

CHAPTER V

GREEK FAR-RIGHT: THE FORMATION OF AN AUTONOMOUS POLITICAL SPACE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Thomas LAZARIDIS

PhD candidate, Department of Political Science, University of Crete-Greece

polp498@pol.soc.uoc.gr,

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.51331/EB09TL>

Introduction¹

The 1990s marked Greek politics and society with a series of events. In the political field, at the beginning of the decade, significant political conflicts erupted, linked to a major financial scandal in which the then Prime Minister and key government officials were allegedly involved. At the same time, international events following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the subsequent changes (e.g., in migration flows) directly affected political parties and the political system.

This instability had immediate consequences for Greek political parties as well as society. As in other European countries, in Greece too, significant levels of dissatisfaction and political cynicism also begin to emerge, while abstention rates start to concern the entire political establishment. Thus, this marked the beginning of a continuous period characterized by both a crisis of representation and a legitimacy crisis, which, with various fluctuations, spans at least a two-decade-long course. Among the multiple crises that arise, new political

1 The research work was supported by the Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation (HFRI) under the 3rd Call for HFRI PhD Fellowships (Fellowship Number: 5940).



parties emerge that differentiate themselves from the mainstream parties, with rhetoric focusing partly or entirely on critiquing the democratic model and the practices of Metapolitefsi², and gradually affecting the entire political landscape. A key player in this effort is Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos (LAOS-Popular Orthodox Rally), a radical far-right party that appears in the early 2000s and will play a decisive role in renewing conservatism and reshaping the party system.

In order to examine the above in detail, the following will be analysed: a) the trajectory of the broader right-wing space in the Metapolitefsi period, in an attempt to trace the multifaceted relationships that have developed between the Right and the far-right³. The post-war organisational model of the far-right sought to establish close ties with the Right, making this connection of crucial importance, b) the emergence of LAOS and the strategies it employs to break the far-right's long-standing dependence. In this context, the political opportunities leveraged by LAOS will be examined, along with the political platform it presents, which appear to persuade the electorate to place their trust in it. These include its ideology, the political personnel it gathers, and the communication strategies it adopts. At the same time, through its trajectory, to what extent has it built strongholds in electoral districts that consistently support similar parties and political agendas, allowing the far-right to stabilize within the political system for nearly 20 years? Finally, c) the strategies of the Right towards the far-right will be examined, with a reference to similar parties in the Balkan region.

The historical and political evolution of the Right in the post-Junta period (1974-1999)

The fall of the Regime of the Colonels (1967-1974) does not simply restore the democratic system, nor does it return the political and party system to its previous state. The post-authoritarian régime -the Metapolitefsi- will leave a decisive mark on political subjects and will affect the social dynamics for more than 40 years. The right-wing party, which had been the key point for the formation of the state apparatus and the political system in the post-war period, would be radically reformed under the leadership of Konstantinos Karamanlis, who reject the idea

2 Metapolitefsi refers to the Third Hellenic Republic, i.e. the post-Junta (1974-) régime change into a democratic republic.

3 The term far-right is used throughout the text to delineate a boundary between the right-wing and the political parties, organizations, and individuals situated further to the right. This includes various subcategories, such as populist, radical, and extremist right, among others.

of re-establishing the pre-dictatorial Ethniki Rizospastiki Enosis (ERE-National Radical Union), and establish Nea Dimokratia (ND-New Democracy).

The new party of the conservative faction moved significantly away from the pre-Junta habits of the Right. Initially, it accepted and legitimized the Communist Party (KKE), which had been illegal until that time, and then, although the nationalist side had strong ties to the crown, it chose a neutral stance in preparation for the 1974 referendum on the return of the king, which was decisive in the outcome of the result against the establishment of the monarchy (Mavrogordatos, 1984). At the same time, the leader of the Right relied heavily on the tactics of reaching out to the centre and moderation rather than following more radical paths.

The new régime will find the far-right in complete disarray, as during the dictatorship its leading members were placed in important positions in the state administration. With the fall of the dictatorship, they were completely delegitimized and found themselves in a political dilemma without a specific strategy and political identity. For this reason, a strategy of acceptance or opposition to the democratic framework was crucial for their political integrity. The main directions that the far-right chose to pursue were: a) to follow an autonomous direction, where they formed short-lived and personalised political groups, which were unable to produce an overall strategy, b) they tried to approach and to some extent join the new party of the centre-right.

The coalition of the Right and the extreme right was an important tactical choice for the stability of the Greek post-war political system. Particularly in the field of youth, significant convergences and collaborations can be found throughout the turbulent period before the dictatorship, culminating in the 1960s. In the post-Junta period, the formation of ND, with strong ideological groups and factions⁴ within the party, was a major factor assisting its contact and cooperation with the far-right. To understand this better, two important political groups that formed and acted within the party will be examined below.

The first one consisted of political personnel coming mainly from the old right-wing party of ERE, clinging to the old splits of the political system, reintroducing divisions and tensions that were now considered obsolete for the renewed party system. The second clustered around the personality of Karamanlis, who,

4 The terms *group* and *faction*, as used throughout this paper, refer to intra-party divisions within political parties and to the groupings—whether formal or informal—that emerge based on ideological, political, or tactical alignments among party members. For a more detailed analysis of these intra-party groupings, see, *inter alia*, Sartori (2005: 63-66).

through the ND, was seeking to modernise the Right based on the European standards (Alivizatos, 1980: 71-72). Smaller groups developed between the two groups, but the main internal life and the ideological and political disputes within the party were based on the two lines mentioned above.

The far-right groupings of the period gradually developed relations with the first group within the ND. It should be noted that even within this group one can identify significant differentiations, which schematically form two sub-groups. One of them openly adopts pro-conservative positions, opening up the constitutional issue, on which the ND opted for neutrality, while simultaneously strongly criticizing the strategy of approaching the centre. However, they consider their role particularly crucial for the party to remain on the ideological principles of conservatism and ultimately obey the party's needs and tactics. The second sub-group, while ideologically close to the first, does not hesitate to make its (radical) demands known in the public sphere, regarding not only the monarchy but even the better management of the coup leaders. This group will develop close relations with far-right parties and personalities (Papavlasopoulos, 2004: 332-333).

As the relations between the two sides were marked by a series of crises, especially after the referendum for the return of the king and the trial of the Colonels, the extreme right was in a constant state of dynamic movement and continually seeking its own autonomous course. When conditions matured and the right leaders who could lead this effort emerged, the extreme-wing left the Right party and, together with other groups from the extra-parliamentary sphere, formed the *Ethniki Parataxis* (EP-National Camp). This party was the most successful group for the post-Junta far-right, until the emergence of *Chrisi Avgi* (GD-Golden Dawn), as it won 6.8 % in the 1977 elections.

However, the new far-right party from the very beginning does not simply claim the space of the nationalist right and the corresponding electorate but acts mainly as a blackmail party (Mavrogordatos, 1983: 77). In other words, it tries to exert influence on the positions and the political space occupied by ND. Its aim was to weaken ND and restore the conservatives to their pre-dictatorial positions (Papapas, 1998: 60-62). Within a few years, and in preparation for Karamanlis's transition to the Presidency of the Republic, the departed conservatives will return to the ND, with the most prominent members being directly absorbed into the party's electoral lists in the 1981 elections.

With the return of the far-right to the ND, the ultra-conservative wing was revitalised and reclaimed a role in the party's internal activities. The change in leadership and the adoption of more conservative positions by Averoff's ND not

only help integrate this group into the party but also strengthen its influence. Furthermore, alarming trends of radicalization were emerging within the right-wing youth sphere. In fact, task forces—known as the Centaurs and Rangers—were formed around the party’s official youth organization,⁵ ONNED, and took on an important role as strike cores. Their methods of action closely resemble those of corresponding groups of the extreme right. This section will “host” various far-right figures from whom the party recruits members (Papavlasopoulos, 2004: 345). Accordingly, both their actions and the rhetoric they use are virtually identical to those of the post-war far-right. Their activities were not limited to combating “enemies” outside the party; they also serve as the “frontline” in internal conflicts and disputes.

The new leadership change in the right-wing party, due to its poor electoral performance against PASOK, and the rise of Konstantinos Mitsotakis, a liberal politician, did not affect the favorable conditions that were formed in the previous period for the far-right wing within the party (Tsiras, 2012: 99). In fact, as the party was constantly searching for the ideal formula to challenge the dominance of the centre-left, it repeatedly shifted in an attempt to appeal to both the center-right electorate and those further to the right. It is notable that leading far-right figures have admitted that in the political crisis of the ‘89-’90s and in the triple elections, they chose to withdraw from contesting votes, indirectly opting to move them towards the ND.

Meanwhile, the party leader was surrounded by key figures of the ultra-conservative wing of the party, with Georgios Karatzaferis standing out as the most significant. Relying on his expertise in communication topics, which increasingly influenced the election campaigns, he will compete for a position in the high echelons of the party. As a politician, Karatzaferis prioritized issues that were important at the political and ideological core of nationalist voters, such as the release of the Junta Colonels, as well as demands regarding the fate of the monarchy and the king himself (Psarras, 2010).

During this period, organizations and groups on the radical and extreme right (such as EPEN⁶ and the Hellenic Front) were renewing their ideological and

5 For their use and actions as task forces, see Sklavenitis (2015: 366-369).

6 EPEN was a party formed within the Korydallos prison in 1984, led by the dictator G. Papadopoulos. Politically, it follows many of the positions of the junta régime and strongly advocates for the release of its leader. It is worth noting that within the party, and particularly in its youth wing, there were members who will play leading role in the Greek far-right of the 21st century (e.g., Michaloliakos, Voridis). See Georgiadou (2019: 97-125).

political strategies. Many of them, following the example of similar parties across Europe, began adopting free market and privatization demands, coupled with strong criticism on the role of the state and public administration. As a result, they gradually integrated neoliberal positions into their political platforms, which facilitated the far-right's growing ties with factions and members of ND who shared similar views. In the years of economic crisis and austerity measures, these connections would make it easier for parts of the far-right to gain influence within and even shift toward the ND party.

The discussion about the ultra-conservative faction within the ND came into the spotlight in the 1990s, a decade in which the demand for the nationalist agenda increased significantly. The Macedonian conflict and the dispute over the name of the then FYROM propelled nationalist figures as “experts” on TV panels, giving them significant airtime to promote their views.⁷ At the same time, the emergence of private television channels marked a new era in Greek media, society and politics. On regional stations and notably on Karatzaferi's own station, significant personalities of the far-right began hosting shows, further facilitating the spread of nationalist narratives (Lazaridis, 2024: 158-159). Issues that, as mentioned earlier, were at the core of the far-right, were strengthened by a series of conspiracy theories, that glorified the Greek nation and the central place it supposedly holds in global culture.

The political vibrations caused, in part, by the handling of the Macedonian issue will lead to: a) a significant split within the ND, where the then-Foreign Minister A. Samaras will leave ND, to found his own party, *Politiki Anixi* (Political Spring),⁸ b) the fall of the Mitsotakis government in 1993 and the return of PASOK, and c) after intense competition and disputes over leadership succession, Kostas Karamanlis, the founder's nephew, will be elected as the new leader of ND. Under his leadership, the party will expand its influence towards the centre and appeal to moderate voters. This shift will energize the conservative elements within the party, and the political dynamics of the period will set the stage for the creation of a new party to the right of ND.

The continuous conflicts with extreme party officials culminated in the expulsion of G. Karatzaferis in 2000, shortly after which he found LAOS. This new party

7 A notable example is the TV program “Telos Epohis” (1995), broadcast on a nationwide TV station. The program featured for one episode the leader of GD N. Michaloliakos, the deputy leader Ch. Pappas, and the historic figure of the extreme right K. Plevris. The relevant video can be accessed: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYv863E-IM8>

8 For the differences between the party and LAOS, see Ellinas (2010: 136-137).

would later include prominent members of the ND as well as other groups from the extra-parliamentary far-right, both radical and extremist, which will be examined below. Prior to the establishment of LAOS, the far-right had primarily made its presence felt through the EP. However, smaller groups connected to youth, such as ENEK, also played a notable role, as did parties like EPEN, which managed to achieve temporary electoral representation. These groups, however, lacked a stable political trajectory and typically faded into marginality after elections.⁹ Despite this, they gradually built significant electoral “castles” and cultivated a dedicated voter pool, contributing to a consolidated nationalist vote within the broader right-wing electorate. These voter bases would become the foundation upon which LAOS and its later successors would initially build their political presence.

Aspects of a (successful) strategy: the consolidation of the far-right within the party system

As analysed earlier, the post-Junta Greek far-right remains largely attached to and rooted in the ND, with a few exceptions that, however, have relatively small impact and are (socially) marginalised. With the rise, growth and electoral success of LAOS, the political landscape seems to be shifting significantly, with notable effects on the party system. Yet, what is the innovation of the LAOS that will make it the first far-right party to succeed in being elected in consecutive elections?

Ignazi (2003:1) observes that despite “*The initial, albeit very limited, success of neo-fascist parties...it was not to be confirmed later on and the extreme right almost disappeared*”, however, it was the populist radical right¹⁰ that ultimately broke this pattern of failure, establishing a more stable presence in the party system. The case of LAOS exemplifies this shift. Although the party entered the political arena with a renewed pro-conservative agenda, many of its members expressed nostalgia for the military junta and positive views towards the monarchy. Typically, adherence to the old régime is seen as a negative factor to the success of right-wing parties (Ignazi, 1997: 312), yet LAOS seems to overturn this model. To

9 The weak electoral performance of the far-right will be the primary reason why both the academic literature and public discourse will appear insufficient when the extremist right makes its appearance through GD, sparking an extensive public debate regarding the reasons behind its continued rise. One of the “innovations” brought about by the rise of LAOS is the renewed focus of researchers on parties and figures within this space (Ellinas, 2012: 124).

10 For the placement of the party as a Populist radical, see Mudde (2007).

understand the party's success, it will be analysed the ideological framework it was built around, the staff it recruits, the political opportunities it receives through its media exposure, and the electoral reservoirs that favor the consolidation of this party and its later successors.

Ideology

Appearing in 2000, in a relatively favorable context for a pro-conservative agenda, LAOS emerged at a time when significant political issues were unfolding: a major state-church confrontation had begun over the mandatory registration of writing the religion on identity cards and the name dispute over FYROM was quite recent and political conflicts were continuously erupting around it. Moreover, the “middle ground” strategy adopted by the ND, which partially sidelined the electorate on its right, left considerable political space for the development of new parties. LAOS would capitalise on every aspect and political opportunity that emerged. It established strong ties with Archbishop Christodoulos, who was a key figure in the ID controversy, and the party, both in terms of rhetoric and symbolism, fully adopted the principles of the Orthodox faith.¹¹

It is crucial to understand that LAOS operates in a state of ambiguity concerning its views and positions. The television charisma of the leader, as well as of his most important cadres, many of whom were highly familiar with the media, as will be analysed later, enabled them to tailor their discourse according to their audience. On the same issue they adopted extreme positions when addressing to their followers, while presenting more moderate, conservative stances when they were on national TV stations. Although this adaptability was criticised by party members for its inconsistency, it provided LAOS with the opportunity to appeal to a wide range of voters.

Despite its tendency to muddy the waters, its ideological core was built around an irredentist nationalism, in which the Orthodox faith—considered intrinsically tied to the Greek state—occupies a central position. Following the path of the Greek far-right of the 1990s, the primary enemies of the nation are identified as immigrants (particularly illegal ones) and other groups often implicated in the “nation's fate” through extensive networks of conspiracy theories. Depending on the context, these groups may include Jews, bankers, or other nations, with Turks, Albanians, and Americans occupying a prominent position (Ellinas, 2010:

11 From its title (Popular *Orthodox* Rally) to its founding date (14/09/2000), which was chosen symbolically as it marks the Orthodox Church's celebration of the Elevation of the Holy Cross, its close relationship with the Church is clearly evident.

138-139). These enemies are frequently blamed for every issue facing the Greek state, from unemployment to the financial crisis of 2009.

Thus, the party leader often directs his rhetoric against the “corrupt elites” who, as he claims, are destroying the country’s productivity for the benefit of the few. This positioning and focus on the people vs. elite dichotomy becomes more pronounced with the outbreak of the economic crisis, during which Marxist terminology is strategically instrumentalised in the party’s discourse in order to construct an anti-plutocratic framework of critique (Iliadeli, 2010: 121-129). Despite its seemingly anti-capitalist position—used primarily as a populist rhetorical strategy—on economic issues it advocates neoliberal demands, which will be evident in its stance during the memoranda period (Lazaridis, 2024:163). However, consistent with its nationalist principles, the party prioritizes keeping critical economic sectors under state control (Mudde, 2007: 129).

Despite its extensive criticism of the democratic system, the party focuses primarily on the deconstruction of Metapolitefsi guarantees, accusing political personnel of being corrupt, and advocating for the moral restoration of conservative symbols. At the same time, it does not entirely reject democracy but proposes reinforcing it through an authoritarian control framework. The authoritarianisation of the state comes as a demand in the face of “fear”, which in the party’s rhetoric is mainly provoked by immigrant populations. The party’s manifesto refers to immigrants as “imported criminals” (LAOS, 2004), arguing that addressing this issue requires strengthening the “law and order” doctrine. In line with this doctrine and the push for more punitive measures, the party also called for the reintroduction of the death penalty.

Political personnel

Karatzafelis establishes his new party by recruiting political personnel from two main sources¹²: a) executives and staff from extra-parliamentary far-right parties or from ND, and b) television and lifestyle personalities (Karoulas, 2014: 117). Regarding the first group, although it includes cadres bearing the “*New Democracy identity*” (Georgiadou, 2019: 154), particularly in the initial local elections in which the party participates, it also attracts members spanning the entire spectrum and factions of the extra-parliamentary far-right of the time.

More specifically, as a direct result of the party’s collaborations, members of K.

12 It is important to note, however, that the lines of distinction between the categories of personnel origins are often blurred and indistinct. For instance, some personnel recruited as public figures had simultaneously established significant political careers.

Plevris's¹³ Proti Grammi (PG-Front Line), an organization with a clear national-socialist orientation, participated in its founding activities from the outset. Along similar ideological lines, members with ties to GD were also present. Although LAOS did not establish direct cooperation with GD, the "nationalist electoral list" for the Super-prefecture of Athens-Piraeus elections in 2002—jointly supported by LAOS and PG—included individuals with explicit connections to GD (Tsiras, 2012: 118). Among them was I. Panagiotaros¹⁴, who later became a member of parliament for GD (2012–2019) and was convicted in 2020.

In 2005, the party cooperated with the Elliniko Metopo (EM-Hellenic Front) led by Makis Voridis, a former EPEN member, who served as a MP for LAOS (2007–2012) and later joined ND in 2012, where he held ministerial positions in key government ministries. The EM was founded within the far-right political milieu of the 1990s (EPEN, National Party), and despite its poor electoral performance and limited regional influence, it played a significant role in renewing the ideological core of the radical far-right. Drawing inspiration from radical parties of the period, particularly Le Pen's National Front, the party placed a strong emphasis on issues such as (illegal) immigration, the protection of national identity, and nationalism as central tenets of its ideological framework (Ellinas, 2010: 133). This was combined with a blend of authoritarianism and pro-free market policies, with a specific focus on privatisation and limiting state intervention (Georgiadou, 2019: 141–145).¹⁵

13 Plevris was a prominent figure of the national socialist parties and movements, serving as leader of the post-war 4th of August Party (supporters of Dictator Metaxas), which is considered a breeding place for right-wing extremists. He held high-ranking positions within the state during the Junta period and later established connections with leading members of the extremist right in the Metapolitefsi era. Additionally, Plevris hosted his own TV show on Karatzaferis channel, where he promoted his books. Much of his published work addresses issues related to Jews, most notably his revisionist take on the Holocaust and his endorsement of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Notably, Psarras (2013, p. 205) refers to him as "*the Goebbels of (dictator) Papadopoulos*". Furthermore, there are several allegations against him, including claims that he collaborated with the Greek secret service during the post-Junta period, see Omada los (1996).

14 Panagiotaros was also a key member of *Galazia Stratia*, an organized supporter group associated with the national football team, which became notorious for its involvement in incidents at football matches and for displaying banners with explicit Nazi and nationalist messages before the rise of GD. This group garnered significant media attention, as documented in sources such as Omada los (2001).

15 The path of Voridis and his party, which strategically invest in xenophobia and closely resemble the tactics of Le Pen, is also supported by the observation made by von Beyme (1988), that right-wing parties now aim for "intellectual hegemony", promoting the corresponding "militant-rightist intellectuals". Voridis is one of the first far-right leaders who attempts to challenge the "ideological hegemony of the left," even using Gramsci in his analyses.

Lastly, as previously mentioned, there are also several members from ND, who either left the party at some point during the post-Junta period or later joined Karatzaferis. In the first case, these were members expelled due to their political views. For example, I. Savvouras, a pro-royalist former MP, was expelled from ND in 1976, partly due to his involvement in organizations linked to the monarchy. Similarly, M. Manolakos, a member of the youth task forces and a prominent figure in the nationalist movement, was known for his openly pro-Junta stance.

The aforementioned schematic classifications of the political personnel recruited by LAOS largely reflect the party's political flexibility and the diversity of ideological factions that coalesce within it. By the mid-2000s, the party succeeded in incorporating the three main ideological camps of the Greek far-right (Tsiras, 2012: 109): the extremist faction, including hard national-socialists, the radical nationalists, who had renewed their strategies in the preceding period and played a leading role in the party's alignment with European far-right parties, and, finally, the so-called "popular right", which includes executives who were part of ND at some point during the Metapolitefsi period, as well as conservative individuals with pro-royalist and/or pro-Junta views who had previously been involved in various parties and organizations¹⁶.

The political personnel mentioned were generally well-known in the public sphere or within nationalist circles and political groups, due to their political involvement and views. The second, and more numerous, group consisted of personalities from television, radio, and the broader lifestyle sector. This group included singers, actors, athletes, and even individuals with cult characteristics, many of whom gained media attention via underground broadcasts. In this way, Karatzaferis significantly renewed the sources of political candidates by promoting people with whom he had collaborated within television circles and who had gained visibility using television programs. The topics they focused on included issues of historical revisionism, extensive conspiracy theories, telesales for controversial (scientifically) historical and political books, and finally, shows with an interest in ancient Greek culture that glorify the Greek nation.

16 This mapping overlooks the analysis of personnel with symbolic importance for the Greek far-right, such as A. Giosmas (who later appeared on the GD electoral lists), the son of Xenophon Giosmas (or Fon Giosmas), who was known for his connections with the WWII German occupation forces and played a prominent role as a leading figure in the post-war *parakratos* (deep state), culminating in his involvement in the assassination of the left-wing politician G. Lambrakis in 1963.

From the TV camera to the parliamentary seats, figures like A. Georgiadis¹⁷ and K. Velopoulos¹⁸ will emerge, while D. Liakopoulos¹⁹, a close associate and best man of Karatzaferis, known for his conspiracy theories, will participate in party events and propagate party positions. The political personnel of this recruitment pool is directly guided by the party leader and director of their television station. Karatzaferis serves simultaneously as mentor, party leader, and employer of his MPs. However, these relationships will not remain harmonious for long, as after 2011, many of these executives will be absorbed by ND, “betraying” Karatzaferis and leaving the party in obscurity. Some will rise to high positions within ND governments, while others will seek refuge in new far-right parties.

Media

The field of communication was one of the strong assets of the leader of LAOS, and to a large extent, it was one of the main reasons that helped him rise to the leadership of the party while he was still in ND. Before the introduction of privately owned television in Greece in the early 1990s, Karatzaferis had developed a substantial business activity in producing radio programs and also played an active role in the party’s newspaper (Psarras, 2010: 45). The expertise he gained from his involvement in the media would be used to acquire his own media outlets. With the entry of private television in Greece, Karatzaferis founded his own (regional) television station, Telecity (later renamed TileAsty). This station provided significant airtime for figures from the radical and extremist right, creating a mix of commercial nationalism: in addition to promoting their ideas, they also endorsed materials (books, magazines, tapes) that validated their statements. The television airtime, both through the leader’s personal show and the shows of party officials, helped these previously unknown figures become familiar to the television audience and established a form of direct communication with them.

Additionally, the TV station would also serve as an organizational tool for the development of the party’s (underdeveloped) internal structures. As Psarras (2010: 12) notes, “(LAOS) is essentially a creation of television”, and through it, the party

17 Georgiadis will eventually leave the party and join ND, where he will even run for its presidency. He will hold significant government position. For more on his path, see Psarras (2010, pp. 203-205) and Psarras (2018).

18 Velopoulos will initially join ND, but will soon leave and establish his own party, Elliniki Lisi (EL-Greek Solution), a faithful replica of LAOS. For more, see Psarras (2010, pp. 205-208).

19 Liakopoulos was one of the most prominent figures who emerged in the space between the far-right and conspiracy theories, having authored numerous books and become one of the most high-profile personalities of the television station. For more, see Psarras (2010, pp. 208-210).

recruits and trains its officials. It is also the medium that connects, and in fact brings into the public sphere, officials, members, and supporters from across the spectrum of the extra-parliamentary far-right (Ellinas, 2010:141).

The personal television station, of course, was not enough on its own to provide the nationwide visibility that the party leader desired. The leader's charisma and his ability to create impressions, made him popular with the media, securing him television airtime during prime hours. In fact, his presence was not limited to politically-oriented programs but extended to appearances on tabloid talk shows as well. A similar strategy and approach to television exposure were adopted by many of the officials who were at the forefront of the party.

Electoral Reservoirs and Political Descendants

The political space located furthest to the right of the established right, which was largely controlled by the latter, has now, after more than 20 years, acquired an autonomous trajectory. The emergence of LAOS marked the beginning of this space, as it was followed by a series of parties that were elected at both national and European elections.²⁰ In fact, the rise of GD demonstrated that not only is there a stable space for extreme right-wing narratives, but also that a segment of society is shifting towards this direction, a segment that was largely mobilized during the period of 2011-2015. Therefore, to examine the conditions under which these parties establish themselves in the political system, it is necessary to consider their electoral appeal, specifically the electoral bases and strongholds they gradually build, which will provide steady support for these parties and their policies.

The first elections in which LAOS participated were for the Super-prefecture of Athens-Piraeus will address all the ideological issues previously examined, particularly the strategy followed by the ND in its approach to the centre. The party received 13.6%, making an impressive entry into the political and party arena. In the 2004 national elections, it came close to parliamentary representation²¹ with 2.2%. However, in the 2007 snap elections, it successfully surpassed the required threshold for its entry into parliament (3.8%). It repeated this success in 2009 with 5.63%, while its participation in the Papademos government in 2011, along with the absorption of its key members by the ND, gradually sidelined the party.

20 Specifically, in 2012 GD and ANEL were elected, in 2019 EL, in 2023 Spartiates and Niki, and in the 2023 European elections, in addition to EL, Spartiates and Niki, Foni Logikis was elected. See more about the latest elections, Georgiadou & Rori (2023).

21 The threshold for entering the Greek Parliament is set at 3%.

From 2012 onward, it has seen a steady decline in votes, far from the prospect of regaining parliamentary representation. Its performance in the European elections mirrored this trend. In 2004, unlike the national elections of the same year, it managed to cross the threshold (4.12%) and elect the party leader as an MP, while in 2009, receiving 7.15%—the highest percentage it has ever achieved in a national or European election—and elected two MPs. Since then, its support has continued to shrink dramatically.

In the analysis of the geographical distribution of LAOS, it is observed that the most significant performances are recorded in major urban centers. Specifically, with its strongest stronghold being the city and suburbs of Thessaloniki (Thessaloniki A & B regions) and, to a lesser extent, the Central Macedonia region (Imathia, Kilkis), it achieves its highest percentages in the first case and significantly higher percentages in the second, compared to its nationwide results. Similarly, in the electoral regions within Attica (Attica, Athens A & B, Piraeus A & B), the largest population regions, the party records percentages in the 2007 elections that are 1.5% higher, and in the 2009 elections 2-2.5% higher, than its national results (Table 1).

Table 1. 2007 and 2009 highest LAOS’s number of votes in large urban areas.

Regions	2007 elections	2009 elections
Thessaloniki A	6.22 %	8.26 %
Attica	5.82 %	8.23 %
Piraeus B	5.52 %	7.58 %
Athens A	5.39 %	7.59 %
Thessaloniki B	5.35 %	7.48 %
Piraeus A	5.25 %	7.56 %
Athens B	5.04%	7.28%
National percentage	3.80 %	5.63 %

Note : Data from Ministry of the Interior, <https://ekloges.yypes.gr/>

The participation of LAOS in the Papademos Government, the strategic moves of New Democracy under the leadership of A. Samaras, and the tactic of absorbing the far-right into the broader right will lead to the gradual decline of the party. In the 2012 elections, which reshaped the party system, the fall of LAOS coincides with the simultaneous rise of

Anexartitoi Ellines (ANEL–Independent Greeks)²² and GD. In those elections (May 2012), the far-right in all its variations garnered the highest percentage ever achieved by this political space during the post-dictatorship period (20.47%).

The “strongholds” built by LAOS, however, appear to benefit the far-right parties emerging during that period. Analysing GD’s performance, it seems to draw significant portion of its support from two main sources: a) electoral regions that traditionally favor right-wing and far-right parties. Specifically, areas in the Peloponnese (Corinthia, Laconia, Argolida), which in the past delivered high percentages to the EP and showed strong support for the monarchy in the 1974 referendum, and b) GD also appears to achieve high percentages in areas of Attica, where LAOS had previously performed particularly well (Attica, Piraeus, Athens). In contrast, LAOS’s electoral bases in Northern Greece seem to benefit ANEL, which, as a party straddling the broader right-wing spectrum, preferentially attracts the votes of disenchanted right-wing voters.

The influence of GD in Athens can be explained both in relation to the pre-existing influence that LAOS had in this electoral district and independently of it. The high concentration of immigrant populations in the center of Athens, combined with the violent activities of GD’s paramilitary squads, brought the party into the spotlight as early as 2010.²³ At that time, it secured 5.3% and managed to enter the Municipal Council of the city of Athens, where its leader, through extremist and pro-Nazi rhetoric and actions, succeeded in attracting public attention.²⁴ From that point onward, the party embarked on a steady upward trajectory. In this way, the Municipality of Athens (and the electoral district of Athens A) constitutes a significant stronghold of the far-right, not only at the national level but particularly in local elections.

22 For its classification as a far-right movement party, see Fielitz (2019).

23 Since then, the so-called “social” activities began, where the party and its members-initiated actions benefiting “only Greeks”. These activities were highlighted by the far-right press and attracted the attention of television stations. For more on the activities of these groups, which at times served as a cover for violent attacks on migrants, see Koronaïou & Sakellariou (2013).

24 For the role of the 2010 local elections as a political opportunity for GD, see Dinas et al. (2016).

In conclusion: Dilemmas of the Right - Strategic Choices between Imitation and Distancing

Regardless of the strategies employed by the far-right and the political opportunities it utilizes in order to remain in the political spotlight, the actions and choices made by the right-wing parties play a pivotal role in enabling the far-right to ascend and secure the political space necessary for its establishment within the political system. This is because the trajectory of the far-right, throughout all phases of its post-war development, is intertwined with the right-wing, with these two spaces intersecting on a political-ideological level and through programmatic agreements. However, this contact is neither symmetrical nor controlled by the far-right, as the right functions post-war as a political camp orchestrating the actions of (ultra-)conservative social and political actors (Papavlasopoulos, 2015). In conclusion, this chapter examines the main strategies adopted by the right parties, focusing primarily on the Greek example while also exploring analogous tactical approaches adopted by right-wing parties in neighboring Balkan countries.

The relationship between the right-wing and its far-right offshoots varies depending on the political and social context at stake. Based on Kriesi (1999), the intersection and interaction of these two spaces can be summarized as follows:

- The tactic of “instrumentalisation” of the far-right agenda and leaders. By engaging in an open dialogue with far-right organizations, the right-wing shifts its position along the center-right to right-wing spectrum. This approach aims to broaden its appeal to new constituencies while simultaneously curbing the growth of other parties and groups further to its right. However, this strategy may inadvertently benefit far-right parties, as the established right legitimizes extreme rhetoric and symbols (Kriezi, 1999: 418).

A notable example of this dynamic is the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), which emerged from the far-right Serbian Radical Party (SRS). Despite positioning itself as center-right, the SNS incorporates (ultra-) nationalist rhetoric, particularly on issues such as Kosovo, and retains ideological ties with the SRS (Stojarová, 2013: 66). This approach allows the SNS to dominate the conservative voter base, marginalizing extremist far-right parties over time.

- The tactic of “demarcation” of the right from the far-right. Under this approach, the right-wing partially adopts certain far-right issues while maintaining a firm position within its own ideological framework. This strategy helps it solidify its status as a center-right party, while minimizing opportunities for interaction with more extremist groups. Simultaneously, it emphasizes its

opposition to more radical political positions. However, under this strategy, the far-right often finds ground for growth, as the established Right shifts towards the center.

The case of Croatia exemplifies, in a sense, this strategy. Although the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) is classified by scholars as a radical right party (Bus-tikova, 2020) and is considered responsible for a series of illiberal actions (Čepo, 2022), in recent years with the European integration as a central issue, it has been increasingly shifting towards the center-right. While it shares a common ideological base with far-right parties, particularly on nationalist views of the state, HDZ tries to distance itself and draw clear distinctions. For instance, on issues like EU membership and international relations (such as NATO), the HDZ adopts positions that distance it from extremist right-wing parties, leaving the far-right largely marginalised (Stojarová, 2012: 144–147). At the same time, the attempt to shift towards the center-right left a space to its right, which in the latest elections (2024) was represented by the Homeland Movement.

Moreover, in order for the right to impose clear limits on the development of the far-right, even when cooperating with them in government coalitions, it implements additional safeguards to define and protect its own space. Barriers to legitimizing the far-right agenda may include programmatic guarantees, such as those agreed upon by coalition partners in Romania (1992-1996), including the far-right parties Greater Romania Party and the Romanian National Unity Party (Shafir, 1996: 91).

Nevertheless, Georgiadou (2013: 80) adds a third strategy to the above model, based on the Greek example and the actions of Konstantinos Karamanlis. In this case, the right-wing party instrumentalises the far-right and its staff (Pappas, 1998: 153), as in 1980, when it absorbed the majority of the EP back into the ND. However, the right remained faithful to its leader's stance on moderation and centrist approach, while simultaneously managing to eliminate the far-right from the political map.

The tactical approach of the right-wing is not static over time. Since the late 1990s, ND has consistently followed the strategy of *demarcation*, which led to the departure of LAOS. In government, ND would take hardline positions particularly on national issues, while attempting, to some extent, to engage with more extreme audiences. However, during the subsequent period of the economic crisis, under the leadership of A. Samaras, ND adopted a strategy of *boundary-setting*. Initially, this was attempted with LAOS, whose popularity continued to rise steadily until 2011, showing no signs of the sharp decline that would follow. By

placing national issues at the forefront of its agenda and adhering to an anti-immigration rhetoric, Samaras effectively absorbed much of LAOS's agenda. The gradual disintegration of LAOS and ND's open doors to its members marked the party's disappearance from the political landscape. However, as two new far-right parties (ANEL and GD) emerged to the right of ND, achieving notable electoral success, and with ND's electoral collapse,²⁵ it became clear that this strategy was not entirely successful.²⁶ It may have been effective in demarcating specific types of the far-right (e.g., populist radical right), but not in halting the broader rise of far-right parties.

In summary, it is clear that the right does not act in a unified or coordinated manner in response to the far-right threat. Its tactics evolve based on historical and political contexts as well as social availability. Moreover, even the same parties, such as ND, alter their strategies over time. The tactic of instrumentalising the far-right, while strategically aimed at consolidating the Right in the nationalist space, seems to have, in the Greek case, created an opportunity for more radical forms of the far-right to emerge into the political spotlight. This kind of tactic, in addition to further elevating and legitimizing the ultra-conservative agenda, carries the risk of the right-wing itself becoming progressively radicalized. By following this path, the danger arises that Le Pen's statement—"that the voters prefer the original over the copy" (Mudde, 2007: 241)—may ultimately prove true. With the establishment of an autonomous far-right space and the rooting of far-right parties to the right of ND, it appears that even in the more conservative positions it adopts, the right-wing is no longer able to define the political developments to its right.

25 In the May 2012 elections, ND received 18.85%, the lowest rate achieved in an electoral contest since its founding.

26 The approach to the demarcation culminated in the contacts and discussions between the Prime Minister's inner circle and key figures from GD. The confession by several members of ND regarding a possible alliance with Golden Dawn was confirmed by the revelation of the contacts between Baltakos (the then General Secretary to the Government) and Kasidiaris (a GD MP), an event that triggered significant political confrontations targeting the right-wing party, see Psarras (2014).

REFERENCES

- Alivizatos, N. (1980). Ο Εκδημοκρατισμός σήμερα: σύγχρονες διαστάσεις ενός παλιού αιτήματος (Democratisation today: contemporary dimensions of an old demand) *Σύγχρονα Θέματα*, 2(8), 71–80.
- Bustikova, L. (2020). *Extreme Reactions. Radical Right Mobilization in Eastern Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Čepo, D. (2022). Structural weaknesses and the role of the dominant political party: democratic backsliding in Croatia since EU accession. In D. Kapidžić & V. Stojarová (Eds.), *Illiberal Politics in Southeast Europe*. Routledge.
- Dinas, E., Georgiadou, V., Konstantinidis, I., & Rori, L. (2016). From dusk to dawn: Local party organization and party success of right-wing extremism. *Party Politics*, 22(1), 80–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068813511381>
- Ellinas, A. (2010). *The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ellinas, A. (2012). LAOS and the Greek extreme right since 1974. In A. Mammone, E. Godin, & B. Jenkins (Eds.), *Mapping the Far Right in Contemporary Europe: From Local to Transnational* (124–139). Routledge.
- Fielitz, M. (2018). From indignation to power: The genesis of the Independent Greeks. In M. Caiani & O. Cisar (Eds.), *Radical Right Movement Parties in Europe*. Routledge.
- Georgiadou, V. (2013). Right-Wing Populism and Extremism: The Rapid Rise of “Golden Dawn” in Crisis-Ridden Greece. In R. Melzer & S. Serafin (Eds.), *Right-wing extremism in Europe. Country Analyses, Counter-Strategies and Labor-Market Oriented Exit Strategies* (75–102). Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Georgiadou, B. (2019). *Η άκρα δεξιά στην Ελλάδα 1965-2018* (The Far Right in Greece, 1965–2018). Καστανιώτη.
- Georgiadou, V., & Rori, L. (2023). *The June 25th elections and the complex mosaic of the Far Right* | Heinrich Böll Stiftung - Thessaloniki Office. <https://gr.boell.org/en/2023/07/03/oi-ekloges-tis-25is-ioynioy-kai-syntheto-mosaiko-tis-akras-dexias>
- Ignazi, P. (1997). New Challenges: Postmaterialism and the Extreme Right. In M. Rhodes, P. Heywood, & V. Wright (Eds.), *Developments in West European Politics*. Palgrave.
- Ignazi, P. (2003). *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe*. Oxford University Press.
- Iliadeli, A. (2010). Ο συνωμοσιολογικός λόγος στο ελληνικό πολιτικό σύστημα: οι πυρκαγιές του 2007, η διεθνής χρηματοπιστωτική κρίση και η λέσχη Μπίλντερμπεργκ [Master's thesis] (The conspiratorial discourse in the greek political system: the fires in 2007, the international financial crisis and the Bilderberg Club). Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.
- Karoulas, G. (2014). *Πολιτικά κόμματα και ανάδειξη των πολιτικών ελίτ στο ελληνικό κομματικό σύστημα 1989-2011* [Doctoral dissertation] (Political parties and the emergence of political elites in the greek party system of the period 1989–2011). National & Kapodistrian University of Athens.
- Kriesi, H. (1999). Movements of the Left, Movements of the Right: Putting the Mobilization of Two New Types of Social Movements into Political Context. In H. Kitschelt, P.

- Lange, G. Marks, & J. Stephens (Eds.), *Continuity and Change in Contemporary Capitalism* (398–423). Cambridge University Press.
- LAOS. (2004). *Πλαίσιο Θέσεων*. Γραμματεία Πολιτικού Σχεδιασμού.
- Lazaridis, T. (2024). Private television and the reproduction of conspiracy theories: the Greek case. In Y. Mylonas & E. Psyllakou (Eds.), *Class, Culture, and the Media in Greece*. Springer International Publishing.
- Mavrogordatos, G. (1983). The Emerging Party System. In *Greece in the 1980s*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mavrogordatos, G. T. (1984). The Greek party system: A case of 'limited but polarised pluralism'? *West European Politics*, 7(4), 156–169.
- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Omada Ios. (1996). Η κατασκευή του χαφιέ. *Ελευθεροτυπία*. <http://www.iospress.gr/ios1996/ios19960623a.htm>
- Omada Ios. (2001). *Ναζί με στολή φιλάθλου*. <http://www.iospress.gr/mikro2001/mikro20011201.htm>
- Papavlasopoulos, E. (2004). *Η ανασυγκρότηση του ελληνικού συντηρητισμού: Η οργάνωση της Νέας Δημοκρατίας 1974-1993* [Doctoral dissertation] (The reconstruction of the Greek conservatism: the organizational structure of the New Democracy party 1974-1993). Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.
- Papavlasopoulos, E. (2015). *Η Δεξιά ως παράταξη και ως κόμμα (The Right as a camp and as a party)*. *Εφημερίδα η Εποχή*. <https://www.epohi.gr/article/3294/i-deksia-os-parataksi-kai-os-komma>
- Pappas, T. (1998). *Making Party Democracy in Greece*. Macmillan Press.
- Psarras, D. (2010). *Το κρυφό χέρι του Καρατζαφέρη. Η τηλεοπτική αναγέννηση της ελληνικής ακροδεξιάς* (Karatzafieri's Secret Hand. The televised insurrection of the Greek far right). Αλεξάνδρεια.
- Psarras, D. (2013). *Το μπεστ σέλερ του μίσους. Τα "πρωτόκολλα των σοφών της Σιών" στην Ελλάδα, 1920-2013* (The bestseller of hate. The protocols of the elders of Zion in Greece). Πόλις.
- Psarras, D. (2014). *Golden Dawn on trial*. Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung.
- Psarras, D. (2018). Άδωνις Γεωργιάδης, Η ακροδεξιά με το γελαστό πρόσωπο. *Εφημερίδα Των Συντακτών*.
- Sartori, G. (2005). *Parties and Party system: A framework for analysis*.
- Sklavenitis, D. (2015). *Οι μαθητικές κινητοποιήσεις απέναντι στις εκπαιδευτικές μεταρρυθμίσεις στη Μεταπολίτευση (1976-1997)* [Doctoral dissertation] (The protest of high school students against educational reforms at the post-junta period in Greece (1976-1997)). University of Peloponnesse.
- Tsirias, S. (2012). *Έθνος και ΛΑΟΣ. Νέα Άκρα Δεξιά και Λαϊκισμός* (Nation and LAOS: New Far Right and Populism). Επίκεντρο.
- Unfollow. (2013). Μιχαολιάκος, Πλεύρης, Παπάς με τον Γ. Πρετεντέρη (1995) [Video recording]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYv863E>