

# Research leads to new data on number of victims of terrorist groups

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Painstaking new analysis of activity linked to the terrorist organization

ETA, responsible for waging a campaign for independence in northern Spain and south-west France, suggests the total number of victims could have been underestimated by more than 100.

Researchers at Northumbria University have established a new and detailed account of attacks over a 50-year period linked to ETA, or Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, meaning Basque Homeland and Freedom.

Their findings, which are published in the peer-reviewed international journal *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, suggest the number of attacks carried out and the lives lost could have been significantly undercounted.

Formed by dissidents from the Basque Nationalist Party in 1959, with the goal of liberating the Basque Country from Spain, ETA's campaign led to the deaths of members of the Guardia Civil, Spain's national police force, local and national politicians, and civilians. Attacks made by the group ranged from targeting individuals to bombings that killed or injured hundreds of people.

ETA announced in Basque newspapers it was ceasing its activities in 2011, and the group disarmed, disbanded, dissolved its structures and ended its [political campaign](#) in May 2018.

"ETA's impact both within and beyond the Basque Country is simultaneously well documented and fiercely contested," explained Kathryn Loosemore, a Ph.D. student at Northumbria who first began researching the separatist group as part of a Master's in International Relations.

When completing her dissertation on the activities of ETA, Kathryn realized she couldn't find a definitive record which showed how many people had been killed, injured or impacted, and decided to investigate further at Ph.D. level.

"The difficulty arises in defining a 'victim'", said Kathryn. "There are a range of factors, political and otherwise, which determine how a victim is categorized, but it is clear that terrorism's impact is broader than just loss of life."

Kathryn, who studies part-time and has spent much of her accomplished career analyzing data and cataloging trends for the international news and information specialists, Thomson Reuters, spent months collecting data and verifying evidence to create a comprehensive database of ETA's activities.

The data uncovered suggests that ETA's impact is significantly greater than previously acknowledged, with a total of 1,047 attacks between 1959 and 2010, comprising 503 bombings, 456 shootings and 66 kidnappings. The remaining 22 attacks used other forms of violence.

The data collected suggests that 957 people were killed—a figure which is 10 percent higher than previous accounts recognize. There were also 1,949 injuries and three post-incident deaths via suicide and cancer that were attributed to trauma.

Matthew Johnson, Professor of Politics at Northumbria and Kathryn's Ph.D. supervisor, said, "The consequence of not producing a political accounts of the conflict is that the full scale of ETA's activities is subject to ongoing debate, with real consequences for those who require recognition as victims in order to secure official compensation or support. So, this really is quite an astonishing and meaningful piece of work."

"Establishing the scale and scope of a [terrorist](#) organization's activities is essential to understanding the social, economic and humanitarian impact on the organization's target, and more broadly, on society. This new database will ensure that the impact can continue to be tracked and

enable scholars of terrorism to track the impact of organizations more broadly."

Kathryn balances her Ph.D. studies with managing an operations team working across 38 different countries as part of her current role as Chief Operations Officer for Kantar Worldpanel, the global market research company which specializes in consumer trends and insights.

"I lived in Spain for some of the time that ETA was active and remember clearly the bomb that was defused at Bilbao stock exchange," Kathryn said. "So the subject has always been in my mind as something I'd like to understand more about."

The in-depth process of compiling the database by interrogating and synthesizing multiple existing datasets on ETA's activity, has been outlined in a new academic paper, published in *Critical Studies on Terrorism*.

**More information:** Kathryn Loosemore et al, The challenge of establishing the impact of terrorist organisations: development of a database on ETA's activities, *Critical Studies on Terrorism* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/17539153.2023.2170514](https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2023.2170514)

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