

A stylized world map composed of a grid of dots in various shades of gray, with several dots highlighted in red. The map is centered behind the title text.

Golden Dawn and Its Appeal to Greek Youth

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- One of the most salient developments of the crisis in Greece was the remarkable electoral success and entry into the Greek parliament of a formerly marginal political formation, namely the neo-Nazi party »Golden Dawn«. This enabled it to foster an extreme xenophobic, racist and authoritarian discourse focused on anti-immigrant scapegoating and the clear rejection of the democratic political system established in Greece in 1974.
- Young people seem to support »Golden Dawn« more than other age groups. They feel attracted by »Golden Dawn's« right-wing ideology and share the party's racist stance vis-à-vis immigrants and other groups. In this sense the economic crisis has acted as a »catalyst«, contributing to the rise of young people's support for »Golden Dawn«. In addition, young people's general lack of historical knowledge helps to increase their votes for the Greek neo-Nazi party.
- In order to deal with this phenomenon successfully, action has to be taken on various levels. This includes education in school, the design and implementation of youth policies and the role of the media and their impact on public discourse.





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Introduction

The economic and social crisis that Greece has been experiencing since 2010 has deeply affected both society and the political system. The crisis, together with the complete failure to tackle it effectively, has brought to the surface, magnified and accelerated extensive and profound socio-political processes that had been developing over the previous one or two decades and were related principally to the depoliticisation of the Greek people, especially young people, who felt alienated from mainstream politics and politicians (General Secretariat for Youth 2000; General Secretariat for Youth 2005). These processes were crystallised in the two successive national elections of 2012, the local and European elections of 2014 and the recent national elections of 2015 and have led to an extensive restructuring of the Greek political system.

These elections took place in a climate of harsh political conflict caused by successive waves of austerity and recession that had already led to a sharp rise in unemployment and adversely affected the living conditions of large parts of the population. The current crisis has had a profound impact on people's everyday lives: unemployment, poverty, an increase in homelessness rates and the number of those without access to basic social services, healthcare and social security rights. These conditions triggered a series of socio-political developments that have strongly challenged the balance of power within the Greek political system, which had been dominant for the past four decades, as reflected in successive and alternating governments led by the socialist (PASOK) and the conservative party (New Democracy).

One of the most salient developments is the remarkable electoral success and entry into the Greek parliament of a formerly marginal political formation, namely the neo-Nazi party »Golden Dawn«, thus enabling it to foster an extreme xenophobic, racist and authoritarian discourse focused on anti-immigrant scapegoating and the clear rejection of what is now Greece's third democratic political system, established in 1974. »Golden Dawn«'s impressive electoral leap forwards in 2012, as well as its constantly rising influence – according to subsequent opinion polls and elections – particularly among young people, has attracted the attention and concern of both the media and the public,

given the party's penchant for extremist discourse and violent activism. As a consequence, the main questions regarding the relations between »Golden Dawn« and young people are the following: Do young Greeks really support »Golden Dawn« and how can this be proved? What are the reasons for »Golden Dawn«'s appeal to young people? What has been proposed to deal with this phenomenon?

1. History of the Golden Dawn Party

»Golden Dawn« started to become a major political force in 2010 when it managed to elect a town councillor in Athens, but mainly from 2012 and its successful electoral gains in the national elections. However, »Golden Dawn« is not a new phenomenon. Its history goes back to 1980 (Psarras 2012: 11–96). Furthermore, the group's leader, Nicos Michaloliakos, became very active among right-wing extremists as early as the period of the restoration of democracy in 1974. In 1976, Nicos Michaloliakos and other right-wing extremists and supporters nostalgic for the recently overthrown military regime attacked some journalists at the funeral of a recently murdered police officer, who had been dismissed from the force, who was condemned as a torturer during the Junta. In addition, Nicos Michaloliakos was arrested as a member of a fascist terrorist group accused of bomb attacks in the summer of 1978 and imprisoned for about a year.

Almost a year after his release, in December 1980, Nicos Michaloliakos launched the periodical »Golden Dawn«, which evolved into a party organisation and has come to dominate neo-Nazi extremism in Greece. This publication was directly connected with »national-socialist« ideology and has become one of the most important and influential tools for propagating neo-Nazi ideology, especially among young people. From the very beginning »Golden Dawn« has been a neo-Nazi or indeed a plain Nazi group, attacking leftists and people of different ethnicities. Especially during the 1990s, after the collapse of Albania's communist regime and the arrival of Albanian immigrants in Greece, »Golden Dawn«'s influence increased. Another crucial development that contributed to »Golden Dawn«'s rising influence was the so-called »Macedonian issue«. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia and when the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) claimed the name »Macedonia«, there was a huge

reaction in Greece and rallies were organised in almost all major Greek cities. »Golden Dawn« found a unique opportunity to penetrate these rallies but also schools, trying to propagate its nationalist and extremist ideology. During that period many young people were influenced and recruited by »Golden Dawn«.

In 1994 »Golden Dawn« participated for the first time in the elections to the European Parliament, although unsuccessfully, gaining only 0.11 per cent of the votes (7,242 votes). Two years later the party's participation in the national elections of 1996 had even worse results, with the party receiving only 0.07 per cent (4,487 votes). In the following years »Golden Dawn« as a party either collaborated with other political parties or participated in coalitions of similar ideology, but not independently until the 2009 European and national elections, when it attracted 0.46 per cent and 0.29 per cent of the votes, respectively.

However, regardless of its electoral participation and democratic mantle it should be underlined that during these years »Golden Dawn« never stopped its grassroots mobilisation and its attacks against ideological opponents, workers, school or university students and immigrants. From the very beginning »Golden Dawn« organised militarised groups consisting mainly of young males and never abandoned this kind of activism. To understand the formation and rise of »Golden Dawn« one needs to go back in history and study the emergence of fascist groups and ideologies in the interwar period, as well as the collaboration of several Greek national-socialist groups with the German authorities during Greece's occupation in the Second World War and, of course, the following civil war and the military regime of 1967–1974 (Marketos 2006; Kousouris, 2014: 33–81).

»Golden Dawn«'s power and electoral success erupted at the peak of the economic crisis in 2012, but the first signs were obvious earlier in the 2010 local elections when the party gained 5.29 per cent of the votes; in some areas of Athens it even achieved 8.38 per cent. As a consequence, any explanation that tries to connect the rise of »Golden Dawn« with the crisis in a linear and deterministic way seems to be superficial; the crisis was not the single cause, but rather a pretext, and one needs to seek the deeper reasons behind the party's success, especially its appeal to young people.

2. The Party's Interest in Young People

Fascist movements historically have had a special relationship with young people. As repeatedly stressed by academic research, they have put great emphasis both on controlling mass youth organisations and institutions and on integrating young people into their militant groups. Youth is an absolute value for fascism and it becomes a symbol of the »new«, of national rejuvenation and of the nation's rebirth that the future nationalist revolution will bring. It is the symbol of a creative force and of the omnipotence of the forces of life; it is worshiped through images, hymns and music (Richard, 1999: 244) and the fascist state seeks to control and manipulate it (Paxton, 2004: 123, 137–39).

»Golden Dawn« seems to have faithfully pursued this socio-historical course as it loudly declares that it is a political movement of Greek youth and of Greek workers (Karakostas 2014). Its members are mainly young people, students, scholars, farmers, artists, employees but also the unemployed.¹ Of particular importance are the arguments used by »Golden Dawn« to explain why young people are the social group most likely to struggle for a national revolution. First, young men and women are considered to have inexhaustible resources in terms of energy, courage, fighting spirit, reaction and resistance. Moreover, they have nothing to lose, because they are building their future. In addition, they constitute, together with the workers, the part of the people which has remained untainted by the poison of the post-1974 political system; or, at least, it has been minimally alienated. For all these reasons they are considered to be the vanguard of the national revolution process. Thus, »Golden Dawn« has put great emphasis on its relationship with young people, carefully planning and organising the diffusion of its political ideology in social milieus in which young people are found in high numbers. Football fan clubs, gyms, secondary schools and music-based youth cultures, as well as the internet and social media have been key sites in which the party has sought to forge its ideological and political bonds with sections of Greek youth.

Music in particular has a special place in neo-Nazi culture. It is perceived and understood within a militant-activist framework that privileges political propaganda and networking; that is, which favours expressive, communicative or participatory uses of music over aesthetic or recreational ones. It has no intrinsic value and becomes meaningful only as a means of recruiting young people and propagating fascist and racist ideology, that is, within the framework of propaganda. »Golden Dawn« is no exception to this paradigm. In fact, the development of the Greek White Power music scene can be attributed to »Golden Dawn«. Building upon the marginalised in Greece skinhead culture, »Golden Dawn« adopted a strategy from the British far right/neo-Nazi parties and organisations of the late 1970s and 1980s that aimed at reaching young people through youth music subcultures (Koronaïou, Lagos and Sakellariou, forthcoming 2015). »Golden Dawn« is a driving force that encourages and supports the growth of the White Power music scene in Greece, especially at the youth festivals the party organises, which are another form of activism focusing on young people. These are usually celebrated in autumn and culminate in concerts of White Power music.

The formation in late 1990s of the party's youth division (Youth Front)² and the issuing of its magazine *Antepithesi* (Counterattack) were »Golden Dawn«'s first moves in its attempt to reach a wider youth audience that had become more susceptible to the nationalist discourses that dominated the Greek public sphere in the 1990s. As already mentioned, this was a crucial period for »Golden Dawn«'s development, a period during which nationalist and xenophobic discourses were established in the Greek public sphere following the first mass immigration to Greece and FYROM's claim of »Macedonia« as its official name in the early 1990s. As one of the party's main ideological instructors explained in 1999, »Youth Front was formed as an attempt to exploit politically and ideologically the already very positive climate that existed in a large part of young people. From the first moment we thought that penetrating these circles would become much easier if we used those sectors

1. This description is easily found on the party's official website: <http://www.xryshaygh.com/index.php/kinima/neolaia> (in Greek, accessed on 21.5.2015).

2. The youth division belongs to the party, but the structure and management of the group are not known publicly. Until 2012 it was said that the leader of the youth division was current MP Ilias Kasidiaris, but this is unofficial information that is not available on their website.

in which youth is massively present, such as music and football stadiums.» (Mastoras 1999) ³

Recently, »Golden Dawn« has sought to attract young people by organising »history« courses for children, given on the party's premises.⁴ It is interesting that in some of the photos on the party's official website, small children are pictured giving the neo-Nazi salute during these history lessons. The emphasis is on ancient glory and the military victories of ancient Greeks, in particular the militaristic and oligarchic ancient Sparta or the Revolution of 1821, which resulted in liberation from Ottoman rule and the formation of an independent Greek state in 1830. As far as recent Greek history is concerned, particular emphasis is put on condemning so-called »Bolshevik atrocities« during the civil war, as well as attempts to put a positive spin on the dictatorships of 1936–1941 and 1967–1974.

Concerns about the interest shown by a section of young people in »Golden Dawn« rhetoric and practice escalated when the party's influence became evident in the education system, particularly in secondary schools. School students appeared to openly express their support for »Golden Dawn«, displaying the party's symbols (including swastikas and the Nazi salute), intimidating and attacking political opponents, teachers and classmates of non-Greek origin, and recruiting fellow students. The situation quickly evolved into fierce antagonism and conflict between groups supporting »Golden Dawn« and anti-fascist groups formed in reaction to the party's aggressive presence in schools. Despite the party's denial that it systematically recruits young people in schools, »Golden Dawn«'s political activities attract young people from all age groups. One need only call to mind the formation of the Antifascist Education Front, on one hand, and the Nationalist Front of School Teachers, made up of »Golden Dawn« members, on the other, to get a good idea of the presence of »Golden Dawn« within the school environment.

3. »Το Μέτωπο Νεολαίας δημιουργήθηκε ως μια προσπάθεια να εκμεταλλευτούμε πολιτικά και ιδεολογικά το ήδη πολύ θετικό κλίμα που υπάρχει σε αρκετά μεγάλο μέρος της νεολαίας μας. Από την πρώτη στιγμή κρίναμε ότι η διείσδυση σε αυτούς τους κύκλους θα γινόταν πολύ πιο εύκολη, εάν χρησιμοποιούσαμε εκείνους τους τομείς που η νεολαία δίνει το μαζικό παρών, όπως π.χ. η μουσική και τα γήπεδα«.

4. According to their official website they have 59 offices (local organisations) in various cities around Greece and three abroad (New York, Montreal and Melbourne).

Furthermore, groups of »Golden Dawn« supporters – especially young men – take part in various camps. At these camps, they practice military training, including shooting, gymnastics, long-distance running, wrestling, boxing, basic self-defence and winter survival skills. The party and its youth division repeatedly argue that »Golden Dawn« represents the hope of Greek youth, while the corrupted parties of both the left and the right belong only to the older generation. The leading role of youth is clearly recognised in some texts on the youth division's website. There, it is declared that Greek youth is the source of the power of the popular nationalist movement and that the movement is the expression of the power of Greek youth, as well as that nationalist youth is the pioneer of the solidarity activities of »Golden Dawn« (Karakostas 2013a; Karakostas 2013b). »Golden Dawn« repeatedly emphasises the importance of such youth support and argues that the party is »the power to come«, the rising star in the political spectrum. According to »Golden Dawn«'s official discourse, future elections will represent intergenerational battle, with the majority of Greek youth taking the side of »Golden Dawn«.

3. Young People's Support for Golden Dawn: Voting and Participation

The crucial question is whether and to what extent young people indeed support »Golden Dawn« and, of course, how this support is expressed. Even though in some studies it was mentioned that young people have already supported other extreme-right political parties – for example, the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) – in previous elections (2002) (Marvakis et al. 2013:19), it should be underlined that the youth vote for »Golden Dawn« was extremely high and far outstripped that for LAOS.

According to the exit polls, electoral support for »Golden Dawn« in the double elections of 2012 was higher among young people than among the population as a whole. The youth vote for »Golden Dawn« ranged from 10 to 14 per cent (depending on the different May/June exit polls) in the age group 18–24 and from 13 to 16 per cent in the age group 25–34. In one of these exit polls, »Golden Dawn« was the second party among young people of 18–24 years of age, with 13 per cent, and in the same position together with the conservative party (New Democracy) in the age group 25–34, with 16 per cent (Table 1). ⁵

5. Unfortunately, no socio-demographic data are available at this point regarding the young voters of »Golden Dawn« (employment, gender, social class background, educational background).

Table 1: June 2012 national election exit poll by age group (%)

Age group	SYRIZA/ Left coalition	New Democracy/ Conservatives	Golden Dawn	DIMAR/ Democratic Left	KKE/The Greek Communist Party	ANEL/ Independent Greeks
18-24	37	11	13	10	5	7
25-34	33	16	16	5	4	10
35-44	32	21	11	7	4	10
45-54	34	24	7	7	5	8
55-64	27	33	4	6	5	7
65+	13	48	2	5	4	5

Source: *Public Issue 2012*

In the two years following 2012 youth support for »Golden Dawn« remained high despite the accusations the party faced. This was crystallised in the European elections of 2014 when »Golden Dawn« became the third political power in the country, after SYRIZA (26.6 per cent) and New Democracy (22.7 per cent), capturing

9.4 per cent of the votes and electing two members of the European Parliament. It emerged from the exit poll analyses that young people had voted for »Golden Dawn« in high numbers, especially in the 18–24 age category (Table 2) ⁶.

Table 2: 2014 European Elections exit poll by age group (%)

Age group	SYRIZA/ Left coalition	New Democracy/ Conservatives	Golden Dawn	ELIA/ Socialist-Centre coalition	KKE/The Greek Communist Party	ANEL/ Independent Greeks
18-24	39.5	10.5	21.2	2.6	2.6	5.3
25-34	25.5	17.3	10.2	5.1	7.1	9.2
35-44	34.8	13.9	13.9	2.5	5.1	10.1
45-54	32.2	12.9	10.5	4.3	6.3	7.4
55-64	27.5	20.9	9.9	8.3	7.5	5.9
65+	18.5	37.9	5.1	14.5	4.6	4.6

Source: *VPRC 2014*

6. The results of the latest elections in January 2015 were as follows: SYRIZA: 36.44 per cent, New Democracy: 27.81 per cent, Golden Dawn: 6.28 per cent, To Potami: 6.05 per cent, the Communist Party KKE: 5.47 per cent, Independent Greeks: 4.75 per cent, PASOK: 4.68 per cent.

Table 3: January 2015 national elections exit poll by age group (%)

Age group	SYRIZA/ Left coalition	New Democracy/ Conservatives	Golden Dawn	To Potami	KKE/The Greek Communist Party	ANEL/ Independent Greeks
18-24	35	25.3	8.4	5.2	7.5	5.3
25-34	33.6	27.3	7.9	5.9	5.0	4.2
35-54	39.1	24.4	6.8	7.5	4.8	5.3
55+	34.5	32.8	4.4	4.6	6.1	4.1

Source: Metron Analysis 2015

In all the elections it has fought so far »Golden Dawn« has managed to attract more votes among young people than the party's national percentage (Table 4).

Table 4: »Golden Dawn's« electoral percentages (national level)

National elections 2012 (June)	European elections 2014	National elections 2015
6.9	9.4	6.3

Source: Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction

Apart from these exit polls, there have been few studies – for example, sociological – about young people's support for »Golden Dawn« and, as a consequence one cannot easily come to a final conclusion. Nevertheless, in one of the few studies (MYPLACE)⁷ about young people and their socio-political participation the above mentioned numbers were verified. From a sample of 1,207 respondents in a survey on young people's activism, values, attitudes, ideas and voting, »Golden Dawn« was the second choice among them during the elections of 2012, after the left coalition (SYRIZA) and way ahead of the conservatives (New Democracy) (Table 5).

Table 5: Youth support to GD according to the MYPLACE survey (1207 interviewees)

Age group	SYRIZA/ Left coalition	Golden Dawn	New Democracy/ Conservatives	KKE/The Greek Communist Party	ANEL/ Independent Greeks	DIMAR/ Democratic Left
18-24	32.7	16.7	11.2	9.2	7.9	5

7. MYPLACE is the acronym of Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement, an fp-7 research project (2011–2015). In Greece the project's partner was Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences. The leader of the Greek team was Professor A. Koronaoui and the participant researchers were A. Sakellariou, E. Lagos, I. Chiotaki-Poulou and S. Kymionis. The project included a statistical survey of 1,207 participants in Athens, 60 semi-structured interviews, three ethnographic case studies (Golden Dawn, the Greek Indignant Movement and Young Greek Evangelicals) and a study of historical memory (intergenerational interviews and focus groups). For more information on the project, its structure, goals and outcomes, see www.fp7-myplace.eu

3.1 Ideological Support for »Golden Dawn«

All the above statistics show clear support among young people for »Golden Dawn«. Data from some media coverage of young people's participation in »Golden Dawn« activities and from a small number of interviews conducted during the MYPLACE research shed light on the reasons behind young people's support of the party.⁸

These qualitative interviews gave young people the opportunity to express their views and ideas and to explain the reasons behind their support for »Golden Dawn«. It is interesting to underline that almost all the respondents, when asked to comment on »Golden Dawn«'s ideology, denied that it is a fascist or pro-Nazi party. They claimed that they are »nationalists« and they feel very proud of this, arguing that »Golden Dawn« is a nationalist, patriotic party and movement.

Young people expressed their pride about their nationalist ideals, which are related to a belief in the superiority of the Greek nation. However, this is not a superiority based on biology, but primarily a superiority based on history and culture. As one of them stated, »it is clear that we are superior to other peoples, we were civilized when the others were living in the trees«.⁹ Other respondents also added that the Greeks are superior because they were the first in poetry, in science, in trade; and that history shows that Greeks gave everything to the whole world, but are left with nothing, arguing for example that »the Germans were still hunting pigs with slings when the Greeks were organising the Olympic Games«¹⁰.

For some young people, the primary reason they became a member of »Golden Dawn« was their love of their country and nation, as well as their pride in their race. To this they add that »Golden Dawn« is a way of life

and that the party represents and expresses in the best way the ideology of nationalism which is directly related to ethos, principles and values, social, psychological and spiritual (Michalarou 2012). According to such views, »Golden Dawn« is an idea; it's about Hellenism, Greek history and, above all, the Greek race (Kordali 2012).

Another point of interest and a reason for supporting »Golden Dawn« is immigration. They agree, to a greater or lesser extent, with »Golden Dawn«'s hostility towards immigrants living in Greece. The main reason for this hostility is the view that the immigrants are responsible for the rise in criminality. One respondent described herself as a racist:

»I have been forced over recent years to become a racist. They have forced me to become a racist because it can't be right that I'm afraid to move around in the country where I was born and in the neighborhoods where I grew up.«¹¹

The vast majority of respondents when asked about violence against immigrants responded by referring to the criminality and violence perpetrated by immigrants against Greeks, arguing that the attacks against immigrants are fewer in number than those of immigrants against Greeks. In their view these immigrants have no culture and are barbarians. It is argued that it is impossible to have even a proper discussion with them because they will take a knife and attack you; that is why Greeks should take up the knife first.

Another reason for supporting »Golden Dawn« is a rejection of the political system and hostility towards traditional parties. All shared the view that the current political system should be rejected; as one respondent put it, »the political system is a stupid democracy. I don't believe in democracy«.¹² The political system is also considered responsible for the crisis because »politicians have made so many mistakes and they have not been punished at all«.¹³ For young supporters of »Golden Dawn«, the party's violence is embedded in an authoritarian vision of the new Greece that will

8. The case study of »Golden Dawn« included a full content analysis of the party's official website and the website of the youth division and, additionally, 10 semi-structured interviews with »Golden Dawn« voters (eight males and two females, from 21 to 28 years of age; seven of them were unemployed, and eight of them had a degree either from university or a private college). More information about this particular research carried out by the MYPLACE project on »Golden Dawn« can be found at [http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/documents/D7_1/Cluster%201%20Right%20Wing%20and%20Patriotic%20movements/MYPLACE_WP7.1REPORT_PUA_Golden%20Dawn%20\(Greece\).pdf](http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/documents/D7_1/Cluster%201%20Right%20Wing%20and%20Patriotic%20movements/MYPLACE_WP7.1REPORT_PUA_Golden%20Dawn%20(Greece).pdf)

9. »Είναι ξεκάθαρο ότι είμαστε ανώτεροι από άλλους λαούς, εμείς είχαμε πολιτισμό όταν οι άλλοι ζούσαν ακόμα στα δέντρα«.

10. »Οι Γερμανοί κυνηγούσαν ακόμα γουρούνια με σφεντόνες, όταν οι Έλληνες οργάνωναν Ολυμπιακούς Αγώνες«.

11. »Τα τελευταία χρόνια έχω αναγκαστεί να γίνω ρατσίστρια. Με έχουν αναγκάσει να γίνω ρατσίστρια, γιατί δεν γίνεται να φοβάμαι να κυκλοφορήσω στη χώρα που γεννήθηκα και στις γειτονιές που μεγάλωσα«.

be built in the future. Thus, praising past authoritarian regimes in Greece, advocating the violent suppression of opponents and imagining a regime of absolute power are very common in the respondents' discourse.

3.2 Participation in Party Activities

In addition to their discursive beliefs, young people participate in various party activities. According to the party's youth division website, young people are quite active. They assemble once a week at their offices and listen to speeches about contemporary or historical themes, for example, about the Ottoman Occupation and the revolution of 1821 against the Turks or the Byzantine Empire. They participate in propaganda activities such as the distribution of party leaflets or writing slogans on walls at night. They also participate in summer youth camps and youth festivals organised every autumn, as well as in commemorations, for example, of the battle of Thermopylae against the Persians in 480 BC, the fall of Constantinople in 1453 or the 1996 crisis with Turkey about the Imia islands in the Aegean Sea.

Food donations are by far the most appreciated and praised activity of »Golden Dawn«. As one person said, »of course I would participate, not only in a »Golden Dawn« activity, but in any activity of a group of Greeks helping Greeks«. ¹⁵ One young woman argues that she participates in such activities whenever she is asked to do it and that the party offers this work and proves its humanity in action.

Young »Golden Dawn« supporters have an affinity with its ideology and values. Rejection of all other political parties and the political system, hostility towards and scapegoating of immigrants, acceptance of the superiority of Greeks, an ambiguous assessment of political violence and an attribution of positive meaning to the term »nationalism« may all be factors that explain why »Golden Dawn« has remained the third most popular political party, despite being accused of being a criminal organisation.

12. »Το πολιτικό σύστημα είναι μια ηλίθια δημοκρατία, δεν πιστεύω στη δημοκρατία«.

13. »Οι πολιτικοί έχουν κάνει τόσα πολλά λάθη και δεν έχουν τιμωρηθεί καθόλου«.

4. In Search of a Theoretical Explanation

4.1 The Economic Crisis

One explanation often presented is the effects of the economic crisis. The argument is that, from the moment the crisis began to influence large parts of the population, especially young people, with the unemployment rate rising above 60 per cent in the 16–25 age group, this led them into the arms of »Golden Dawn«. Although young people have indeed been hard hit by the crisis this is probably an insufficient explanation; the crisis is probably not the deep underlying cause of support, even though some exit polls seem to suggest the opposite (Georgiadou 2013: 93). The crisis explanation does not answer the reasonable question of why those hit by the austerity measures selected »Golden Dawn« rather than other anti-austerity parties such as the Left Coalition (SYRIZA), the Communist Party (KKE) or the Independent Greeks (ANEL).

4.2 Immigration

Another explanation usually offered is immigration. This seems to be better founded because it takes into account that »Golden Dawn« started to gain young people's support in 2010 in the local elections in Athens, at a time when the crisis was not so deeply entrenched in Greek society. Indeed, the flow of immigrants who had been entering Greece since the 1990s and the complete lack of immigration policies created serious problems in many regions of Greece, particularly in some areas of Athens. Again, however, it seems that immigration was just a pretext for young people's support of »Golden Dawn«. Furthermore, data since the 1990s – for example, from the Eurobarometer (1997) – clearly show an anti-immigrant attitude among Greeks.

4.3 Ideological Closeness

A third explanation of young people's support is that »Golden Dawn« offers them a sense of belonging and this is very important, especially for young males, a higher proportion of whom voted for »Golden Dawn«

14. »Φυσικά και θα συμμετείχα, όχι μόνο σε δράση της Χρυσής Αυγής, αλλά σε κάθε δράση μιας ομάδας Ελλήνων που βοηθάνε Έλληνες«.

in the last elections than females (8.5 per cent vs 3.8 per cent). From its very first days »Golden Dawn«, like other neo-Nazi movements in other European countries, tried to attract young people by offering them the feeling that they belonged to a group of peers, with similar views and ideology and participating in common activities. This is a more sociological explanation that is related to social movement and social network theories and is closer to reality. Nevertheless, it still does not fully explain why »Golden Dawn«, which has existed as a youth group since the 1980s and 1990s, has managed to gain such popularity only recently.

Some additional reasons for young people's support of »Golden Dawn« are based on the ideological closeness between the party and young people. One of the most interesting findings of the quantitative part of the MYPLACE study was that 81.6 per cent of the young people who said that they voted for »Golden Dawn« felt close to the party. This was the highest percentage among all the other parties, higher even than in relation to the Communist Party, New Democracy and SYRIZA. This implies that these voters probably feel close to the ideology, views and practices of »Golden Dawn« and that the party expresses their own views and values. »Golden Dawn« voters also ranked first with regard to a series of questions in the MYPLACE survey concerning national identity. For example they ranked first among all interviewees on the question »How proud are you to have this [Greek] citizenship?«, with 90.8 per cent. Additionally, they achieved the highest scores when asked: »Some people say that the following are very important to be considered a true Greek. Others say that they are not important. How important do you think each of them is?«

- Have at least one Greek parent (78.9 per cent);
- Be able to speak Greek (84.2 per cent).«

These numbers prove the strong national feelings of »Golden Dawn« voters. These were accompanied by some other evidence regarding attitudes towards other minority groups, in which case they also scored the highest percentages. For example, they replied that minority groups such as Albanians, Roma, Muslims and Jews are not making a positive contribution to society and that some of them may never be fully incorporated in Greek society. In addition, they ranked first in arguing that:

- violence can be justified to support your ethnic/ racial group (23.6 per cent); and that
- migrants should not have the same rights to welfare as Greek people (48 per cent).

Furthermore, »Golden Dawn« supporters were in favour of having a strong leader, who is not constrained by parliament, as a way of governing the country; they had the highest numbers against the democratic multiparty system; they thought it would be good to have the army ruling the country; and that violence is justifiable to sustain a government. All these views lead to the conclusion that the identity of »Golden Dawn's« young supporters includes strong racist, xenophobic and authoritarian ideas and opinions. Young supporters of »Golden Dawn« seem to have strong ideological bonds with the party in the areas of nationalism, racism and authoritarianism. At this point it should be underlined that such views and ideas are not new in Greek society (Eurobarometer 1997; EUMC 2005).

4.4 Lack of Historical Knowledge

But if ideological proximity explains youth support for »Golden Dawn«, at least to some extent, how was this ideological formation produced in the first place? Intergenerational »memory« plays a crucial role because families usually pass on their ideas to the next generation. Schools play an equally important role. As mentioned by young people in the MYPLACE research, history is very important and everyone should study history, but they honestly admitted that they lack historical knowledge and that the school system and school curriculum are unable to fill this gap. They argued that they only learn about the glorious Greek past and just a few things about Greece's and Europe's modern history (for example, the Greek civil war, the Holocaust, fascism and so on). These attitudes were crystallised also in the MYPLACE survey where, despite the fact that the majority professed an interest in history, 7.7 per cent of them said that they are not interested at all, while 34.7 per cent were only slightly interested. In addition, 8 per cent of respondents said that the Holocaust was »not at all important« for Greece's history, while 14 per cent said that it was »not that important«; and 4.1 per cent said that fascism was »not important« for Greece's history and 6 per cent »not that important«. As a consequence, historical knowledge or the lack of it is another fundamental parameter that

should probably be taken seriously into consideration when discussing the causes of young people's support for neo-Nazi or authoritarian and racist ideologies.

5. Dealing with Right-wing Extremism

After presenting and analysing the existing findings and framing the problem the critical question is what can be done to tackle the appeal of neo-Nazi and racist ideologies and practices among young people. Four key issues could be addressed here:

- (i) the economic crisis and especially youth unemployment;
- (ii) the engagement of young people in shaping their own future;
- (iii) the role of education (especially the teaching of history);
- (iv) public discourse (confronting racist and xenophobic speech).


The first – but not necessarily the most important – action needed is to tackle the economic crisis, on two levels. On one hand, the problem of youth unemployment is severe and needs special attention, because young people are becoming more and more marginalised and feel that they do not have a future. On the other hand, the economic crisis influences young people's families as well; if the living standards of families are improved this will have an impact on children's and young people's living conditions and well-being. However, as already mentioned, the crisis is probably only one explanation of young people's appeal to »Golden Dawn« and this means that further measures are necessary to prevent such ideologies from becoming stronger and more dominant among Greek youth.

The second action that could be taken is related to the first one, but has to do with the way politicians and policymakers treat young people. Policies need to be elaborated and implemented that will seriously take into account what young people have to say and involve them in the design and implementation of youth policies. In various studies young people express their disappointment that politicians and policymakers do not

pay attention to their problems (educational, social and psychological) and that their voices are not heard. They feel alienated from mainstream politics and even though they are not apolitical and apathetic they express their hostility towards politicians, because, in their view, they are not interested in young people. A national policy on youth, which at the moment is completely absent, should be planned and implemented, including, for example, the re-purposing of local youth councils and cooperation of the General Secretariat for Youth and the Ministry of Education with a wide spectrum of youth groups and organisations, not only with the youth divisions of political parties.

The role of education and especially of history and memory are crucial. Young people themselves accept that they lack historical knowledge and thus their knowledge of some of the following historical periods and facts needs to be enriched and strengthened: the rise of fascism and Nazism in Europe and their role in Greece; the Holocaust; and the role of the dictatorships in Greece. This is likely to help them to confront ideas such as the »financial miracle« of the military regime of 1967–1974 or the argument that during that period people felt safe – in other words, they were not threatened by immigrant criminality; or the idea that the Metaxas regime (1936–1941) was not as oppressive as has been said, achieved many social goals and in the end fought Italian Fascism and German Nazism. Education, both formal and informal, should be the main tool in such an effort. In order for this to take place new school curriculums and new books are probably needed, but also additional educational programmes, both for young people and for adults, dealing with these issues (for example, lifelong learning programmes). In recent years there have been many initiatives in this area, but more efforts are needed in order to have a positive outcome, such as the launch of short educational publications for children and young people, education packs and seminars for adults, journalists and the broader public.

Finally, attention needs to be paid to the public discourse of institutions and agents such as the media and the Church. The reproduction of prejudices and stereotypes about, for example, immigrants, Islam, Jews and homosexuals create a fertile ground for the cultivation of racist and xenophobic views and ideas that could easily lead people into the arms of »Golden Dawn«, which presents itself as the genuine representative of



such ideologies. As a consequence, the Church and the media could play a critical role in the fight against extremism, racism and Nazism, not only through the exclusion of such voices, but also through the cultivation of tolerance.

6. Concluding Remarks

As we have said, the main reasons for »Golden Dawn's« appeal to young people are the economic crisis, immigration and lack of historical knowledge, but also closeness to »Golden Dawn's« ideology. The latter in particular has to be addressed seriously in order to confront »Golden Dawn's« infiltration of Greek youth and society in general.

We should also realise that young people are not a »problem« and should not be treated as such. The main problem is the ideology »Golden Dawn« expresses and propagates and this is what we should focus on. For that purpose, special attention needs to be paid to the lack of historical knowledge, particularly among young people. Furthermore, we need to develop possible ways of engaging young people in the design and implementation of youth policies, making a serious effort to make their voices heard by politicians and policymakers.

Finally, we should pay special attention to the public discourse of the media or other public agents (politicians, the Church) and try to eliminate racist and xenophobic ideas from the public sphere or at least marginalise them. This is clearly a long-term strategy, which calls for patience and persistence in order to reap the benefits, but probably it is the only strategy capable of dealing with such a multifaceted phenomenon.



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