, ethno-ideological cleansing, and a broad socio-political movement that provides support, attracts new recruits, and binds its imagined ethnic community together." (2010: 218). Consequently, responsibility for the killings is attributed to the Spanish and French States.

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1. The history and evolution of ETA are beyond the scope of this article. A comprehensive historical account of the terrorist group can be found in Teresa Whitfield, *Endgame for ETA. Elusive Peace in the Basque Country*. The history of terrorism in Spain is complex, and it includes the presence of GAL (Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación, "Antiterrorist Liberation Groups"), illegally established by officials of the Spanish government to fight against ETA, the principal Basque separatist militant group. They were active from 1983 until 1987, under the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE)-led governments. At trial, it was proven that they were financed by important officials within the Spanish Ministry of the Interior.

2. See Sabucedo et al (2002) and Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca (2007).

Secondly, the capacity to generate fear is mentioned by several authors.<sup>3</sup> Fear was spread obviously by the killings and kidnappings, but also by the economic extortion of businesses and professionals and by the threats made to non-nationalist political sectors, as well as by what was termed *kale borroka* (episodes of street fighting by ETA's supporters) (Llera, 2010: 221). Thirdly, the combination of media and propaganda with forms of social control is noted by García as a specific trait of the Basque terrorist organization to gain control over public opinion:

Unlike several modern terrorist groups, the communicative nature of ETA and its capacity to generate fear was not restricted to killings, kidnappings, or extortion, or even to a sophisticated creation of media productions or use of the internet. Instead, ETA's strategic communication apparatus was articulated through a social support apparatus (called by many the Basque National Liberation Movement) comprising a number of organizations with a strong presence in the public sphere (2018: 28).

Finally, Criado adds another significant element in the public support for ETA referring to the organization's own constituency, and states that the convening of truces and negotiating with the governments throughout the last decades of its terrorist activity significantly increased public support for the terrorist organization. The interaction of methods, tactics and strategic practices implemented by ETA and its social support network is too complex to be detailed here, but it is undeniable that they were effective in creating a favorable public opinion in wide sectors of the Basque society in the 60s, 70s, 80s and early 90s, which progressively has been rever-

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3. See, among others, García (2018), Llera (2008) and Spencer & Croucher (2008).

sed, as the next section explains. Many other authors have studied in detail these and other aspects related to ETA and public support; recently Fernández-Soldevilla, Bullain, and Mees, among others, have explored the interactions of the political organization with the citizenship in the Basque Country and provided reflections from different perspectives. A detailed analysis of these and other authors are beyond the scope of this article, which concludes from the existing literature that the four main reasons for the public support for ETA are the denunciation of a political problem, the capacity to generate fear, the combination of media and propaganda with social control, and the ability to negotiate with the governments.

## 1.2 Public opinion and youth perception of violence in the Basque Country

The concept of public opinion has been defined by Crespi as a three-dimensional process in which individual opinions are formed and changed, then mobilized into collective judgements, and finally integrated into the governance of a people (2009: 1). Llera notes that public opinion acts as a mediator between institutions, public actors, and the civil society and adds: “the struggle to control and shape public opinion makes it a battleground for the main actors, institutions, and rituals alike” (2010: 212) of which terrorism is one. Public opinion plays a decisive role in the processes of legitimization and delegitimization of ETA in the Basque Country. As Funes noted in an article written in 1998, when ETA was still active, its persistence should be attributed, among other reasons, to “its social support from a qualitatively significant sector of Basque

society” (1998: 495). Van den Broek states that, from the first attacks by ETA at the end of the 1960s there was a network that actively supported those who commit violent activities along with another sector which did not provide direct support but did not “look unfavourably upon the activists and their actions either.” (2004: 716). Both sectors were essential in the legitimization of ETA’s violence.

In the Basque Country, the *Euskobarómetro*<sup>4</sup> is a series of surveys carried since 1995 by a research group at the University of the Basque Country, and in a section of the questionnaires the impact on society penetration of Basque terrorism and the extent to which terrorism has been accepted or rejected by public opinion are assessed. To succinctly summarize the evolution of public opinion regarding the legitimization of ETA’s terrorist actions, it is important to note that in the 1980s support was evident in large sections of the population<sup>5</sup>. The majority did not reject ETA until the 1990s, and the shift from acceptance to almost total rejection has been a gradual but constant tendency in the last years. To mention just one of the most relevant indicators, the extent to which respondents subscribe to the view that any ideology can now be defended in the Basque Country without resorting to violence has experienced a constant increase. In the last decade (2000-2010), an overwhelming majority (around 80%) has consistently agreed with this assertion, while only a small minority (some 15%) has

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4. [www.ehu.es/euskobarometro](http://www.ehu.es/euskobarometro)

5. One of the clear indicators of such social support is that 100% of the killings or arrests of members of ETA provoked public demonstrations, but only 20% of the killings perpetrated by ETA had such public forms of support; see Eduardo Mateo and José Antonio Pérez (2014).

disagreed. The reasons for such transformation are many and reflect the decline of the terrorist organization due to political pacts and negotiations, social mobilization against terrorism, the activities of victims' organizations, the appearance of Islamic terrorism, the effectiveness of police action, French cooperation, proscription of terrorist organizations and several other sociological and political factors.<sup>6</sup>

In such context, the exploration of the public opinion of Basque youth regarding the use of violence and terrorism is relevant to understand the present and the future of Basque society and the knowledge and perception by the youth of a convulse and conflictive past:

Knowledge of the past and reflection on what happened is essential so that, based on the painful experience of the victims, society, and especially the youngest members of society are able to ratify the principles of respect for others, the defense of pluralism and the superiority of the rule of law over violence (Fundación, 2016: 18).

Two main studies have been carried out with a focus on this specific area. In the first one, Elzo gathers the results of several surveys that reflect the opinion of Basque youth on terrorism and violent activities from 1986 until 2012, and indicates that in 1986, 36% of the people between ages 15 and 29 justified the legitimacy of terrorism "under certain circumstances" (2014: 28). Just four years later, in 1990, the percentage was down to 27%, and the decrease is a constant in the following years, with a value of 12% in 2010. (2014: 33). Elzo's publication includes a comprehensive analysis of the different variables included in the surveys and of

the sociological, religious, and cultural factors around the legitimization of ETA by the Basque youth, but the results do not go beyond the year 2012. In 2017, Iker Usón publishes the second study on Basque students' knowledge and ethical considerations around ETA and terrorism. It shows the results of a survey of university students (18-29 years) carried out in 2016 concerning infringements of Human Rights due to political reasons in the Basque Country. Results show that 86% of the answers agree with the statement that any violent action against the dignity of a person must be rejected; 7% disagree and 7% do not have an opinion, and the conclusions indicate that 91% agree that no political project is more important than the right to life of a person (Usón, 2017).

The present article offers the results of the first survey carried out in the Basque Country in which young university students provide their answers around the topic of the legitimization of terrorist violence after the dissolution of ETA in 2018, which is relevant in terms of not only reporting their answers around such topic, but also inquiring on their perception around the need to whether to explore the past to understand the decades of violence and suffering or to simply move on and forget about such painful experience. To that end, the objectives for this study focus on determining whether Basque university youth:

1. Grant legitimacy to the use of violence, in general, to achieve political objectives.
2. Grant legitimacy, in particular, to the existence of ETA and justify it.
3. Believe that public self-criticism of the organizations that socially supported ETA would improve coexistence in Basque society.

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6. See, among others, Llera (2010), Criado (2011) and Bourne (2010).

4. Believe that Basque society should make a clean slate of its past of violence and terrorism.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The questionnaire for this study was developed by the authors of this article after consulting those used in other sociological studies with a similar topic and purpose.<sup>7</sup> The draft questionnaire was evaluated by a panel of ten experts, six women and four men. Half of them were university professors who have academically studied notions linked to violence and terrorism in the Basque Country such as victims, peace movements, and memory from the perspective of sociology, criminology, anthropology, and literary studies. The panel also included two victims of terrorism (a woman and a man) and three people (two women and a man) who actively participated in the Basque peace movement. The suggestions made by this panel of ten experts led to the elimination of some questions and the introduction of new ones. This new version of the questionnaire was translated into Basque and both versions were tested with a group of 15 20-year-old students, to see if the language and the wording of the questions were understood correctly in both languages. After some minor editorial and style corrections, the questionnaire was ready for dissemination in the two co-official languages in the Basque Autonomous Community (Basque and Spanish).

To carry out the study, the research team opted for a non-random sampling.

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7. Such as Gobierno Vasco, 2012a; Gobierno Vasco, 2012b; Gobierno Vasco, 2014; CMVT – Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo (2017); Elzo, 2014; and Usón, 2017.

The questionnaire was disseminated on the internet through a link to a form built using Google Forms, in such a way that the interested person, by clicking on the link, opened and answered the questionnaire in a self-administered way. For the dissemination of the questionnaire, an association of students from the University of Deusto was contacted, who disseminated the link to the questionnaire through their social media accounts and in the personal accounts of their associates.

The questionnaire was open for response for 17 days, from November 26 to December 12, 2020, and 1,067 valid responses were obtained from young university women and men between 18 and 25 years old residing in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, where 57,534 university students with these characteristics are officially listed that academic year. 707 responses (66.3%) were given in Spanish and the remaining 360 (33.7%) in Basque. During the 17 days of fieldwork, no notable event took place in Basque political life on the subject under study that could potentially influence the opinion of the people who responded to the questionnaire. The final composition of the sample according to the main classification variables can be seen in the following table.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Objective 1. To determine if Basque university youth grant legitimacy to the use of violence, in general, to achieve political objectives

The legitimacy of the use of violence as a political tool was raised in the first place, in a global and generic way. The

Table 1 – Sample analyzed (n=1,067)

Variable	Category	n	%
Sex	Female	678	63.5
	Male	389	36.5
Age (years at the time of the questionnaire)	18	300	28.1
	19	357	33.5
	20	147	13.8
	21	159	14.9
	22 to 25	104	9.7
Feeling of identity	Only Basque	274	25.7
	More Basque than Spanish	288	27.0
	As Basque as Spanish	331	31.0
	More Spanish than Basque / Only Spanish	75	7.0
	Indifferent	99	9.3
Size of the municipality of residence	< 10,000 inhabitants	136	12.7
	From 10,000 to 100,000 inhabitants	403	37.8
	> 100,000 inhabitants	528	49.5

Source: Elaboration by the authors.

Table 2 – The use of violence to achieve political objectives is legitimate

Answer	n	%
Strongly agree	23	2.2
Agree	41	3.8
Neither agree nor disagree	112	10.5
Disagree	267	25.0
Strongly disagree	586	54.9
Don't know / Don't answer	38	3.6
Total	1,067	100.0

Source: Elaboration by the authors.

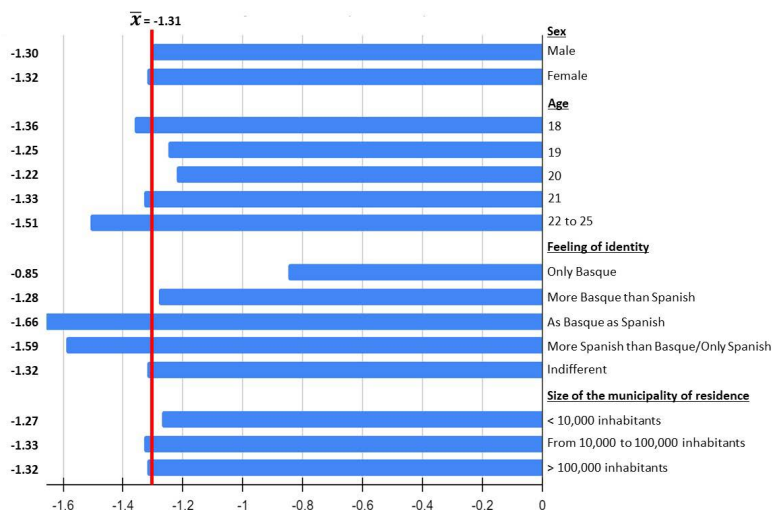
results were obtained from the level of agreement of the young people surveyed with the following statement: "The use of violence to achieve political objectives is legitimate." Responses were measured on a five-position Likert scale, from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree" and results are shown in table 2.

An "Index of legitimacy of the use of violence to achieve political objectives" was constructed as follows:

- The answer "Strongly agree" was assigned the value +2.
- The answer "Agree" was assigned the value +1.
- The answer "Neither agree nor disagree" was assigned the value 0.
- The answer "Disagree" was assigned the value -1.
- The answer "Strongly disagree" was assigned the value -2.
- The answer "Don't know /Don't answer" were eliminated for this index.

The mean value of this index for the sample was -1.31, which indicates that among the young people surveyed there is a strong delegitimization of the use of violence, in general, to achieve political objectives. Graph 1 shows the mean value of said index for each of the categories studied. As can be seen in graph 1, the delegitimization of the use of violence to achieve political objectives is, with greater or lesser intensity, transversal for all the

Graph 1 – Index of legitimacy of the use of violence to achieve political objectives



Source: Elaboration by the authors.

categories analyzed. A set of hypothesis tests carried out confirmed that in all the categories the mean value of the “Index of legitimacy of the use of violence to achieve political objectives” is significantly lower than zero ( $p < 0.001$  in all the categories).

T and ANOVA tests run to compare mean values of the categories of each variable conclude that there are no significant differences in the “Index of legitimacy of the use of violence to achieve political objectives” according to sex ( $p = 0.695$ ), age ( $p = 0.090$ ) or size of the municipality of residence ( $p = 0.833$ ). Significant differences ( $p < 0.01$ ) occur only as a function of the feeling of identity:

- Youngs who feel exclusively Basque present a mean value for this index (-0.85) significantly higher or less negative than the rest of categories of this variable.
- Youngs who feel as Basque as Spanish or more Spanish than Basque or only Spanish present a mean value for this

index (-1.66 and -1.59, respectively) significantly lower or more negative than the rest of categories of this variable.

- Youngs who feel more Basque than Spanish or indifferent are in an intermediate position. Their mean values (-1.28 and -1.32, respectively) are significantly lower than the first group but significantly higher than the second one.

### 3.2 Objective 2. To determine if Basque university youth grant legitimacy to the existence of ETA

More specifically, with the aim of exploring an idea similar to the previous one, but transferred, in this case, clearly and concisely to the violence carried out specifically in the Basque Country by the terrorist group ETA, young university students were asked to express their level of agreement with the statement,



**Table 3 – The existence of ETA was justified**

Answer	n	%
Strongly agree	34	3.2
Agree	109	10.2
Neither agree nor disagree	276	25.9
Disagree	245	23.0
Strongly disagree	352	33.0
Don't know / Don't answer	51	4.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,067</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Elaboration by the authors.

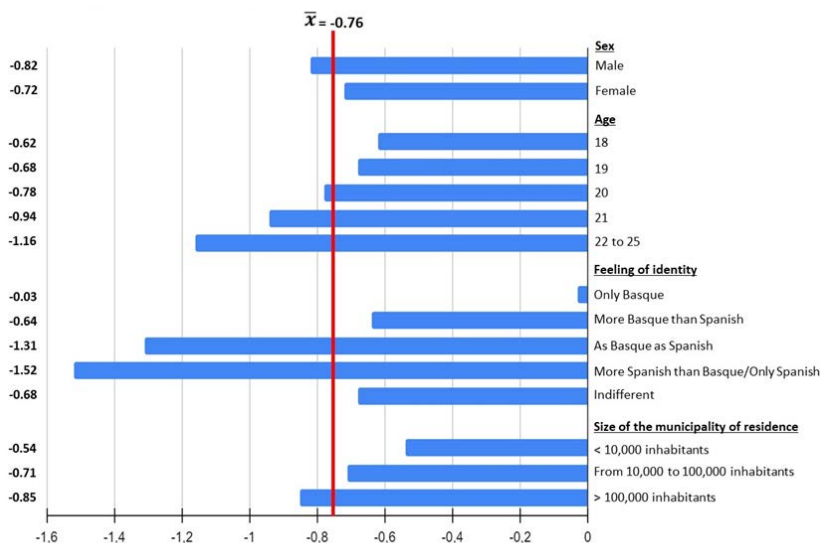
“The existence of ETA was justified”. Responses were measured again on a five-position Likert scale, from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree.” Results to this question are shown in table 3.

Following the same procedure proposed in the previous objective to score the answers in the range -2 to +2, an “Index of justification of the existence of ETA”

was constructed.–The mean value of this index for the sample turned out to be -0.76. We can see, therefore, how the delegitimization of violence as a political tool is more forcefully manifested when it is treated in a general level (the average in the previous case was -1.31), but not so actively delegitimized when it is raised in the specific situation related to the exercise of ETA violence in the Basque Country. Graph 2 shows the mean value of the “Index of justification of the existence of ETA” for each of the categories studied.

As can be seen in graph 2, the non-justification of the existence of ETA is once again, with greater or lesser intensity, transversal for all the categories analyzed. But now it is not as clear as the rejection that appeared in graph 1 to the use of violence in general as a tool for political action. A paired sample T-test revealed that the vast majority of the categories present a mean value for the “Index of

**Graph 2 - Index of justification of the existence of ETA**



Source: Elaboration by the authors.

legitimacy of the use of violence to achieve political objectives” significantly more negative ( $p < 0.05$ ) than that obtained for the “Index of justification of the existence of ETA”. Only for the category “More Basque than Spanish/Only Spanish” this difference is not significantly different from zero ( $p = 0.248$ ).

In addition, for the category of those who feel only Basque we cannot accept that the mean of the “Index of justification of the existence of ETA” (-0.03) is significantly less than zero ( $p = 0.353$ ). In all the other categories, the hypothesis tests concluded that this mean value of the said index does turn out to be significantly less than zero ( $p < 0.001$ ). T and ANOVA tests run to compare mean values of the categories of each variable conclude that there are no significant differences in the “Index of justification of the existence of ETA” based on the sex of the young surveyed ( $p = 0.206$ ), but there are certain differences in the rest of the crossover variables considered ( $p < 0.01$ ):

- Regarding the age, people from the two older groups, those aged 21 and 22 to 25, have a mean value in the index (-0.94 and -1.16, respectively) significantly lower or more negative than that of people from the two younger age groups: 18 and 19 years (-0.62 and -0.68, respectively).
- Regarding the feeling of identity, the same pattern appeared in the previous objective is observed again. The highest level of legitimization of ETA (-0,03), significantly higher or less negative than the rest of categories of this variable, corresponds to those who feel exclusively Basque. On contrary, the lowest levels of legitimization of ETA, significantly lower or more negative than the rest of the ca-

tegories of this variable, correspond to those who feel as Basque as Spanish (-1.31) or more Spanish than Basque or only Spanish (-1.52). Finally, intermediate mean values correspond to those who feel more Basque than Spanish (-0.64) or indifferent (-0.68). These values are significantly lower than the one of the first group but significantly higher than those of the second one.

- Those who live in municipalities with less than 10,000 inhabitants present a level of legitimization of ETA (-0.54) significantly higher or less negative than those who reside in the largest municipalities, those with more than 100,000 inhabitants (-0.85).

### **3.3 Objective 3. To determine if Basque university youth believe that public self-criticism of those who socially supported ETA would improve coexistence in Basque society.**

A question that remains to be answered and that a large part of Basque society poses to the conglomerate of political parties and social groups that supported and socially legitimized ETA is whether, if they formulated a public self-criticism about this support strategy, then violence would be definitively delegitimized and coexistence within Basque society would improve. In such context it is relevant to ask if the young people surveyed shared this opinion, because this matter, still to be carried out by the social and political groups that supported ETA, generates a lot of controversy in Basque society. The question was posed to those surveyed as follows: “If the political parties and

social organizations that supported ETA made a public self-criticism of their past of justification and support for it, would you say that coexistence in Euskadi ...". Responses were measured on a Likert-type scale with five response positions, from "Would improve a lot" to "Would get much worse". Results are presented in table 4.

**Table 4 – If the political parties and social organizations that supported ETA made a public self-criticism of their past of justification and support for it, would you say that coexistence in Euskadi ...**

Answer	n	%
Would improve a lot	211	19.8
Would improve a little	376	35.2
Would remain the same	295	27.6
Would get a little worse	67	6.3
Would get much worse	33	3.1
Don't know / Don't answer	85	8.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,067</b>	<b>100.0</b>

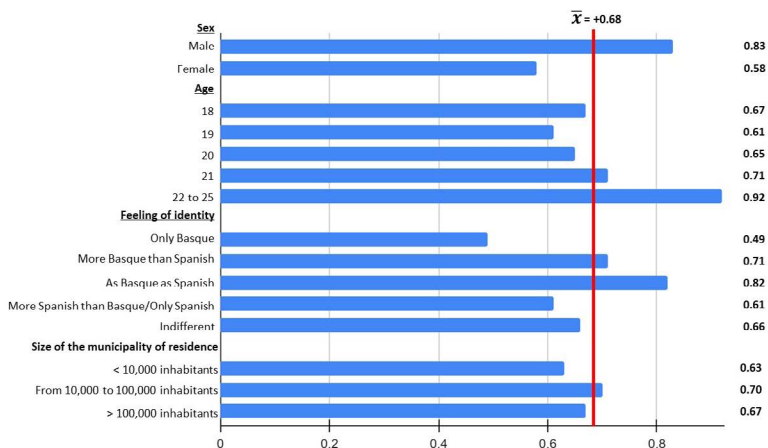
Source: Elaboration by the authors.

Operating as in the previous objectives, an "Index of improvement of coexistence in the Basque Country in the event that those who supported ETA made public a self-criticism for this support" was constructed as follows:

- The answer "It would improve a lot" was assigned the value +2.
- The answer "Would improve something" was assigned the value +1.
- The answer "It would remain the same" was assigned the value 0.
- The answer "It would make something worse" was assigned the value -1.
- The answer "It would get much worse" was assigned the value -2.
- The answer "Don't know /Don't answer" (85 cases) were eliminated for this index.

Graph 3 shows the mean value of said index for the sample, which turned out to be +0.68. As can be seen in the graph, the belief that making and making this self-criticism public would improve coexistence is transversal and appears clearly

**Graph 3 - Index of improvement of coexistence in the Basque Country in the event that those who supported ETA made public a self-criticism for this support**



Source: Elaboration by the authors.

in all the categories considered, since all of them present a positive value for said index. In fact, a battery of hypothesis tests concluded that in all of them the mean value of the said index turns out to be significantly higher than zero ( $p < 0.001$ ).

T and ANOVA tests run to compare mean values of the categories of each variable conclude that there are no significant differences in the “Index of improvement of coexistence in the Basque Country...” based on the age ( $p = 0.108$ ) or the size of the municipality of residence ( $p = 0.783$ ), but there are certain differences depending on the sex and feeling of identity of the young person surveyed ( $p < 0.01$ ):

- Male respondents believe (+0.83) that, if this self-criticism were to occur, the coexistence would improve significantly more than the female respondents believe (+0.56).
- People who feel exclusively Basque believe (+0.49) that, if this self-criticism were to occur, coexistence would improve significantly less than what people who feel as Basque as Spanish believe (+0.82).

### 3.4 Objective 4. To determine if Basque university youth believe that Basque society should make a clean slate of its past of violence and terrorism.

The last objective of this section has to do with the way in which Basque society should close this sad chapter in its recent history; whether we must work for a delegitimization of violence, if Basque society should keep a memory of what happened, or if it is better, for the sake of coexistence, to make a clean slate of

everything. To deal with this fundamental topic, the young people surveyed were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement “On the issue of violence and terrorism experienced in the Basque Country in recent decades, we should move on with a clean slate.” Responses were measured again on a five-position Likert scale, from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree”. The results obtained are shown in table 5

**Table 5 – On the issue of violence and terrorism experienced in the Basque Country in recent decades, we should move on with a clean slate**

Answer	n	%
Strongly agree	64	6.0
Agree	178	16.7
Neither agree nor disagree	244	22.9
Disagree	353	33.1
Strongly disagree	200	18.7
Don't know / Don't answer	28	2.6
Total	1,067	100.0

Source: Elaboration by the authors.

Following the same procedure as in previous objectives 1 and 2, an “Index of support to the clean slate in the Basque Country” was constructed. The mean value of this index for the sample was -0.43, which indicates that, in global terms, among the young people surveyed there is a rejection of the idea of a clean slate suggested in the statement. Those surveyed believe that keeping a memory of what happened is positive for coexistence. Graph 4 shows the mean value of this said index for each of the categories studied. As can be seen, the disagreement with the clean slate policy is, to a greater or lesser degree, cross-sectional for all the

categories analyzed. In fact, a battery of hypothesis tests carried out revealed that in the vast majority of the categories the average value of said index turned out to be significantly less than zero ( $p < 0.001$ ). Only for the category of people who feel only Basque we cannot accept that the mean of the “Index of support to the clean slate in the Basque Country” (-0.14) is significantly less than zero ( $p = 0.055$ ).

T and ANOVA tests run to compare mean values of the categories of each variable conclude that there are no significant differences in mean value of the “Index of support to the clean slate in the Basque Country” according to the sex of the person surveyed ( $p = 0.226$ ) or the size of the municipality of residence ( $p = 0.159$ ), but there are certain differences for the rest of the classification variables considered ( $p < 0.01$ ):

- Regarding age, it was detected that people from the two oldest groups of the sample (21 and 22 to 25 years) have

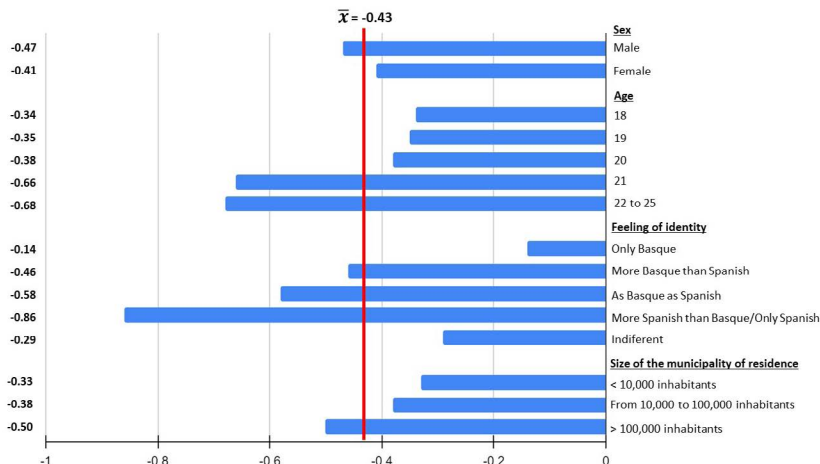
a mean value in the said index (-0.66 and -0.68, respectively) significantly lower or more negative than the one of the three youngest age groups: 18, 19 and 20 years (-0.34, -0.35 and -0.38, respectively).

- Regarding the feeling of identity of the people surveyed, it was detected that youngs who feel they are only Basque or indifferent have a mean value in the said index (-0.14 and -0.29, respectively) significantly higher or less negative than the ones of those who feel as Basque as Spanish (-0.58) and more Spanish than Basque or only Spanish (-0.86).

## 4. Discussion

In May 2018, the terrorist group ETA made its self-dissolution effective through a public letter. This article offers answers to the degree of legitimization of violence in general and ETA in particular by

Graph 4 - Index of support to the clean state in the Basque Country



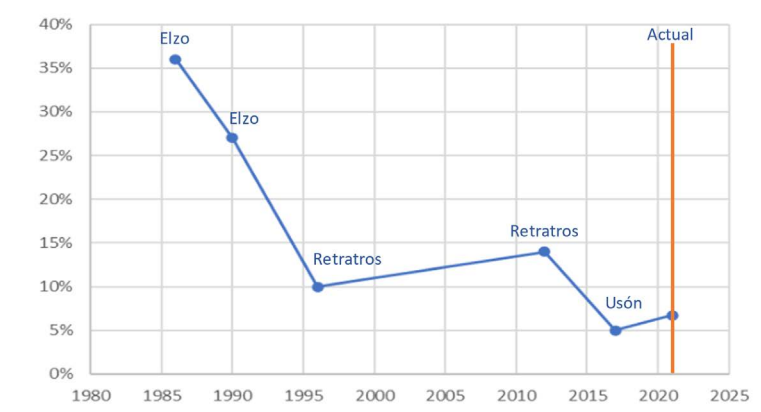
Source: Elaboration by the authors.

Basque university youth once ETA has formally disappeared. As detailed in the first section of this article, the exercise of political violence requires a discourse of legitimation, and a social strategy which, in the case of ETA, included the denunciation of the existence of a nationalist political conflict to appeal to the Basque population in an attempt to convey terrorism as a legitimate and bearable strategy to reach an end. A discourse of legitimization is needed to alleviate or cushion the damage caused to the community, and some sectors must identify with that discourse and lend its support to spread it significantly and to obtain social support. ETA's terrorism in the Basque Country could not have lasted over time without the social support of a group that shared and protected the exercise of this violence and that allowed this legitimizing discourse to permeate (Sabucedo, 2002; Snow, Hunt & Benford, 1998; Elzo, 2014). The present study investigates the existence of an inverse process towards the delegitimization of the use of violence in the Basque university youth that allows to conclude that this

legitimizing discourse will disappear, like ETA itself.

The results show that the delegitimization of violence as a political tool in the Basque Country, although with a worrying minority resistance (6.0% of the people surveyed) is widespread among Basque university youth. The legitimation discourse that apparently had an important degree of effectiveness and permeabilization in Basque society in the 80s begins to lose its social base from the 90s progressively until today. Such trend towards the loss of social base in the legitimation of violence by Basque youth is underlined in the findings of other studies carried out in the Basque Country on dates and times different from the current one. The results discussed by Elzo (2014), Usón (2017) and the series *Retratos de Juventud* (2018), show a unanimous conclusion that reflect the declining percentage of the answers provided by young people in the Basque Country that legitimize violence as a political tool. Graph 5 shows such declining tendency.

**Graph 4 - Agreement with the justification of violence**



Source: Elaboration by the authors.

Regarding the answers to the question of whether “the existence of ETA was justified”, the result show that the agreement reaches 13.4%, more than double the 6% of those who agreed with a more generic formulation. Thus, we see that the delegitimization of the existence of ETA is clear, but the discourse that delegitimizes violence is more direct and forceful when it is made in a general approach, in an abstract manner regarding violence than when it refers, in a concrete way, to the context of the Basque Country and the violence of ETA in particular. This trend towards greater delegitimization of violence when the question is of a general / theoretical nature than when it refers to ETA violence in the Basque Country is confirmed in other studies (Usón, 2017). In Usón’s study, 5% declare, with greater or lesser force that the right to life can be violated for political reasons, while 91% believe that no political project is more important than the right to life. However, when the statement is “I am against the existence of ETA” there are 12% who show their disagreement with such statement (Usón, 2017).

The questions of objectives 3 and 4 of our study are the first time they have been measured in a survey of young people, so it is not possible to make a comparison with other studies. These are questions aimed at building the future that had not been asked due to the influence of ETA’s presence in Basque life. The debate is still open in today’s Basque society: in which way must coexistence be faced in the new social situation after the dissolution of ETA in 2018. The survey shows that a high percentage of Basque university youth believe that it is important for the improvement of social coexistence that the institutions, political parties and

social groups that supported and socially legitimized ETA’s violence should give to self-criticize their past support. However, it is again the youngest people of 18 and 19 years old and those who define themselves as only Basque who believe that this self-criticism and delegitimizing discourse would contribute to a much lesser extent to improving coexistence in the Basque Country, once again showing that the discourse of delegitimization has penetrated with much less force in this specific group. One of the most relevant observations which can be drawn from the analysis of results in the present study is that if the profile of the typical young person who has not yet so forcefully delegitimized the existence of ETA were to be formulated, it would be that of a person between 18 and 20 years old, who defines himself/herself as only Basque and who lives in a town with less than 10,000 inhabitants of the Basque Country.

Finally, the study refers to another important issue that must be debated and defined in Basque society. It is the one that focuses on how to face the future after so many years of legitimizing discourses of violence and coexistence with the exercise and consequences of it. The debate is about whether the future should be built by keeping the memory of what happened, assuming past mistakes and successes as a society or if, on the contrary, we should make a “clean slate;” that is, to go on without considering the legitimation given to violence in the past by certain political and social sectors, and without reflecting on the consequences of such support. Most of the answers surveyed expressed disagreement with the proposal to move on as if nothing had happened, which is the option underlying the question about the “clean slate”. Once again, it is among the

**Table 6 – Summary of the main findings of this research**

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

Topic	Sex	Age	Feeling of identity	Size of municipality
The use of violence to achieve political goals is legitimate	GENERAL DELEGITIMATION There are no significant differences	GENERAL DELEGITIMATION There are no significant differences.	GENERAL DELEGITIMATION, but Those who feel that they are only Basques delegitimize significantly less intensely than the rest of the sample	GENERAL DELEGITIMATION There are no significant differences
The existence of ETA was justified	GENERAL DELEGITIMATION There are no significant differences	GENERAL DELEGITIMATION, but The two youngest bands (18 and 19) delegitimize significantly less intensely than the two most adult bands (21 and 22-25)	Those who feel that they are only Basques delegitimize with much less intensity than the rest of the sample. There is no evidence that this group delegitimizes in a significant way	GENERAL DELEGITIMATION, but Those residing in the smaller municipalities (<10,000) delegitimize significantly less intensely than those residing in the larger municipalities (> 100,000)
If the political parties and social organizations that supported ETA made a public self-criticism of their past of justification and support for it, would you say that coexistence in Euskadi would (improve/worsen)	GENERAL BELIEVE THAT IT WOULD IMPROVE, but Young women believe that living together would improve significantly less than young men believe	GENERAL BELIEVE THAT IT WOULD IMPROVE There are no significant differences	GENERAL BELIEVE THAT IT WOULD IMPROVE, but Those who feel they are only Basques believe that coexistence would improve significantly less than other categories in the sample believe	GENERAL BELIEVE THAT IT WOULD IMPROVE There are no significant differences
On the issue of violence and terrorism experienced in the Basque Country in recent decades, we should move on with a clean slate	GENERAL REJECTION There are no significant differences	GENERAL REJECTION but The two youngest bands (18 and 19 years old) reject the clean slate with significantly less intensity than the two oldest bands (21 and 22-25 years)	GENERAL REJECTION but Those who feel exclusively Basque reject the clean slate with significantly less intensity than other categories of identity	GENERAL REJECTION There are no significant differences

Source: Elaboration by the authors.

youngest people in the sample (18, 19 and 20 years old), among those who identify themselves as only Basque and among those who live in towns with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants where the rejection of the clean slate is significantly lower.

Table 6 summarizes the findings of the study. As a cross-sectional summary, we find that there is a variable that is significant in all the questions which introduces the elements with the greatest variation in the results. It would be the variable feeling of identity, where the category “Only Basque” presents significant mean differences in all the questions. From this same cross-sectional reading, it can be inferred that the age variable is the second that presents the most differences, since the youngest age categories introduce significant mean differences with the oldest age categories in two questions.

Lastly, sex and size of the municipality of residence are variables that introduce mean differences in a single question.

## 5. Conclusion

The use of violence as a political tool in general and ETA violence in particular requires the conscious and programmed elaboration of a legitimizing discourse that permeates wide sectors of Basque society and explains the legitimacy given to the use of violence. The dissolution of ETA in 2018 offers a new context to research to what extent this legitimizing discourse is still present in the youth at the university level.

This sample collects responses that contribute to understanding the opinion of Basque university youth regarding the legitimization of terrorist violence and the



need to explore the violent past. The results and conclusions offered here represent an advance in the knowledge of the specific sector of university youth, but in no way should they be interpreted in an extensible way to the whole of society. The results confirm the trend of the data presented in recent studies, in the sense of a progressive delegitimization of the majority among Basque youth of violence or the use of terrorism to achieve political ends.

The results of this study offer encouraging general conclusions regarding Basque university youth. The delegitimization of the use of violence as a political tool and the expression of the need for self-criticism among those who gave support and ideological coverage to this exercise of violence and support for the reconstruction of the memory of what happened as a basis on which to build the future of Euskadi are supported by the majority of the respondents. However, it is the younger generations and especially those who identify themselves as uniquely Basque and live in smaller populations that express less forcefulness and less determination in favor of the delegitimizing discourse of violence and a greater permeability to other proposals such as privileging oblivion as the way to close this long chapter of violence in Euskadi. The results also reinforce the specific idea that after the definitive dissolution of ETA, the Basque youth delegitimize its existence and mostly believe that a critical review of the historical past is necessary for a better common coexistence. However, it is once again found that a minority sector among young people, specifically those of younger age, who practically did not experience the violence of ETA, expresses

with less intensity their delegitimization of both proposals.

The results of this study confirm that the laborious work carried out by organizations and entities that have promoted this discourse of peace and the educational work by the Basque Government and other institutions in these last two decades have left their mark on a sector of society that has practically not known the active exercise of violence in the Basque Country. However, there is still pending work among the youngest segment of this society and specifically among those who express a greater sense of Basque identity and who live in smaller towns in the Basque Country, both in the sense of deepening the delegitimization of ETA, as well as making a greater self-criticism of supporting its use.

As a society it is fundamental to articulate a common discourse with values, representations and attitudes that actively build a culture of peace that delegitimizes the use of violence as a political tool and that can clearly oppose the legitimizing discourse that despite the disappearance of ETA still persists, albeit in the form of a minority opinion. In the words of Wilson López and José Manuel Sabucedo it is urgent to “create a new culture, a culture that incorporates discourses, values, representations and attitudes at the service of fairer and more supportive intergroup relations. This objective necessarily involves committing actions to build discourses that legitimize cultures of peace” (2007: 144). If such effort is not undertaken in a conscious, explicit and active way, the risk of the persistence of a legitimizing discourse of violence, which worryingly persists among a part of the younger sector of the Basque youth surveyed remains.

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