



## **Merely outlawing Golden Dawn is not enough**

[Published on 19. November 2015](#) by Andreas Dafnos

Recently the [Guardian](#) published an article about whether young people are more tolerant than their parents. Not restricting its attention to the UK, the article includes several states from around the world, including Greece. The Greek youth appear to have shown high support for Golden Dawn, an ideological offspring of the abhorrent Nazi worldview, which has fared remarkably well over the last years and took third place in the last election even though MPs as well as members of this xenophobic party have been standing trial since April 2015, facing charges of participating in a criminal organisation. The outcome of this trial is relevant for the socio-political system of the country as it ostensibly offers the chance to eliminate the virulent language and violent activities emanating from far-right ideology in case the party will be outlawed.

However, the main point I intend to make here is that merely getting rid of Golden Dawn will only partially deal with a bigger concern, i.e. the level of nationalist sentiments and intolerance that exist in Greek society and especially among the young. This concern brings out the core of the problem since it is directly related to the proper functioning of democratic processes. Yet we should make sure that the threat coming from the extreme right should not be exaggerated, and avoid that assessments of policy makers are based on groundless fears.

Before I proceed to the main argument, let me mention two caveats: firstly, far-right parties, apart from their electoral success, can be influential in several other ways e.g. by distorting the interpretation of sensitive and admittedly important issues such as immigration rates, public safety and preservation of cultural values or by shifting the direction of the political agendas and the positions of mainstream political parties. Secondly, youth should be viewed as a target group of great importance because it constitutes the backbone and main bearer of change. In a similar context, one of the participants of the [Club de Madrid](#) forum on countering violent extremism places young people at the forefront of policy measures because they form the majority of the global population and offers the plausible conclusion that long-term interventions are needed in order to address the appeal of extremist rhetoric and practices to young people effectively. In my view, the latter also applies to the case of the far-right impact in Greece.

A study published in 2015 (see [here](#) for a detailed analysis) points out that the influence of far-right ideological aspects on the youth segment of society is more prevalent in Greece and east central Europe than in other European states. Yet, if we specifically turn our attention to the example of Greece, the proliferation of these ideologies can be connected only to a certain extent with the presence and role of Golden Dawn. [Research](#) reveals that anti-immigration stances, racist views and aspirations of authoritarian forms of government were expressed as far back as the 1990's; a period where Golden Dawn or similarly extreme voices remained on the margins of social and political life. [Sakellariou](#), a post-doctoral researcher at Panteion University, explains

that one of the factors that may feed the above dispositions and subsequent ideological affinity with Golden Dawn, besides the impact of economic crisis and immigration flows, is the malfunctioning of the educational system. The latter does not equip young people with the required skills and knowledge (e.g. ignorance of historical facts) and as a result they may fail to develop critical thinking in order to resist the lure coming from the far-right. Generally speaking, my understanding is that in certain periods of time far-right parties will harness various opportunities which in turn will help them establish themselves as alternative forces within the political arena; however, those parties should not be viewed as the unique driving forces for transforming people's beliefs into exclusionary attitudes or views that reflect a sense of superiority and the dismissal of otherness.

Therefore, the outcome of the trial against Golden Dawn, although it is important in terms of bringing justice to the victims and their families in case the members of Golden Dawn are proven guilty for committing these crimes (e.g. the murder of anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas), will only partly counter the far-right as a general worldview. What we need to keep in mind is that the far-right is a rather complex phenomenon. Youth may find it attractive due to misconceptions about their surrounding environment, their mistrust toward the established political system and their perception of having not enough opportunities to actively participate in politics and make decisions on their own lives.