

**The extreme far-right in Greece:
the case of Golden Dawn**

*Anna Zaptsi**

1. INTRODUCTION.

One of the most notorious outcomes of the wrenching Greek economic and humanitarian crisis was the emergence of a formerly marginal political formation, namely the ultranationalist, far-right political party Golden Dawn (GD). The party rose to popularity in 2010 with its unprecedented election of a municipal councillor during the Athens Mayoral Election. Its successful electoral results in 2012 general elections, that converted it into the most successful right-wing parties of European extremism and consequently, placed the cradle of democracy firmly on the map of countries with a quite powerful hostile far-right constituency. This organization has attracted both the public and academic attention and concern, given its extremist populist discourse and violent activities. Nevertheless, in the latest 2019 Greek general elections, Golden Dawn failed to enter the parliament putting an end to its further successful electoral penetration at the Greek politics.

The purpose of this article is to examine the factors that led to GD's meteoric rise and to unveil the reasons of its poorer overall performance in the 2019 Greek elections. Additionally, this paper will argue to classify GD as a criminal and pro-Nazi political organization provoking severe impacts on Greek and European sociopolitical issues. Taking into consideration that it is the most radical right-wing party in Europe, and it had also received an incredible influx of votes, the Greek party Golden Dawn was selected, therefore, making this study designed as a single-case one.

* Psicóloga, psicoterapeuta sistémica y doctora en Comunicación Audiovisual por la Universidad de Sevilla, España.

This paper is divided into four sections. Part one, will concentrate on Golden Dawn, examining its history, ideology, and its organization's structure. Part two, will analyze the conditions that favored the rise of the party, and the way GD itself took advantage of these conditions. Furthermore, it will offer a portrait of rightwing extremist voters, including their socio-demographic profiles, political ideologies, and political affiliations. Part three, will focus on the reasons that led to Golden Dawn's downfall. Finally, part four, will conclude with a discussion about the understanding of this phenomenon and will provide proposals for future investigations.

2. GOLDEN DAWN'S HISTORY.

Golden Dawn is not a new phenomenon strictly related to the rise of right- parties ideology worldwide upon economic crises and high immigration rates. Its history goes back to late 1970s. In the summer of 1978, the founder, leader and general secretary of GD, Nikos Michaloliakos, along with other right-wing extremists and supporters of the recently overthrown military regime (1967-1974¹), were arrested and imprisoned for possession of explosives (Psarras, 2012). In December 1980, shortly after his release, Nikos Michaloliakos, under a direct order from the imprisoned leader of the Greek junta, George Papadopoulos, began laying the foundations of Golden Dawn. At first, he launched a magazine closely aligned with National Socialist beliefs, and, five years later, he founded The Popular Association–Golden Dawn (Greek: Λαϊκός Σύνδεσμος–Χρυσή Αυγή).

Golden Dawn was registered as a political party in 1993, and one year later, in the eve of the European elections, acquired its legal status as a party. In the following years, the organization was absorbed into the right-wing Patriotic Alliance until Michaloliakos severed those links in 2007 and GD became the primary focus of far-right politics in Greece (Psarras, 2012; Hasapopoulos, 2013). The organization, momentarily, set its goals into entering mainstream politics and thereupon made two course organization changes. First, it cut off its ties with paganism and embraced the Greek Orthodox background and second, started to include terms as patriotism and nationalism to defend its ideology, leaving behind its affiliation to National Socialism (Psarras, 2012). In that

¹ The Greek military junta or the Regime of the Colonels, was a series of far-right military juntas that ruled Greece from the coup by a group of colonels on 21 April 1967 until 24 July 1974. Those seven years were characterized by limited freedom, fear, oppression, and police brutality since political and citizens opponents were brutally tortured and imprisoned (Kornetis, 2006; Karakatsanis & Swarts, 2018).

moment, an opportunity appeared; the extension of its network beyond Greek frontiers.

During the 1980s, Golden Dawn reached out to the neo-Nazi *Círculo Español de Amigos de Europa* (CEDADE)², the French GRECE ethno-nationalist think tank (*Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne— Research and Study Group for European Civilization*) and the Italian far-right (De Benoist & Champetier, 2012). Its effort to expand abroad, continued in 2012, when GD achieved an electoral success. It was then that it decided to enter into a coalition with the newborn Cypriot National People's Front (*Ethniko Laiko Metopo—ELAM*) and in addition, developed contacts with Ukrainian nationalists. Surprisingly, the leader of the French National Front, Marine Le Pen, denied any kind of relation with Golden Dawn (Willsher, 2014).

Golden Dawn was, also, linked to the Spanish far right. Sergio Concepción and Cristian Amaya, members of the youth wing of the populist far right Platform for Catalonia (*Plataforma per Catalunya—PxC*) and Alberto Sánchez and Alejandro Fernández, leaders of the even more extreme Tramontane House (*Casal Tramuntana*), met with Michaloliakos inside GD's headquarters in January 2013 (Cazorla, 2013; Radio Bubble, 2013).

In the same time that Golden Dawn was strengthening its partnerships outside Greece, it also shifted its focus of attention on major nationalist issues. Over the years, GD became actively involved in actions of Greek ultranationalism such as its non-pacific participations during the massive demonstrations against the recognition of Fyrom (as a result of the Macedonia naming dispute) in 1993, the crisis between Greece and Turkey over Imia (a pair of small uninhabited islets in the Aegean Sea, situated between the Greek island chain of Dodecanese and the southwestern mainland costs of Turkey) in 1996 and the rallies upon the matter of removal of religion and nationality from the Greek Citizens' Identity cards in 2000 (Danforth, 1995; Raftopoulos, 2000; Frangoudaki, 2013).

² Founded in Barcelona, Spain (1966-1993), CEDADE inspired Golden Dawn in its beginnings based on the classics of fascist intellectuals such as Adolf Hitler and Julius Evola (Psarras, 2012).

2.1. Ideology and rhetoric of the organization.

Over the years, Golden Dawn has been known for its extreme xenophobic, racist and authoritarian discourse focused on anti-immigrant scapegoating and the clear rejection of the current Third Hellenic Republic. Its magazine and website run articles praising the Nazis and often place photographs of Hitler, Himmler, and Nazi gatherings on its front cover. Golden Dawn's precise coordinates within Nazi ideology is exhibited through its swastika-like emblem (meander) and the Nazi-like salute its leader has publicly performed on various occasions.

In respect of the party's self- presentation and language, GD openly avows its support for Greek ultranationalism, aspiring to make their Fatherland a great national state again, a Hellas that will belong solely to pure Hellenes. By the same token, proclaiming nativism and racial supremacy, GD advocates the expulsion of immigrants, regardless of their legal situation —particularly Muslims— from the country because not only they will become the majority in Greece but, also, they already equal high unemployment, clearly showing its antisemitism and anti- immigration policies. Moreover, it is opposed to communism, remains critical of economic globalization and it rigorously demands direct democracy being loyal to right-wing populism. Furthermore, Golden Dawn considers that Greece should withdraw its membership from European Union, due to undermining national sovereignty (Ellinas, 2013; Mavrikos-Adamou, 2017).

Considering all that was mentioned above, the link between Golden Dawn, Fascism and Nazism seems self- evident. On one side, GD's agenda goes along with Fascism, because they both stand against communism, Marxism and bourgeois democracy (Breuilly, 1993). Its ultimate aim is the national rebirth though the empowerment of the nation. On the other side, the organization has a similar social base to Nazi principles due to its obsession with the people of the nation (volk), its emphasis on nationalism and its objective to terminate with the other political divisions (Griffin, 1991). Nazism might be a variation of fascism seeking to cleanse the nation from domestic and foreign rivals but its final goal, like Fascism and Golden Dawn case's, is totalitarianism (Mann, 2004). A prominent member of the social-democratic political party of PASOK, Andreas Loverdos, compared the Golden Dawn to a "Greek Hezbollah" because they are active in major issues and capable of building trust among Greek citizens (ToBHMA Team, 2013).

2.2. Organizational structure and violence of the Golden Dawn.

Golden Dawn is a rigorously structured, strictly hierarchical introvert organization with very strong leadership. Since its foundation, it has had the same party leader and his authority is absolute and remains unquestioned (Mudde, 2007; Ellinas, 2010). GD's members and supporters are revolving around the party's leader orders to which they respond by respect, obedience, discipline and the appropriate attitude wearing combat boots, marching like soldiers do and screaming the organization's motto "blood, honor, Golden Dawn". The key to its organizational structures is militarism which it also explains its ties to army officials and paramilitary forces. Furthermore, the organization establishes direct contact with its supporters through its website and its TV program broadcasted online. To this day, the party's financial backers and advisers remain shrouded in secrecy.

Throughout its troubled early history, Golden Dawn was known more for its engagement in violent incidents, than for its electoral activity. As a matter of fact, that became obvious from the first time that GD obtained successful electoral results. Overwhelmed by their surprising results on the May 2012 elections, GD members ordered Greek and foreign journalists to pay respect by standing up the moment that Michaloliakos was to enter in the press room (Dinas, Georgiadou, Konstantinidis & Rori, 2013).

Topics like immigration and crime and the correlations between the two, soon became central within GD circles. Two of the first documented attacks occurred in the decade of 1990. The first one, in 1991, when GD started attacking the first Albanian immigrants while others participated in the Srebrenica massacre. And the second one, took place in 1998, when the deputy chairman of GD, Antonios Androutsopoulos, severely injured a left-wing student. However, this was not considered to be the last in a long series of violent acts perpetrated by party members (Psarras, 2010). The concentration of immigrants in Athens and in the district of Attica provoked a new series of criminal assaults against radical left-wing groups, immigrants and homosexuals (Kousoumvriss, 2004; Ellinas, 2013; Lowen, 2015).

3. THE CHRONICLE OF GOLDEN DAWN'S APPEARANCE AND ITS RISE.

Before its electoral success in the municipal Athenian elections, GD was rather weakly organized with a limited membership lacking in conventional communication resources (Dinas et al., 2013). All this changed, when, during

the run-up to the municipal Athenian elections of November 2010, Golden Dawn opted to strengthen its political efforts in the Greek capital and invested in building grass roots in the area, a technique copied from the German neo-Nazi National Democratic Party. Thus, it created its own stronghold in ethnically diverse neighborhoods, like the fourth and sixth districts in downtown Athens, namely the neighborhood of Agios Panteleimonas, where a huge number of immigrants were also settled in. An opportunity shined on when GD achieved to intervene and took over half of 20 active rightwing organizations in that zone by equating immigrants with criminals (Georgiadou & Rori, 2013; Georgiadou, 2014; Rumbaut & Ewing, 2007).

GD's members using violence were intimidating immigrants in order to provide a sense of security for its citizens. On account of, the organization assumed the role of defenders and saviors of the nation by offering a welfare system and a provision of services (food distribution, vigilance, blood donations) exclusively to Greek citizens, especially to old people and to shop owners of the area. As a consequence, this fact reinforced GD's presence in the Greek politics and promote its anti- immigration profile (Georgiadou, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2012; Psarras, 2012).

Notwithstanding, the rapid ascendance of GD was an alarming sign of the times of a wider institutional pathology, based on a tense situation in the Greek domestic affairs. Firstly, due to the highly public disillusionment with the dysfunction of the democracy and its chronic failures, such as populist practices, the deeply rooted clientelism (Papakostas, 2001) and widespread corruption of past and current governments. Secondly, as a result of the austerity's measures imposed to Greece by Troika (International Monetary Fund, European Commission and European Central Bank) in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2007-08. All of the above, instantly created anti-politics sentiments since the majority of Greek citizens were undergoing changes affecting their everyday life in all kinds of aspects (Davou & Demertzis, 2013). These crisis effects provoked high levels of anxiety, rage, depression and distrust among them and set a new era for the Greek nation. In terms of Crouch (2004), a post-democratic society was looming on the horizon, where all the institutions of democracy were applied although in a limited way. This context was properly shown in the incompetence to form a new ordinary political government after the May 2012 Greek elections and the the call for two general elections within the same year. Thirdly, because the political and economic crisis, in which Greece was immersed, was getting deeper. The media were focused more than ever on the double immigrant criminality danger and the failure of state authorities to deal with it. Immigrants were depicted as responsible for the country's record rate of unemployment and for rising crime.

Meanwhile, Greek citizens were losing their trust in political institutions and anti-immigration sentiments began to increase up to the point that the economic crisis became associated with the immigration issue (Ellinas & Lamprianou, 2014; Fragoudaki, 2013). Fourthly, the nature of the voting system itself with a threshold of only 3%, favors the entry of small parties in parliament (Hix, 2004) and hence, led to the prompt rise of Golden Dawn, which took advantage of the gap of the right-wing in the political Greek spectrum. Finally, it was what the organization did that increased its popularity. The public was looking for a response to the economic, political and ideological crises and Golden Dawn offered it by adopting a political master frame, plausible solutions which stand in line with the political niche the economic crisis created (Anastasakis, 2002; Merkl & Weinberg, 2003; Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2015; Rydgren, 2007).

Table 1.
Evolution of Golden Dawn's electoral power (1994-2019)

Electoral year (Types of Election)	Electoral results		Seats
	Percent Won	Votes	
1994 European Parliament	0,11	7.264	
1996 National	0,07	4.487	
1999 European Parliament*	0,75	48.532	
2002 Municipal	0,30	1.059	
2004 European Parliament*	0,17	10.618	
2006 Municipal *	1,34	3.705	
2009 European Parliament	0,46	23.566	
2009 National	0,29	19.624	
2010 Municipal (Athens)	5,29	10.222	1
2012 National (May)	6,97	440.966	21
2012 National (June)	6,92	426.025	18
2014 Municipal (Athens)	16,12	35.949	4
2014 European Parliament	9,39	536.913	3
2015 National (January)	6,28	388.387	17
2015 National (September)	6,99	379.722	18
2019 European Parliament	4,87	275.734	2
2019 National	2,93	165.711	0

Source: Created by the author, based on Ministry of the Interior data,
<http://www.yypes.gr/en/Elections/>.

* As part of a coalition.

So, despite the fact that the Greek nation had experienced Nazi atrocities and a seven-year military junta, granted parliamentary representation to the

xenophobic and racist Golden Dawn, making it Greece's third biggest political force (Table 1).

3.1. Motives of Voters.

The desire for punishing the political elite of the country, the resentment with the harsh saving measures of Troika and the immigration issue are considered to be the most significant motives of Golden Dawn voters. By all means, it is probable that the choices of some of them were impelled by both of those motives. However, the influx of refugees has not proven to be a strong voting motive even though it exists very little evidence regarding a positive relationship between labor migration and vote shares for anti-immigrant parties in receiving countries (Barone, D'Ignazio, De Blasio & Naticchioni, 2016; Méndez & Cutillas, 2014).

As for their sociological and demographic profile (Table 2), we observe a clear gender gap since GD is mostly appealing to men, as well as, the over presentation of younger voters (25-44 years old). Golden Dawn's voters are, mainly, coming from low and intermediate level of education, they belong to the active labor force or the secondary sector or they are experiencing labor insecurity such as unemployed individuals and students. Studies suggest that higher rates of unemployment correlate with higher levels of support for radical right parties when it coincides with high levels of immigration (Jackman & Volpert, 1996; Lubbers, Gijsberts, & Scheepers, 2002). As for the youth voting for Golden Dawn, their motive is associated with the identification of their ideology with the nationalism and xenophobic rhetoric of the organization (Sakellariou, 2015). The police force has also been associated with voting GD because (a) the police officers just want to keep their jobs (Fisher, 2012), (b) as a result of the public hatred and distrust, or (c) because the Greek police is primarily authoritarian, a result from the time of the Greek dictatorship (Phillips, 2012). What is more, police forces are giving the 56% of their votes to Golden Dawn (Georgiadou, 2013). In terms of previous voter affiliation, the GD mostly attracted voters from people with authoritarian and economic liberalism profile, who, previously, were voting for the liberal-conservative political party of New Democracy (Maragkidou, 2019).

Table 2.
The profile of Golden Dawn's Voters (per cent)

	May-2012	June-2012	May-2014	January-September-2015
Actual Result	6,97	6,92	9,39	6,99
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	8	10	11,6	9
Female	6	4	7,0	4,8
<i>Age</i>				
18-24	14	13	18,0	13,3
25-34	12	16	11,4	8,4
35-44	11	11	12,3	10
45-54	7	7	11,6	8,8
55-64	5	4	9,2	4,8
65+	3	2	4,5	4,8
<i>Education level</i>				
Primary	4	3	6,9	5,6
Secondary	9	9	11,5	10,4
Tertiary	6	6	7,8	3,5
<i>Occupation</i>				
Employers				
/self- employed	9	11	13,1	9,7
Public				
sector employees	8	6	7,0	3,9
Private				
sector employees	8	11	11,5	8,3
Unemployed	10	12	11,5	10,6
Pensioners	4	3	6,8	5,4
Housewives	7	3	7,1	6,3
University				
students	12	7	18,2	10,4

Sources: Politico, Public Issue polls for May 2012 election (N=4.607; data collected between February and May 2012); for June 2012 election (N= 5.682; data collection between May and June 2012); for May 2014 European election (N= 6,270, data collected between March and May 2014); for September 2015 election (N= 3.020; data collected between January and September 2015).

4. THE CATALYST OF GOLDEN DAWN'S DOWNFALL.

Nonetheless, over the years, Golden Dawn started losing its luster. In 2012, GD's spokesperson and MP, Ilias Kasidiaris, brutally attack a Communist Party MP. Meanwhile, during 2011-2013, many unidentified physical assaults occurred against immigrants, refugees and homosexuals across Greece. International organizations have warned on various occasions about the connection of antforeigner violence in Greece with the activity of GD members or supporters (Human Rights Watch 2012; Council of Europe 2013).

What turned out to be a watershed, though, was the cold-blooded murder of a popular anti-fascist Greek rapper by an alleged GD affiliate in September 2013, which sent a chill through Greek society. Almost immediately, Greek authorities launched a series of investigations characterizing GD as "an organized criminal group". During the investigations, the police found fascist paraphernalia, unregistered machine guns and illegal munitions of all kinds in the homes of the arrested GD MPs. In addition, plenty of photos of high-ranking members posing with various machine guns were circulating on the Internet. The leader, the sub-leader, the spokesman and the press officer were arrested, and GD was linked to multiple offenses. In response, the Greek mass media deny any coverage of its political agenda. Currently, the GD is linked to and under trial for multiple offenses, among which murder, aggravated assault, trafficking, kidnapping, money-laundering and extortion (Psarras, 2013; Lowen, 2015; The Toc, 2014). Whereas, these developments caused a severe impact on GD, a big wave of international solidarity followed by Golden Dawn sympathizers around the world, demonstrating the existence of an international far-right network (Psarras, 2013). Nonetheless, Golden Dawn, in the latest Greek general elections celebrated in July 2019, failed to enter the parliament and at the same time, some MPs and members decided to abandon the organization putting in doubt the party's leadership.

Most importantly, the catalyst of its downfall, was proven to be the big wave of solidarity, compassion and empathy that the Greek citizens showed upon the unfolding tragedy of refugees (Afouxenidis et al., 2017), which produced a massive numbers of activism acts and anti-fascist movements in the whole country. While Golden Dawn is still on trial, two trustworthy and valid sources are providing thorough information about its development. The Golden Dawn Trial Observatory (goldendawnwatch.org), which through its attorneys transmits each case, creates an excellent reference file and makes the trial visible through the use of social media and also the jailgoldendawn.com platform that helps disseminating information about the Golden Dawn trial and

action. In the end, the refugee issue was completely different from, if not the exact opposite of, GD's original framing of the issue. A large part of society was brought together, and it succeeded to create a strong embrace against fascism.

5. UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON OF GOLDEN DAWN.

In order to comprehend Golden Dawn's far-right populist rhetoric and demagoguery, the context in which it takes shape, both the party itself and the polity, are of essential importance. Most studies upon far-right tend to ignore the political actor—the party. Instead, they have to take into consideration that nativism, authoritarianism and populism are, in fact, related to mainstream ideologies, mass attitudes and political apathy (Mudde, 2010; Ignazi, 2006).

A possible answer may be provided by investigations with new theoretical tools should include the political developmental factors that affect how people are integrated into the political system. Future researches have to take into account the varieties of extremism across Europe and the relative propensity of European societies to turn to very extreme forms of political representation. Additionally, they should revolve around the influence of social media, organizational infrastructure and the appeal of the parties' leaders and also, examine if the party's voters are conscious of what the electoral programs of the parties actually advocate.

On the other hand, the need to reintegrate key social groups back into the political mainstream and the empowerment of the middle class could put an end to the long tradition of corruption and clientelism of the existing and upcoming political parties. Moreover, it is essential to raise the public awareness. The education in schools and the design and implementation of youth policies should be a powerful factor for a better world far away from inhumane and violent organizations. As long as, the Greek education system promotes exclusion it will continue to offer opportunities for right-wing extremism (Fragoudaki & Dragona, 1997). This also includes the role of the media and their impact on, not only, the public discourse but also, on the tolerance of violence, most of all, on violent acts directed towards unprotected and excluded populations. It is our duty to comprehend that the state's long-term suppression led to the appearance of far-right organizations. But, whenever, anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiments are reinforced and legitimized, our society must be ready to respond with ethically and morally political institutions, in which people will be more trusting and supportive in order to achieve democratic, solidary and social justice societies.

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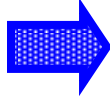
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