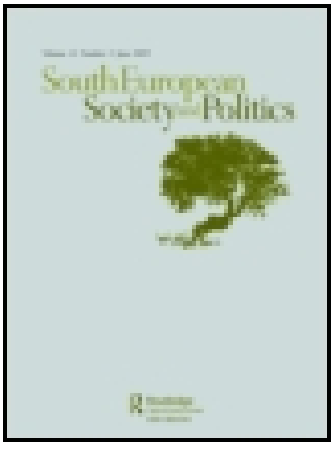

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Neo-Nazism in an Established Democracy: The Persistence of Golden Dawn in Greece

Antonis A. Ellinas

The literature predicts that extremist right-wing parties like the Greek Golden Dawn (GD) are doomed to stay in the margins of electoral competition, scaring away voters with their authoritarian views and violent tactics. Defying scholarly expectations and despite the criminal prosecution of its leadership, GD increased its electoral strength in the May 2014 European elections. The article contrasts the neo-Nazi GD with Western European radical right parties and examines the factors that facilitated the persistence of such an extreme political party in an established European democracy. It shows how GD managed to capitalise on the de-legitimation of Greek political institutions and, through its organisational activity, present itself as a socially legitimate anti-system alternative.

Keywords: Greece; Golden Dawn; Neo-Nazi Parties; Radical Right Parties; Anti-system Parties; Michaloliakos

The literature predicts that extremist right-wing parties like the Greek GD (Χρυσή Αυγή) are doomed to electoral failure. Unlike radical right parties, extremist right-wing parties scare away voters with their authoritarian views and, more importantly, with their violent activity. Considerable evidence from Western Europe shows that voters usually relegate neo-Nazi or neo-fascist political parties to the very margins of electoral competition (Hainsworth 2000, p. 1; Carter 2005, pp. 54–55; Mudde 2007, p. 54) and penalise those parties associated with violence or criminality (Art 2011, pp. 38, 54). Defying these scholarly expectations, GD achieved a major breakthrough in the May and June 2012 elections, attracting almost seven per cent of the vote, and global media attention. 'While many radical right parties have entered national legislatures since 1980, this was the first time that an openly extreme right party was able to pull it off' (Mudde 2013). The imprisonment of GD's leader Nicos Michaloliakos and other top party members in October 2013 on charges of setting up a criminal organisation did not deter voters in the local, regional and European elections in May 2014, as the party managed to

significantly increase its share of the vote. This article seeks to build on the emerging literature on GD (e.g. Psarras 2012; Dinas et al. 2013; Fragoudaki 2013; Georgiadou 2013, 2014; Hasapopoulos 2013; Papaioannou 2013; Zouboulakis 2013) and to extend the findings of the author's earlier work on this party (Ellinas 2013). Whereas some of these works mainly focus on GD's rise, the aim here is also to explore its persistence in the 2014 elections and offer some suggestions as to why a party of this kind has managed to become the third-biggest political force in an established European democracy. The article argues that the ascendance of neo-Nazism in Greece cannot solely be attributed to the protracted economic crisis. The GD managed to capitalise on the de-legitimation of Greek political institutions and, through its organisational activity, present itself as a socially legitimate anti-system alternative.

Golden Dawn

Although GD has been around since the 1980s, it only became politically active in 1993, after the nationalist mobilisations over the Macedonia issue (Ellinas 2013, pp. 547–548). Throughout its troubled early history, the party was known more for its involvement in violent incidents than for its electoral activity. Its leader served time in prison in the late 1970s for possession of explosives and its number two was convicted in 2006 for an almost deadly attack in 1998 against leftist students (Psarras 2012; Hasapopoulos 2013). Oscillating between street-fighting and vote-seeking activities, GD participated in elections for the first time in 1994, receiving 7,242 votes or 0.11 per cent. Throughout the next two decades the party participated, either alone or with other extreme-right groupings, in all European elections and, intermittently, in national elections. In all elections GD attracted a negligible part of the vote and failed to win representation. In the 2009 national election the party received 0.29 per cent and 19,624 votes, and proudly noted 'its stable electoral strength' (GD 2009). The GD's electoral fortunes started changing in 2010, when in the local elections the party leader Nicos Michaloliakos received 5.29 per cent of the vote and won a seat on the Athens municipal council. The party performed particularly well in the fourth and sixth districts of Athens, where GD was locally very active, receiving 6.94 per cent and 8.38 per cent, respectively. This breakthrough in the 2010 local elections became a stepping stone to the electoral inroads the party made in the May and June 2012 parliamentary elections (Dinas et al. 2013; Ellinas 2013, pp. 548–549). In May the party received 440,996 votes or 6.97 per cent and won 21 seats in the 300-member parliament. Expectations that support for the party would collapse were belied a month later, when the party received 426,025 votes or 6.92 per cent and elected 18 members of parliament (MPs).

After the 2012 elections, party support continued to grow. The GD was polling around 12 per cent and looked likely to increase its percentage. However, in September 2013 the stabbing of an anti-fascist rapper by a GD member began to reverse the party's fortunes. The GD's leader, a number of MPs and some party functionaries were arrested for setting up a criminal organisation. The party initially witnessed a sharp

drop in the opinion polls but subsequently managed to recover some support, in part after the death of two GD members in a drive-by shooting, which was allegedly carried out by a left-wing terrorist group. With some of its top leadership in prison and amidst speculation that the party would be banned, GD managed to improve its electoral standing in the May 2014 local, regional and European elections. In the local elections the party elected councillors in the three big municipalities it contested: Athens, Piraeus and Thessaloniki. In the election for the Athenian municipality, Elias Kasidiaris received 16.12 per cent, and the party's list, 'Greek Dawn', elected four councillors. As in 2010, its best performance was in the fourth and sixth districts, where the party received 20.08 per cent and 18.80 per cent, respectively. In the regional elections Greek Dawn managed to elect representatives in 12 out of the 13 regional councils it contested, its MP Elias Panagiotaros receiving 180,908 votes (11.13 per cent) in the Attica region. In the European election the party received 536,910 votes or 9.39 per cent and elected three members to the European Parliament: two retired army generals and the father of one of the two GD members killed in the attack at the party headquarters in November 2013. In an increasingly more fragmented Greek political party system, GD became the third-largest political force after the radical-left SYRIZA (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς), which received 26.57 per cent in the European elections, and the centre-right New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία, ND), which received 22.72 per cent.

Golden Dawn and the Western European Radical Right

To appreciate the significance of GD's electoral ascendance, it is necessary to distinguish between radical and extremist right-wing parties. While GD shares some features with radical right-wing parties such as the French National Front, the Austrian Freedom Party and the Belgian Vlaams Belang, a number of characteristics make it more comparable to extremist parties like the German National Democratic Party (NPD) or the British National Party (BNP). Not surprisingly, although GD claims to be part of a broader nationalist movement in Europe (GD 2014), the leader of the French National Front, Marine Le Pen, ruled out joining forces with the Greek (and Hungarian) right-wing extremists in the European Parliament (Willsher 2014). Indeed, two years after its national electoral breakthrough, GD has no ties with European radical right parties. After severing its ties with the NPD, due to the German party's position on the Greek sovereign crisis (Michaloliakos 2012), GD has only managed to establish official contacts with the BNP.

One of the main differences between GD and Western European radical right-wing parties relates to its ideology. Like many radical right parties in Western Europe, GD self-identifies as a nationalist party (see Ellinas 2013, pp. 549–552) but, as shown below, its ideology is much more extreme. The official statutes of GD state that the party 'has faith in the ideology of Nationalism' (GD 2012d, p. 2). The party considers nationalism to be 'the third major ideology of History', which opposes 'communism-internationalism' and 'liberalism-universalism'. On the basis of this nationalist worldview, and like radical right

parties, GD advocates the expulsion of illegal immigrants from the country. It associates illegal immigration with high unemployment and warns against Greeks becoming a minority in their own country. Moreover, it demands the separation of Greek from foreign pupils in primary and secondary schools, 'due to the linguistic weaknesses of the foreigners'. Reflecting Greek particularities and in line with traditional programmatic claims of the Greek far right (Kolovos 2005), GD demands a more assertive foreign policy and orientation away from 'American-Zionism' towards Russia. Not surprisingly, the party considers Greece's entry into the Eurozone a mistake, not least because they consider that it undermines national sovereignty. In its ideological statement the party makes no reference to democracy (2012c) and in its programme it demands 'direct democracy', that is, referenda for all major national issues and direct election of the Greek president by the people (GD 2012b).

Like most Western European radical right parties, GD has a strong anti-systemic profile. In the context of public resentment towards the austerity programme and the economic situation in Greece, GD rejects the politics of the 'parties of the constitutional spectrum', a term its political opponents have used to suggest the isolation of GD and to mobilise inter-party support against it. The GD calls politicians 'thieves' and the Greek polity a 'pseudo-democracy'. The anti-systemic rhetoric of the party has become a more central element of its programme since the autumn 2013 events. The GD is using the criminal prosecution and imprisonment of its MPs and functionaries as evidence of its anti-systemic nature and of the 'conspiracy' of the establishment against the party. From their prison cells, party MPs frequently issue press releases or send recorded messages to make a mockery of the criminal prosecution and to highlight contradictions between how the 'system' treats GD and the 'true looters' of the Greek people.

The 2012 ideological platform of the party differs substantially from earlier party literature, especially of the 1980s and early 1990s, which explicitly adopted national socialist ideology and, on a number of occasions, praised Adolf Hitler (Hasapopoulos 2013; Papaioannou 2013). In recent years GD has sought to moderate its ideological profile and to discard the neo-Nazi image the party had previously projected. However, even this toned-down version of its ideological platform is much more extreme than that of radical right parties in Western Europe. For, unlike these parties, GD adopts a biological conception of nationalism reminiscent of Nazi ideology. The 2012 ideological pamphlet produced by GD provides solid evidence of its extreme ideological views, making a number of references to 'race'. GD wants to preserve not simply the 'nation-state' but the 'nation-race' (GD 2012c). According to GD, 'the people is not solely an arithmetic union of individuals but a qualitative synthesis of people with the same biological and intellectual heritage' (GD 2012a). The party believes that in order to establish the rule of law it is important to respect 'the intellectual, national and racial inequality of people'. The GD states that it is against any levelling of nations, races and people, noting that there are 'naturally existing inequalities' that constitute 'an inseparable element of nature and life' (GD 2012a). The party also signals its ideological kinship with Nazism through its swastika-like

symbol, which it calls a Greek 'meander', and through the Nazi-like salute its leader has publicly performed on a number of occasions.

Not surprisingly, the political rhetoric of party members matches the biological nationalism adopted in official documents. Commenting on the recruitment of a black Greek basketball player, Yiannis Antetokounmpo, by the National Basketball Association (NBA), GD leader Nicos Michaloliakos refused to accept that he is Greek. When told that Antetokounmpo waved the Greek flag when picked for an NBA team, Michaloliakos responded, 'even in the zoo, if you give a chimp a banana and a Greek flag, he will be Greek'.[1] Similarly, MP Elias Panagiotaros stated on television that Greek citizen Sophocles Schortsianitis, who is a player on the Greek national basketball team and also black, is not Greek. Panagiotaros said, 'We do not consider Schortsianitis, according to the standards of the Greek race, to be Greek. His two parents have to be Greek and belong to the European race.'[2] In a debate in the Greek parliament GD MP Eleni Zaroulia, who is also Michaloliakos's wife, accused the government of 'equating Greek expatriates with every sort of subhuman that invaded our country carrying various diseases'.[3]

Beyond ideology, another characteristic that differentiates GD from the radical right parties in Western Europe is its association with violence. International organisations like Human Rights Watch and the Council of Europe, for example, have linked anti-foreigner violence in Greece with the activity of GD members or supporters (Human Rights Watch 2012; Council of Europe 2013). A report by the Greek Ombudsman documented a sharp rise of assaults against foreigners and associated it with the violent activism and vicious anti-foreigner rhetoric of GD (Ombudsman 2013).[4] The association with violence is not confined to the party base. The top leadership of the party has been involved in violent incidents both before and since the June 2012 election. Between the May and June 2012 elections, GD spokesman MP Elias Kasidiaris physically assaulted two female candidates during a television show. GD refused to condemn the assault and called it an 'unfortunate incident'. In September 2012, GD MPs were involved in the destruction of open-air stalls in Rafina and Mesologgi. The stalls belonged to dark-skinned merchants and GD MPs proudly proclaimed that, after performing checks, they established the stall-holders had no permits, and 'did what Golden Dawn had to do'. In May 2013, GD MP George Germenis was shown on TV pushing away the security guards of Athens mayor George Kaminis, after reportedly trying to assault the mayor and accidentally hitting a bystander. The last two incidents were mentioned in the list of cases the Greek prosecutors put together in October 2013 to charge the top leadership of the party with running a criminal organisation.

After the imprisonment of some of its MPs and a number of its functionaries the party attempted to moderate its violent profile but did not try to dissociate itself from its recent past. In fact, two years after the assault of the two female politicians by Kasidiaris and a day after GD's electoral advance in the European election, Kasidiaris stated that 'the Greek people seem to have appreciated even this behaviour' and that GD 'was the victim' of this incident.[5] In June 2014, when some of the party's imprisoned MPs temporarily returned to parliament to face a motion to lift their immunity from

prosecution, GD did not try to dispel its violent image. During the tense and, at times, chaotic session, Michaloliakos told the Speaker of the House to 'shut up', a GD MP moved aggressively towards an MP of the radical left and a number of GD MPs shouted insults including 'thugs' and 'crooks' at the rest of the MPs when they left the House.

Another distinctive feature of GD relates to its internal structure. On paper the party displays a highly centralised structure revolving around the party leader, which is, in some ways, similar to that of radical right parties elsewhere in Europe (e.g. Mudde 2007). The highly centralised nature of the party and the enormous authority vested in the hands of Michaloliakos is documented in the party statutes, a document approved by the executive leadership of the party and submitted to Greece's Supreme Court in August 2012 (Ellinas 2013, pp. 552–554). In practice, though, the internal structure of GD differs from what is stated in the official party statutes and, in various ways, approximates the organisational structure and principles described in an earlier party document reported in the Greek press (Psarras 2013). While GD disputes the authenticity of this document, Greek prosecutors are using it as evidence in the criminal prosecution of party leaders. Using both visual documentation as well as testimonies from former party members, the prosecutors have accused dozens of party functionaries of setting up a paramilitary organisation with a strict military hierarchy, military-type training camps in Attica and hit squads that take direct orders from the top party leadership. The prosecutors additionally accuse GD leaders of possessing unlicensed guns and, since the May 2014 elections, they have arrested, placed under house arrest or imposed other restrictions on an additional number of party MPs including the party spokesman, Kasidiaris. The material collected by the prosecutors is used as proof that criminal acts by party members or supporters, like the assassination of anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas in September 2013, were not random.

Whereas most radical right parties claim to have some form of internal democracy, GD makes no mention of democratic deliberations in its official party statutes. On the contrary, the party proclaims that it is has a military model, departmentally organised along the lines of the Greek military (Michaloliakos 2012). At party gatherings, GD members and supporters are lectured about the importance of 'hierarchy and discipline' and at outdoor events members often wear camouflage and boots, carry flag-bearing sticks and march in military order (see also Georgiadou 2014). In line with this militaristic image that the party likes to project, top party members reject the autonomy granted to them by their seats in the Greek parliament and consider themselves to be 'political soldiers' under the command of Michaloliakos (Michos 2013). Borrowing the term from British neo-fascists (Eatwell 1998, p. 145), GD proclaims that the 'political soldier' has 'a duty to learn how to be disciplined', both to himself and to the party 'Hierarchy' (GD 2013; see also Golden Dawn 2012c). In the new party headquarters, closer to Athens city centre, one finds evidence that speaks of the true organisational profile of the party and the nature of the duties 'political soldiers' may be asked to perform: crash helmets, anti-riot shields and stacks of rocks.[6]

Although radical right parties often find themselves on the defensive for adhering to the *Führerprinzip* (e.g. Mudde 2007, p. 260), GD members consider this 'leadership

principle' to be one of the main strengths of the party. 'We abide by the "leadership principle." This is one of the party's strengths, not weaknesses' (Lagos 2013). This principle has been extensively analysed in the unofficial party statutes reported in the Greek press but is not explicitly mentioned in the official party statutes. The unofficial document commands 'faith in the leader' who is the embodiment of the movement, 'untouchable', 'invulnerable' and 'above electoral processes' (Psarras 2013). Indeed, the authority of Michaloliakos within the party seems to go well beyond what the official party statutes already grant him. Whereas the statutes specify that new cells can be established with a decision by the central committee, 'everything comes down to the decisions of the leader. *We* have a leader' (Michos 2013). Similarly, while the statutes outline an elaborate process for the recruitment of new members, Michaloliakos seems to have a major role here as well: 'For someone to become a member there is a process. One of us undertakes the responsibility to recommend a new member to the leader' (Michos 2013). The towering presence of Michaloliakos in the party may explain why the regional and local organisations as well as the youth, women's and green movements the party set up after 2012 are not granted any official role in decision-making processes.

Voter Profile and Electoral Geography

In a number of ways, GD seems to draw support from an electorate similar to that of radical right parties (see also Ellinas 2013, pp. 554–556). Firstly, in line with observations elsewhere in Western Europe (e.g. Givens 2004; Georgiadou 2008, pp. 480–482), there is a clear gender gap in the GD electorate. The militant style and extremist ideology of the party seems to deter female voters, who are clearly under-represented in the pool of GD voters (Table 1). Secondly, younger voters are over-represented, a trend that seemed to be reinforced in the May 2014 elections. By contrast, older voters are clearly under-represented, although the party is making inroads among 45–54-year-olds. Thirdly, GD is over-represented among voters with education to secondary level. This largely matches findings elsewhere in Western Europe (e.g. Betz & Immerfall 1998; Ignazi 2003) and reflects the image that, until recently, party MPs sought to project – that they are 'ordinary' people without high educational or occupational status.[7] The recruitment of better-educated and more professionally established candidates for the European election has not changed the educational profile of its voters. Fourthly, GD seems to be relatively over-represented among those most exposed to market conditions, like employers and the self-employed, private sector employees and the unemployed. In the European election the party seems to have made further inroads among university students, but it continued to have difficulty attracting pensioners and housewives.

The electoral geography of GD vote shows that the party managed to improve voter support across the vast majority of Greek municipalities. Its voter share increased by more than one per cent of the national vote in 78.6 per cent or 813 of the 1,034 municipalities and decreased by more than one per cent in only 16 (or 1.55 per cent of the municipalities).[8] As shown in Figure 1, the party managed to make significant

Table 1 Gender, Age, Education and Occupation of GD Voters (per cent)

	6 May 2012	17 June 2012	25 May 2014
Actual result	6.97	6.92	9.39
Gender			
Male	8	10	11.6
Female	6	4	7.0
Age (years)			
18–24	14	13	18.0
25–34	12	16	11.4
35–44	11	11	12.3
45–54	7	7	11.6
55–64	5	4	9.2
65-	3	2	4.5
Educational level			
Lower	4	3	6.9
Middle	9	9	11.5
Higher	6	6	7.8
Occupation			
Employers/self-employed	9	11	13.1
Public sector employees	8	6	7.0
Private sector employees	8	11	11.5
Unemployed	10	12	12.9
Pensioners	4	3	6.8
Housewives	7	3	7.1
University students	12	7	18.2

Sources: Public Issue polls for May 2012 election ($N = 4.607$; data collected between February and May 2012); for June 2012 election ($N = 5.862$; data collected between May and June 2012); for May 2014 European election ($N = 6.270$, data collected between March and May 2014) (Public Issue 2012a; 2012b; 2014).

inroads in municipalities located on the country's northern borders – in the prefectures of Kilkis, Pella and Kastoria – as well as in municipalities in the central Macedonia prefectures of Imathia and Pieria. The party has continued to perform particularly well in the Peloponnese, especially in the prefecture of Laconia, where it extended its electoral support to 15.45 per cent of the vote compared with 10.87 per cent in June 2012. Although the party generally outperforms its national average in urban centres like Athens, Piraeus and Thessaloniki, it does even better in some semi-urban areas, like Attica, and in non-urban areas. As Table 2 indicates, GD receives over-proportionate support in the urban constituencies in which a few years earlier the radical right LAOS (Λαϊκός Ορθόδοξος Συναγερμός – Popular Orthodox Rally) was also electorally stronger than its national average, but also in non-urban constituencies in which LAOS underperformed. Interestingly, GD has managed to mobilise non-urban constituencies in areas that in 1977 voted for the National Camp (Εθνική Παράταξη, NC) – a far right party that had split from ND (Kolovos 2005). Two years after its initial national breakthrough and despite the criminal investigation against its leadership, GD seems to have established a loyal voter base. According to opinion and exit polls, around three-quarters of GD voters in the European election

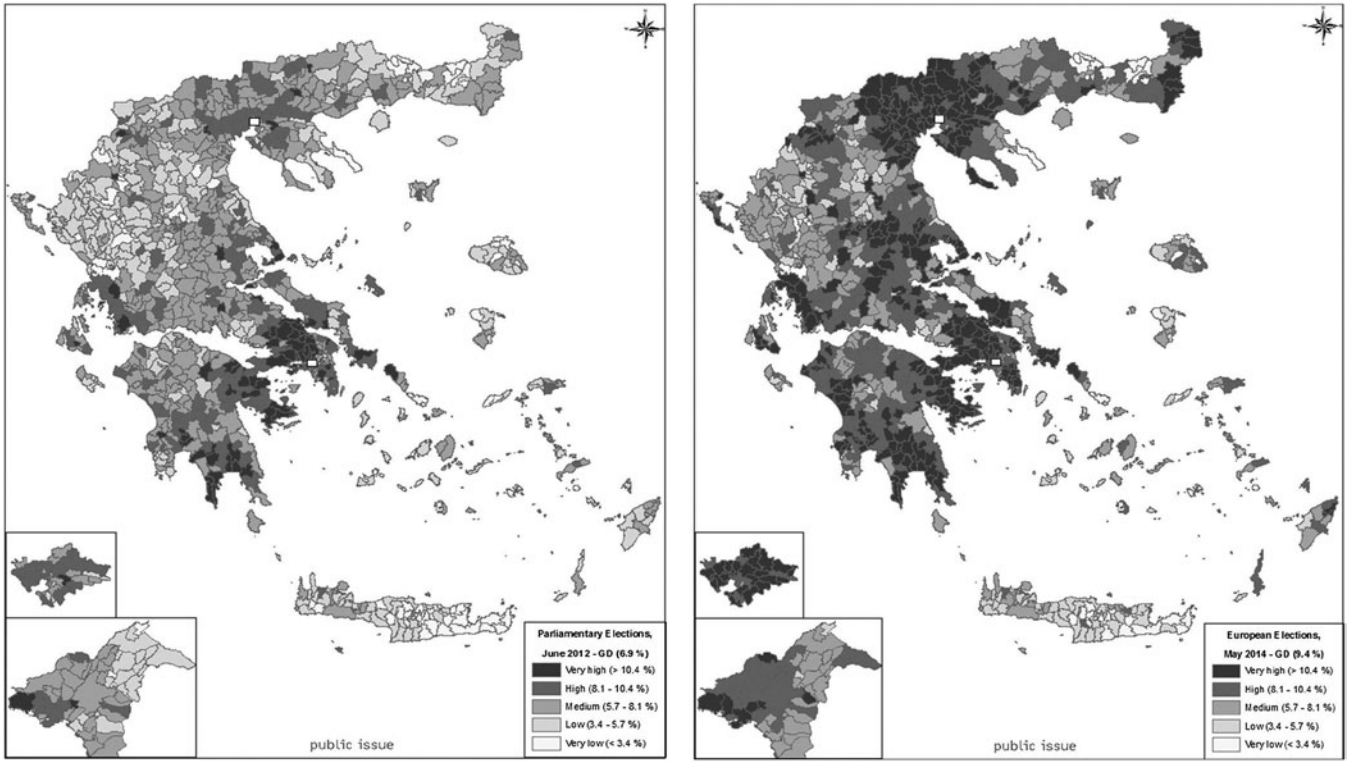

Figure 1 Golden Dawn, Electoral Geography: Parliamentary Elections 2012 and European Elections 2014 (vote share per Kapodistrian municipality)
Source: Public Issue.

Table 2 Best Electoral Prefectures for the GD in 2014 European Election Compared with Results of the GD, LAOS and National Camp in 2012, 2009, 2007 and 1977 National Elections

	GD, 2014	GD, 2012J	GD, 2012M	LAOS, 2009	LAOS, 2007	National Camp, 1977
Overall	9.39	6.92	6.97	5.63	3.80	6.82
Laconia	15.5	10.9	10.2	5.6	3.2	16.2
Kilkis	13.0	7.8	8.2	6.4	4.3	11.4
Pella	12.8	7.4	7.6	5.5	4.3	7.4
Kastoria	12.7	7.6	7.6	4.5	3.3	13.5
Thessaloniki B	12.4	7.8	7.9	7.5	5.4	5.3
Imathia	12.4	7.9	7.7	6.2	4.6	4.2
Attica	12.2	10.0	9.7	8.2	5.8	5.5
Pieria	11.5	7.0	6.7	5.3	3.6	5.6
Pireaus B	11.4	9.3	9.5	7.6	5.5	3.0
Corinth	11.2	10.0	12.0	5.3	3.6	6.2

Source: Ministry of Interior; for 1977, Ministry of Interior; ekloges.gr.

state that they also voted for the party in 2012 (Metron Analysis 2014; Public Issue 2014). The party drew a significant portion of its new voters from the centre-right ND as well as from the populist-right Independent Greeks (Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες, IG). The appeal of GD is much lower among voters of leftist parties.

Understanding the Persistence of GD

An attempt to understand GD's persistence in the 2014 elections must naturally begin with the magnitude of the economic adjustment Greece has been facing. Throughout Europe, radical right parties have had mixed results in the past few years. They remain marginal in Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Cyprus, countries that are also undergoing painful economic adjustment (Mudde 2013). Arguably, though, the severity of the economic adjustment is greater in Greece than in the rest of Europe or the Eurozone. Greece has been through six consecutive years of contraction during which it has lost around 25 per cent of its gross domestic product and witnessed the rise of unemployment to nearly 27 per cent. The rare duration and magnitude of the crisis have given rise to speculation about the 'Weimarisation' of Greece. Viewed through the lens of the severe economic crisis, the rise of extreme political phenomena like GD can be seen as a response to the unparalleled economic environment.

The recent history of the radical right provides some, albeit imperfect, evidence in support of the expectation that major economic crises provide a fertile ground for the rise in political extremism. In France and Austria, for example, the rise of the National Front and the Freedom Party coincided with the major economic adjustment the countries faced in the 1980s. In Germany, Republikaner had a number of breakthroughs in state elections in the early 1990s, when Germans were trying to cope with the economic and social adjustment associated with reunification. Apart

from these examples, aggregate evidence from 16 countries suggests that higher rates of unemployment correlate with higher levels of support for radical right parties (Jackman & Volpert 1996). This is especially the case when unemployment coincides with high levels of immigration (e.g. Lubbers, Gijsberts, & Scheepers 2002; Golder 2003), since radical right parties tend to associate immigration with unemployment. Evidence drawn at the individual level also shows that the unemployed are often over-represented in the pool of radical right voters (e.g. Mayer 1998).

With regard to GD, there is some evidence suggesting a link between economic conditions and voter support. In both the 2012 and 2014 elections, support for GD was higher among the unemployed than among the rest of the population. In the European election, 12.9 per cent of the unemployed were reported to have voted for GD compared with 9.4 per cent of the overall population. According to pre-electoral surveys, GD supporters are also more likely to be facing economic difficulties. Among those who state they are facing economic difficulty, GD supporters make up 11.5 per cent compared with 5.2 per cent of those who state that they are comfortably off or that they can get by (Public Issue 2014). The survey evidence, though, is mixed. Golden Dawn supporters are not necessarily lower-income people or the socio-economically marginalised as earlier theorising on the radical right would predict (Betz 1994). They tend to consider themselves as belonging to higher social strata. Among those who consider themselves to be 'upper or urban' class, 14.8 per cent stated that they vote for GD. Among the 'middle or upper class' support for GD is at 17.1 per cent and among the 'middle class' it is 10.7 per cent. The 'middle or lower' and the 'lower' classes are under-represented among GD supporters: 9.2 per cent and nine per cent, respectively. The GD is also over-represented among those who state that they have witnessed a degradation of class status – an indication of relative, rather than absolute, deprivation of GD voters.

Economic crises do not occur in a political vacuum and any attempt to understand the rise and persistence of extremism must also take into account the political context. To better appreciate the GD phenomenon, it is necessary to take into consideration the basic characteristics and the evolving nature of Greek political institutions. Long thought to be in crisis (e.g. Veremis & Tsoukas 2011), this system became associated with high levels of fusion among political and economic elites immersed in clientelist networks and corrupt practices (e.g. Lyrintzis 1984, 1987; Featherstone 1990; Sotiropoulos 1996; Pappas 1999). Clientelism and corruption have deeper historical antecedents (e.g. Papakostas 2001) but became particularly prevalent in the 1980s due to the 'populist' turn in Greek politics. Populist politics helped create a bloated state 'bent on handing out political rents to practically every member of society' (Pappas 2013, p. 33). The pathological attributes of the system were well captured by repeated surveys, which showed that Greeks distrust their political institutions and actors more than most other Western Europeans do (e.g. Norris 2011, pp. 70–77). Such high levels of distrust would not have been as problematic if the system had provided alterative mechanisms of political participation outside parties' clientelist networks. Yet, the overweening presence of political parties and the weakness of civil society

(e.g. Paraskevopoulos 2001) left few other venues through which citizens could channel their frustration with the system.

The cracks in the system were evident prior to the economic crisis, for example, with the shooting to death of a 15-year-old boy by the police in December 2008 (Verney 2012, pp. 198–200). The shooting led to riots of 'unprecedented magnitude' (Andronikidou & Kovras 2012, p. 707) that started in Athens and spread to other Greek cities. The violent nature of these riots, which included the uncontrolled and unpunished looting of public and private property, is thought to have changed the already loaded repertoire of public protest, reinforcing the acceptance of violent political behaviour (Papasarantopoulos 2012, pp. 75–90, 219–234, 2014; Fragoudaki 2013, pp. 192–198). The violent turn in political behaviour preceded the onset of the economic crisis and seems to have been associated with deeper structural problems in the Greek political system. The riots crystallised the broader frustration with the pathologies of the Greek polity and the failure of the Greek political establishment to reform itself (Economides & Monastiriotis 2009). Not surprisingly, as economic conditions rapidly deteriorated, mainstream political actors themselves became targets of this increased political radicalisation. Political violence was partly directed against politicians, who were verbally or physically assaulted hundreds of times in 2011 alone. A survey showed that 49.6 per cent of those asked approved of public assaults against parliamentarians (Papasarantopoulos 2012, p. 75).

In this respect, the economic crisis only helped exacerbate the existing pathologies of the Greek political system, exposing its chronic failures. Both outside observers and ordinary Greeks saw the crisis as 'the result, in significant part, of inherited state failure' (Featherstone 2011, p. 211) brought about by clientelist, corrupt and populist practices. The toll of the crisis on the legitimacy of the political system is shown in international surveys, which indicate the rapid deterioration of public trust in political institutions from the already low pre-crisis levels (Ellinas & Lamprianou 2014). For example, those 'not trusting at all' Greek politicians increased from 18.2 per cent in 2009 to 50.2 per cent in 2011 and total mistrust of parliament increased from 15.6 per cent to 58.3 per cent (European Social Survey, rounds 4 and 5). In both cases, the 2011 figures were the highest among all countries included in the survey, including Eastern European countries, where political trust is traditionally low.

The economic crisis also exposed the failure of the Greek state to deal with immigration, providing opportunities for political agents to capitalise on pre-existing anti-immigration sentiments (Fragoudaki 2013). In the late 1980s, when migration patterns in Greece had just started to change due to developments in Eastern Europe, Greeks were largely positive about or indifferent to the presence of foreigners (Triandafyllidou & Mikrakis 1995). But in the next decade, when large immigration flows started capturing media attention, attitudes turned negative – in fact, they were among the most negative in Europe. It was then only a matter of time before the exposed weaknesses of the Greek state and the dire condition of the economy became associated with the immigration issue. Politicians were blamed for years of failed immigration policies, and especially for ineffective border controls that allowed

hundreds of thousands of undocumented migrants from Asia and Africa to use Greece as a point of permanent entry to the European Union. Immigrants were blamed for alarming changes to the demographics of major urban centres as well as for rising crime and unemployment rates. Although Greeks already displayed high levels of xenophobia, after the crisis anti-foreigner attitudes reached new levels. Among those asked in 2009 to what extent people of different race or ethnic group should be allowed to 'come and live here', 20.2 per cent stated 'allow none'. By 2011 the absolute rejection of further immigration reached 37 per cent – again, the highest among countries participating in the European Social Survey (ESS) (rounds 4 and 5).

The pathological attributes and chronic failures of the political system generated 'demand' for right-wing radicalism but the rise and subsequent persistence of GD cannot be fully understood without a consideration of external and internal 'supply' factors (Mudde 2007). The GD's entry to the electoral market was made possible by the strategic miscalculation of the radical right party LAOS. The initial opening occurred during the 2010 local elections when LAOS did not field independent candidates for the Athenian municipality, giving Michaloliakos the opportunity to win the GD's first seat on the Athenian municipal council (Georgiadou 2014). Despite GD's local breakthrough, until late 2011 LAOS seemed well positioned to capitalise on anti-immigration and anti-system attitudes. Despite its support of the bail-out agreement, LAOS polled nine per cent in December 2011 (Mavris & Symeonides 2012). The party's subsequent electoral collapse seems to be related to its participation in the Lucas Papademos coalition government (Verney & Bosco 2013, pp. 408–412) and to growing competition from other parties like IG. Having polled around one per cent throughout 2011, GD witnessed a surge in support after LAOS's participation in the Papademos coalition and the signing of the second bail-out agreement (Mavris 2013). Capitalising on the strategic miscalculation of LAOS, GD was able to achieve its first national electoral breakthrough in 2012 (Ellinas 2013, pp. 557–559).

Since passing this initial 'threshold of relevance' (Sartori 2005, pp. 107–110; Ellinas 2007, p. 366), GD has largely relied on its own organisational efforts to sustain and extend its electoral support in the 2014 elections. Unlike LAOS, which was, to some extent, a media-induced phenomenon relying on the visibility and media resources of its leader George Karatzaferis (Ellinas 2010; Psarras 2010; Tsiras 2012), GD invested in building grassroots support to make up for its lack of conventional communication resources (see Dinas et al. 2013). The emphasis the party placed on local activism accounts for the sudden growth of its local cells after the 2012 electoral breakthrough. In some ways mirroring the organisational evolution of the BNP (Goodwin 2011, pp. 77–88), this network had grown to 51 local organisations by September 2013 and, despite the organisational shock caused by the imprisonment of its leadership, increased to 61 local cells by June 2014.

The organisational expansion of the party facilitated the mobilisation of new voters but also helped reinforce GD's anti-immigration and anti-system profile. 'The medium of political mobilisation itself is a message conveying the party's objectives' (Kitschelt & McGann 1995, p. 71) and, using its local cells, GD managed to align its

grassroots activity with its programmatic messages. In the run-up to the 2010 local election, GD's organisational activity involved the expansion of local cells and the establishment or infiltration of local networks. For example, GD managed to set up a stronghold in certain Athenian districts by establishing links with 'citizen groups' involved in vigilante-style activities against foreigners (Georgiadou 2013, p. 89; Human Rights Watch 2012). In the district of Agios Panteleimon, GD gained notoriety for its 'cleansing' operations and the alleged involvement of its members in violent action against foreigners (Psarras 2012). This type of activism reinforced the anti-immigration profile of the party but also signalled its anti-systemic message. Through its neighbourhood-level anti-immigration activism, GD claimed success in an area where the political establishment was perceived to have failed: providing a sense of security for its citizens.

In addition to its vigilante-type activism against immigrants, GD extended its repertoire of local activism in late 2011 to include social work – again, signalling an attempt to address problems the political establishment was perceived to have failed to resolve. The establishment of the 'Solidarity for Greeks Movement' in 2012 marked a shift to social activism similar to that undertaken by extremists in Germany (Art 2011, p. 205) and reminiscent of the 'Rights for Whites' campaign of the BNP in the 1990s and, more recently, of community-based activism in places like Burnley and Oldham (Copsey 2004, pp. 55–60; Goodwin 2011, pp. 46–47, 71–75). The GD's social activism was an attempt to legitimise the party and neutralise its 'neo-Nazi' stigma by embedding GD activists within local communities. The various grassroots activities of the local cells simultaneously served as a mechanism to further de-legitimise the political system by exposing its social failures. Claiming to return part of its public funding to Greeks, GD tried to improve its 'social' image while highlighting the inadequacies of the Greek welfare state.

Analysis of the 143 events planned by the Nikaia local organisation between 2011 and 2013 shows that, initially, the turn towards social activities was very narrowly focused on the delivery of food and clothes to individual families. After the June 2012 election, though, GD organised broader-scale social events like food, clothing and blood drives 'for Greeks only'.[9] When it first started, GD's social activism seemed to be a circumstantial occurrence, largely amplified by the media (Psarras 2012). But by 2013 it seemed to be systematically organised across a number of local branches. 'Our activists go door to door collecting food from suppliers and households and we distribute it whenever we have enough' (Michos 2013). In December 2012 the party started setting up medical centres under a programme called 'Greek doctors' and it planned to establish childcare centres (Lagos 2013). One of the social activities of GD that has attracted media attention has been its 'Jobs for Greeks' – a programme through which it 'convinces' employers to replace their foreign employees with Greeks. In Evia, the local leader and MP, Nicos Michos, claims that his team has found jobs for nearly 200 Greeks. 'We visit local factories with our employment team, headed by Yiannis. He asks businessmen to hire Greeks from a list that we give them. Another tactic is with regards to foreigners. We know they employ foreigners and we ask them

to get rid of them and hire Greeks' (Michos 2013). The Harley-Davidson-driving, broad-shouldered Michos claims that he persuades the employers by simply telling them that they are selling Greek products to Greek consumers, and that they should therefore hire Greeks.

After the criminal prosecution of party MPs and functionaries in October 2013 and the assassination of two of its members, the organisational activity of GD slowed down. But by the May 2014 elections the party had managed to reactivate most of its local cells and, as discussed earlier, establish new ones. In the months since the autumn 2013 events, the party seems to have shifted its organisational efforts. The social activity seems to have been reduced, perhaps due to the suspension of state funding by the Greek parliament in December 2013. Much of the organisational effort is now concentrated on overcoming the communication obstacles GD has been facing since October 2013. The dissemination of information to potential supporters seems to have become a central component of its organisational activity (see Georgiadou 2014). Dozens of entries on the party website show GD members marching on busy streets and handing out the party newspaper *Golden Dawn* as well as other party material to random passers-by. Part of this organisational effort focuses on stressing the 'persecution' of the GD leadership by the 'Samaras junta' (Samaras being the Greek prime minister at the time of writing) and on the dissemination of pamphlets highlighting the 'injustice' done to GD by the political establishment.

In addition to its local organisational activity, GD has tried to overcome its lack of easy access to a national audience through online activism. The advent of technology has decreased the cost of disseminating information to national audiences and has provided new opportunities for extremists to establish direct contact with supporters (Mudde 2007, p. 259; Ellinas 2010, pp. 216–217). In recent years, GD has required many of its younger members to be active online. 'For some time now, we have invested a lot on the internet' (Lagos 2013). The main party website serves as a nationalist news portal commenting on more than a dozen news stories per day and covering all central party activities, some with video and almost all with photos. Regional and local organisations seem to follow the same model, publicising everything they do online. Even a small-scale pamphlet-dissemination exercise by a handful of activists is posted online with pictures of the black-T-shirted, boot-wearing and flag-bearing participants. The GD has also set up a TV programme that is broadcast via the internet a few times a week.

Conclusion

The electoral success of GD constitutes an anomaly in Western Europe. Evidence from the fate of extremist right-wing parties like the British BNP and the German NPD suggests that neo-Nazi parties like GD are electorally doomed. The protracted economic crisis in Greece can go some way in explaining this anomaly. To better understand GD's success, though, it is important to consider the interaction of economic and political factors. The economic crisis has helped highlight and exacerbate the chronic

malfunctioning of Greek political institutions and the lack of alternative mechanisms for the effective aggregation of political preferences. The pathologies of the system, which have yielded high levels of public distrust, dissatisfaction and alienation, may explain why the criminal prosecution of the party leadership has not undermined GD support. Instead of deterring voters from supporting GD, the criminal investigation has been used by the party as evidence of its anti-systemic profile. To reinforce this anti-systemic message, GD has relied on violent local activism against immigrants and on controversial social activism. Through this local activism the party helps mobilise support by claiming to solve problems that the political system has failed to address. The autumn 2013 events temporarily arrested the party's organisational expansion but by the 2014 elections GD was able to establish new local cells and to resume most of its local organisational activity. Although a lot is still unknown about the way the party organizes itself, its organisational infrastructure may help explain its persistence in the 2014 elections.

A lot of work still needs to be done to fully understand the electoral ascendance of neo-Nazism in Greece. This work would benefit from a more careful re-examination of the political developmental factors explaining why such a violent and authoritarian political party seems to have taken root in an established democracy. In light of the Greek experience, one might ask whether a neo-Nazi party would have gained so much public support in a different European political system, in which people are traditionally more trusting and supportive of their political institutions. Such an analysis would need to take into account the existence of similarly successful extremist parties in post-communist Hungary (Jobbik) and Ukraine (Svoboda). Like GD, both Jobbik and Svoboda have been associated with neo-Nazism, paramilitary activity and extreme nationalism. Both parties seem to thrive by mobilising voter support against the political establishment and against certain segments of society – the Roma in the case of Jobbik and the Russian minority in the case of Svoboda (Karácsony & Róna 2011; Nagy, Boros, & Vasali 2013; Shekhovtsov 2011). What kind of political developmental processes explain why societies with such different historical trajectories end up with similar extremist political parties? A possible answer may be provided by an investigation into the political developmental factors that affect how people are integrated into the political system. Systems in which this integration is primarily based on instrumental or otherwise thin links between people and polities may be more prone to generate authoritarian and violent forms of extremism. An analysis along these lines requires the development of new theoretical tools to understand how political developmental trajectories affect political cultures and institutions. Such tools may help one understand the varieties of extremism one finds across Europe and the relative propensity of European societies to turn to very extreme forms of political representation.

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Notes

1. Comments made on Kontra TV; 'Michaloliakos Likens Antetokounmpo to Chimp', *Sentragoal*, 3 July 2013, available online at: http://tinyurl.com/nu6nah3
2. Comments on www.makeleio.gr on 26 October 2012, available online at: http://tinyurl.com/p7cnvlp
3. Greek Parliament (2012), Minutes of the plenary session, 18 October, p. 59.
4. Interestingly, anti-immigrant violence seems to have subsided since the authorities took legal action against the party leadership.
5. Interview with Elias Kasidiaris, Star TV, 26 May 2014, available online at: http://tinyurl.com/mol5pan
6. Visited by author on July 2013.
7. 'Barbarousis: I Am Not a Nazi, Not a College-Boy, but a Genuine Greek', *Iefimerida*, 20 May 2012, available online at: http://tinyurl.com/lw7ezyb
8. Data provided by Public Issue.
9. Author's analysis of hundreds of announcements issued by the Nikaia local organisation between July 2011 and July 2013. The Nikaia local organisation was founded in March 2011 and started reporting its activities on its website in July 2011.

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