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The sun sets on Golden Dawn: Media representations of the biggest trial of Nazi criminality of our times

Christina Verousi¹, Maria Nerina Boursinou², Chris Kostopoulos³

¹University of Leicester, ²University of St. Andrews, ³Curtin University, Malaysia

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[Ms. Verousi Christina](#), University of Leicester, cv65@le.ac.uk,
xristina_verousi@hotmail.gr¹

[Dr. Boursinou Maria Nerina](#), University of Saint Andrews, nerina.boursinou@st-andrews.ac.uk

[Dr. Kostopoulos Chris](#), Curtin University Malaysia,
christos.kostopoulos@curtin.edu.au

Abstract

In September 2013, Pavlos Fyssas, a known musician and antifascist, was fatally stabbed by a Golden Dawn member. His death led to the arrest of the party's leadership and the commencement of a trial which lasted almost 5.5 years and came to a close on October 7th 2020, adjudging the party's leadership to be guilty of running a criminal organisation. The trial of Golden Dawn effectively brought about the end of the Neo-Nazi political party - once Greece's third most popular party. Being branded as the biggest trial of Nazi criminality since the Nuremberg Trial, it also became a landmark in international modern history. Despite that, the trial received a disproportionate amount of coverage in proportion to its significance. The aforementioned come in contrast to mainstream medias' earlier stance towards Golden Dawn, especially in the years from 2010 to 2013, when despite the party's clearly aggressive ideology, rhetoric and activities, it received unprecedented media coverage that facilitated its legitimization. Existing research has shed light to the party's relationship with and representation in the Greek mass media, however, no study has so far been preoccupied with media coverage of Golden Dawn's trial. Examining a total of 257 articles published in three daily newspapers of political standpoints along the left-right spectrum of political opinion in Greece, this study investigates how the mainstream, traditional press managed the coverage of the trial's culmination. Utilising frame analysis, the reconstructed sets of frames were critically analysed to uncover how the press framed the trial, the range of opinions represented through the publications, and its contribution to public debates around the Far-Right in Greece. Founded on an identified gap in the pre-existing research, this study offers a better understanding of the way in which mass media depict major events in society and in doing so it makes a timely contribution in the study of the Far-Right in Greece.

Keywords: #GDtrial, #FarRight, #Fascism, #Greece, #Journalism, #MainstreamPress, #GoldenDawn

1. Golden Dawn's Rise and Fall: Historical Background of the neo-Nazi party and its trial

On October 7 2020, a Greek appeals court declared Golden Dawn² a criminal organisation, marking the culmination of one of the most prominent trials in the country's post-dictatorship period. For years, the political party had made international headlines for its blatant racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric, as well as its street level, extra-parliamentary activities that included numerous violent attacks against left-wing activists, minorities and trade union representatives perpetrated by the party's 'assault squads' (Verousi and Allen, 2021; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015). Despite the party's roots dating back to 1980, GD had remained in the margins of the Greek political system for almost 30 years, due to its ill reputation and known proneness to violence and support of Nazi ideology (Verousi and Allen, 2021).

Capitalising on the implosion of the two-party system, evident in the 2012 electoral results, and the disarray stemming from the 2008 economic recession, bail-out loans, austerity and subsequent decimation of the welfare state, GD, taken straight from the fascist's playbook, seized the opportunity to promote itself as a substitute of the crisis-ridden state. This allowed the party to simultaneously reach out to lower classes that were disproportionately affected by the austerity measures, as well as the middle classes who had lost their confidence in the established political parties (Verousi and Allen, 2021; Tipaldou and Uban, 2018; Koronaiou and Sakellariou, 2013). Despite the party's actions suggesting otherwise, a large part of their communication strategy was invested on the branding of GD as the 'antisystemic solution', an alternative to a system that had, at the time, lost its legitimacy. Unprecedented as it might have been for a country that was under Nazi occupation less than a century beforehand, neo-Nazi GD had succeeded in becoming Greece's third most popular political party by 2015.

Although the exact nature of the relationship between media outlets and the far-right political parties is not proved empirically to a satisfactory extent, research worldwide suggests that especially when far-right political parties are still at an infant stage of development, media exposure can directly impact on their subsequent electoral performance by offering them visibility, increasing their outreach, granting them political momentum, as well as playing a vital role in mainstreaming far-right actors and their belief system. Such was true in the case of Greece's GD. Since its early days,

GD's relationship with the mainstream media had been a complex one, alternating love and hate equally. Although GD' delegates have claimed their access to news media to have been historically limited and conditional, in truth, the party's representatives were given ample time to communicate their views early on, a phenomenon that researchers have partially accredited to the commercial appeal of its members' controversial opinions (Psarras, 2012). As GD's appeal grew, so did its media presence. Despite the party's alarmingly aggressive ideology, rhetoric and activities, its delegates enjoyed extended, and often positive, media coverage that ultimately facilitated the party's legitimization (Prinos, 2014; Kandylis and Kavoulakos, 2012; Psarras, 2012). The carefully constructed façade of a modern era Robin Hood who is striving to right the wrongs of a corrupt kingdom and protect the less fortunate, was reinforced and disseminated by said media, including several prominent newspapers (Prinos, 2014; Koronaïou and Sakellariou, 2013; Kandylis and Kavoulakos, 2012; Psarras, 2012). To a large extent, the majority of Greek media initially kept a critical distance from GD, however, negative publicity seemed to have equally benefited the party's reputation.

2. The trial of Golden Dawn

The beginning of the end for GD - at least on a parliamentary level - occurred in September 2013, the day Pavlos Fyssas, a 34-year-old musician and known antifascist, was fatally stabbed by GD member, Yiorgos Roupakias. During the five and half years the trial was ongoing, the court examined a case file 1.5 terabytes in size and heard from 216 witnesses (Department for Justice and Civil Freedoms of the Greek Communist Party, 2020). The 69 defenders had four cases to answer for, including Fyssas' murder, the brutal attacks against Egyptian fishermen in 2012, the assault of communist unionists in the same year; the homicide of Shehzad Luqman, a Muslim migrant worker from Pakistan in 2013, as well as the overarching charge of running a criminal organisation facing the GD leadership (Kampagiannis, 2020). On October 14th 2020, the party's leader, Nikos Michaloliakos, as well as seven other prominent former GD MPs were sentenced to 13 years in prison for running a criminal organisation³.

The court's decision drew the attention of national and international media outlets. Although in its vast majority the national press acknowledged the trial's influential role in bringing about the dissolution of the Neo-Nazi political party, paradoxically, for the largest part, the events leading up to the court's decision received little to no attention by the predominant part of the Greek press. In scarcity of mainstream media coverage, bottom-up initiatives such as observatories and alternative online media emerged, which undertook the role of informing the audiences about the trial almost exclusively

through online platforms and/or social media⁴, but also through selected publications (Fekete, 2020; Department for Justice and Civil Freedoms of the Greek Communist Party, 2020, Psarras, 2014).

As expected, the rise and fall of GD, as well as their organisational practices and rhetoric and politics of hate and exclusion, have been monitored by several scholars working on the Far-Right over the years (E.g. Verousi and Allen, 2021; Roumanias et. al, 2020; Tsoutsoumpis, 2018; Lamprianou and Ellinas, 2017; Karamanidou, 2016; Dinas et. al, 2016; Kyriazi, 2016; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015; Toloudis, 2014; Prinos, 2014; Ellinas, 2013; Dalakoglou, 2013, Psarras, 2012). So far, however, no studies have addressed the media coverage of GD's trial. Furthermore, there have been no studies looking into the framing of GD by the Greek media and the contribution of that framing on democratic debate. Therefore, there is a necessity for research that investigates the framing of GD and its trial in the mainstream Greek media, in order to evaluate the contribution of these frames in democratic debate.

3. Research questions, data, and method of analysis

Addressing the aforementioned literature gap, this study answers the following two-fold research question: How did the Greek press frame GD's trial, and how did these frames contribute to the public debates around far-right politics in the country? To do so, this article presents the analysis of news articles from three daily newspapers. The selection of the newspapers represents a variety of political standpoints along the left-right spectrum of political opinion in Greece, as the chosen newspapers exhibit different forms of political parallelism to class, ideology, and/or political party. More specifically, the left-wing *Avgi* is a newspaper with significant political and economic ties with SYRIZA, the center-left party that sits as the country's main opposition. *Dimokratia* is a right-wing newspaper that represents a political parallelism to right-wing ideologies, although it has come under criticism for harbouring extreme right-wing opinions. Finally, *Kathimerini* is Greece's largest conservative daily newspaper that has been traditionally associated with the ruling party of *Nea Dimokratia* (ND), but in recent years demonstrates a form of class parallelism, representing the interests and opinions of the Greek bourgeois class (Kostopoulos, 2020). The articles were collected from the print versions of these newspapers with a time range between 30/09/2020 and 16/10/2020. The time frame of the analysis revolves around the day of the announcement of the verdicts (7/10/2020) and includes one week of articles before and after, with a few extra days to take into consideration the announcement of the penalties. The decision to focus on these weeks was made based on the assumption

that they would be the most intense from a media attention perspective. Kathimerini generated 79 articles, Dimokratia 88, and Avgi 90 accordingly.

We conducted a qualitative frame analysis on the news articles, employing Van Gorp's (2007) approach that focuses on the reconstruction of frame packages. Van Gorp (2007) views frames as situated within culture, externally of the individual. Individuals, such as media workers, apply and magnify these cultural frames in media content, meaning that although the frame remains stable, its application is subject to negotiation. Frames in culture can be reconstructed through an analysis of media content where they can be found embedded in the journalistic construction of a news message in such a way that many elements refer to that frame, which can then be represented as a frame package composed by the manifest framing devices, the manifest or latent reasoning devices and an implicit cultural phenomenon that displays the package as a whole (Van Gorp 2007). In order to identify the reasoning devices of the frames Entman's (1993) definition of frame functions was employed, locating four different types of devices; 'problem definition' that identifies the central issue of the frame, 'causal attribution' that assigns blame for the causes of a problem, 'moral evaluation' that determines moral judgements on the actors, and 'treatment recommendation' which seeks the possible solutions to the problems. Every reasoning device found in the analysed articles was coded and once the initial stage was finished, a second level of analysis grouped reasoning devices together to form the logical part of the frame. Various framing devices that point to the same core idea and activate the frame were also noted in the analysis of the articles and connected to the fitting set of reasoning devices by the coders. Each framing package was then represented in a matrix, with the central idea of the frame package being used as a heading for each frame, and the corresponding framing and reasoning devices following. The cultural phenomena noted as framing devices were selected as headings, as Van Gorp (2007) argues that associating the frame with a cultural phenomenon achieves a certain degree of generalization to other cases in similar situations. This approach was preferred over others, as it allows the researcher to investigate deeper into the political and cultural meanings that are attached to the frames; which is one of the goals of this research, allowing for a level of analysis that can highlight the range of political meanings circulated by the mainstream press and the limits they place on "acceptable" political debate.

To analyse these reconstructed frame packages there was first a process of micro-analysis, where we looked at each frame found in each of the newspapers and its constituting elements in order to make sense of the cultural and political meanings

attached to it. On a second level, we embarked on a macro-analysis, which consisted of a comparison between all the newspapers and their frames, in order to find similarities and differences. With such an analysis of the frames, we address the research question, by shedding light on how the press framed the trial of GD and the range of opinions that were represented through the press and its contribution to public debates around the Far-Right in Greece.

4. Findings

4.1 News Frames of Dimokratia

The analysis of Dimokratia generated five frames, 'Horseshoe theory' being the first. Although largely discredited, Dimokratia employs the notions of 'Horseshoe theory'⁵ in aid of their assertion that '*Red Fascism*'⁶ stemming from the '*radical left constructs*'⁷ poses an equal, if not more serious, threat for Democratic values than GD ever did. '*Roupakias is no different than Koufontinas. Both men's ideology is a danger to Democracy, Koufontinas*'⁸ *simply killed more people*'⁹, '*17 November neither killed two, nor had an armoury of switchblades and knives. They had rockets and bombs*'¹⁰. As evident from the quotes, in doing so, the newspaper brings into play the Revolutionary Organisation 17 November, a radical leftist group that was deemed a terrorist group. According to this frame's logic, the Left and their partisans over time harbour and defend the political violence deriving from those of like mind who wish to exert pressure on the State. The contemporary leadership of the ruling party of ND, is also complicit in adopting a prudent stance against the Left, rather than denouncing them. This, the frame suggests, is underwhelming for '*the sole political party that collided in practice with extremes and became their victim*'¹¹ in the not-so-distant past. Finally, the frame shifts away the mantle of responsibility for mitigating the endangerment of Democracy from voters to the politicians, proposing they must '*act as true leaders, in the sense that they will be leading in battles, as well as sacrifices*'¹², so as to become a trustworthy alternative to radical extremes.

Similar to the 'Horseshoe theory' frame, the 'SYRIZA as a villain' frame is equally deprecatory of the Left, namely the opposition party. This frame presents SYRIZA availing themselves of GD to cater to their own political expediencies. Not only is SYRIZA accused of having shared similar interests with GD, but also of collaborating with them to serve them. A recurrent theme emerging in the frame refers to the changes in the Greek Penal Code, SYRIZA made when it was in government. The party's leadership is not only criticised for introducing several alterations, which essentially 'softened' the sentences and did not deprive the convicted of their civil

rights, but also accused of deliberately rushing to do so to assist GD. Furthermore, the opposition party is dispraised for putting on a show and exploiting the trial for communicative gains. Finally, it is noteworthy, that both the 'Horseshoe theory' and the 'SYRIZA as a villain' frames also portray the Left as irresponsible, alleging that they repeatedly disdained COVID-19 regulations and posed a risk to public health (for example by attending a gathering outside the courthouse the day of the trial). By extension, these frames manifest that the newspaper is taking an active position against the leftist parties.

Dimokratia's next frame, 'Political Exploitation', revolves around similar issues, however, a fundamental difference exists in that this frame puts under scrutiny the whole political system for providing a fertile ground for GD to flourish. *'We need to seek the underlying causes of phenomena such as GD. And then we will have to talk about memoranda, poverty, working conditions akin to those in Medieval Times, brain drain, dissipating nations, the economic Reich overtaking Europe, vassal politicians and sell-out media'*¹³. Finally, the 'Political exploitation' frame intersects with points made in the previous frames, in that it reprimands the political establishment for vulgarly capitalising on the trial. Concurrently, it calls for rebuilding an incorruptible, patriotic Right that could bring its electoral base together.

Along similar lines to points made in the 'Horseshoe theory' and 'Political exploitation' frames, Dimokratia's fourth frame, 'Politicized trial' advocates that GD is not a *'criminal organisation, as this is defined by the law'*, but rather a *'Neo-Nazi...den of third grade bullyboys and hoodlums'*¹⁴ with *'repulsive, violent and low-end personalities'*¹⁵. Censurable as their actions may be, the evidence is not sufficient to support their denomination as a criminal organisation. This framing of the trial reproduces one of GD's main defence narratives - being prosecuted for their ideology - by focusing on the alleged pressure the political system, public and mass media applied on the Greek Criminal Justice system in order for the latter to reach a guilty verdict. The following excerpt is particularly telling *'I do not believe there's ever been a bigger movement intending at influencing Justice'*¹⁶.

Dimokratias' final frame, 'A victory for Democracy', depicts the trial's outcome as a victory over GD's radical violence that endangered Democratic values. Oftentimes referring to GD members as *Neo-Nazis*, the frame heavily features Magda Fyssa, the mother of 34-year-old antifascist musician murdered by GD sympathiser Yiorgos Roupakias, who is praised as a modern-day heroine who fought a solitary battle. *'YOU, Magda Fyssa, are the MOTHER that inspired every healthy cell in the land, that*

awakened in our hearts Democracy's obligation to stand against the monster. YOU, Magda Fyssa, carried your cross but did not buckle, did not budge, were not afraid, did not allow the tears to dry, did not forget! YOU, Magda Fyssa, were the beacon that kept the light of truth-seeking burning¹⁷. Contrary to Magda Fyssas' prominent portrayal, Shehzad Luqman's family is utterly excluded from the narrative, despite their consistent courtroom presence, as well as the importance of his murder case for the trial. Unsurprising as this may be for a newspaper which harbours controversial opinions against Muslims, migrants and refugees and frequently features articles rife with hateful and prejudicial statements and connotations (Chatzipanagiotou and Zarikos, 2017), the complete absence of any reference to them is noteworthy.

Table 1

Frames	Framing Devices	Problem Definition	Causal Attribution	Moral Evaluation	Treatment Recommendation
Horseshoe theory	Horseshoe theory narrative, Two Extremes narrative, 'Red Fascism'	The Left defends political violence, Political extremes want to pressure state power, ND does not condemn the Left, 17N was also a criminal organization	The Left, ND	ND is too timid against the Left	People must reject both extremes, More trustworthy politics
Politicized trial	Mob rule narrative, Outside intervention narrative, People's court simile	The court was pressured to find GD guilty as a criminal organization, The court serves political goals, There was not enough evidence to condemn as a criminal organization, Public pressures were unnecessary, The trial was ideological	The Left, Public opinion, The media, The government, The political system, The opposition parties	GD was a disorganized mess, The trial was ideological and political, GD will take advantage of public pressure to say they are innocent, The court was prejudiced towards GD	Observe legal culture and presumption of innocence, Clear separation of political and judicial powers, Justice must be independent
Political exploitation	Rotten establishment narrative, Political exploitation narrative	The political system is guilty for the rise of GD, GD is being conflated with the struggle against the memoranda, the establishment rules in lieu of Berlin, the establishment is washing away its sins through the trial, corruption remains unpunished	The political system is not patriotic enough, Economic crisis, political corruption, memoranda, corruption, social inequality	The political establishment is corrupt, the trial is being vulgarly politically exploited, the establishment is hypocritical, GD consists of goons	M. Fyssa stood on her own, ND needs to turn towards the Right, A new party with the ideas of GD but without the practices
SYRIZA as a villain	SYRIZA as a villain narrative	SYRIZA is assisting GD due to electoral expediencies, SYRIZA collaborated with GD when it suited them, SYRIZA is exploiting the trial for communicative gains	SYRIZA	SYRIZA is in a panic	N/A
A victory for Democracy	A victory for Democracy narrative	GD threatened Democracy, GD used extreme political violence	GD	GD is a Nazi party, Magda Fyssa carried the struggle for seven years, The court was balanced	Justice did its job, Political condemnation of GD in the previous elections, ND led them to prison, People now know what GD stands for, Fortification of democratic institutions

4.2 News Frames of Avgi

The analysis of 'Avgi' newspaper produced five frames, namely 'Antifascism', 'Justice', 'A Victory for Democracy', 'New Democracy¹⁸ as a villain' and 'Systemic Support'. The first frame, 'Antifascism' presents antifascist action as the ultimate solution against fascism and neo-nazism. The frame makes reference to the multi-sided nature of fascism, which ranges from systemic manifestations to everyday life occurrences and mentalities. Despite the outcome of the trial, it calls for ongoing, continuous struggles to be developed by a united antifascist front – in both societal and political terms, as the danger of fascism returning '*under the disguise of a sheep skin*¹⁹' is always imminent. Interestingly, the focus lies more on antifascism as expressed through democratic and institutional responses, thus paying less attention and analysis to other types such as militant antifascism. Within this context, SYRIZA is presented as a party belonging to the Left, as well as a decisive force which halted the rise of GD during the years of its governance. The frame, however, makes no reference to the period when SYRIZA co-ruled with the nationalist, conservative party of ANEL, for which it has received much criticism by other parties and organisations of the Left.

Additionally, Magda Fyssa appears as a prominent figure in the antifascist frame. The mother of late Pavlos Fyssas, is often referred to as '*the mother of antifascism*' and '*Our mother*' and is being praised as the woman who have tirelessly fought for years, not only for the attribution of justice for Pavlos Fyssas, but also for every victim of fascism, through the demise and conviction of GD. It is noteworthy that while Pavlos Fyssas and Magda Fyssa receive frequent references in the articles (individually or as mother-son), the respective references to Sahzat Luqman and his family are significantly less. In some cases, the other GD victims are mentioned as follows: '*Justice for Shehzad Luqman and the other victims of the GD stabbers, the Egyptian fishermen, the PAME members but also the tens of named and anonymous victims of the Nazi gang, refugees, immigrants, but also Greeks*²⁰'.

The second frame, 'Justice', draws a deep connection between the trial and its democratic meaning. It is supported that GD is not on trial due to its ideological identity, but because of their criminal actions ignited by their Neo-Nazi ideology. Nonetheless, the trial is still considered as a means to protect the democratic values through the verdict. Therefore, while the court is independent, it still has a moral responsibility towards Democracy. It is noteworthy that the frame clearly promotes a carceral logic when talking about the punishment of Golden Dawn, without making any reference to emerging anti-carceral notions that are currently being developed by

parts of the Global Left and autonomous/antiauthoritarian/anarchist scene. Another theme that occupies the 'Justice' frame is that of the almost non-existent coverage the trial received by the media. The local established media are criticised, as well as the instrumentalisation of specific incidents which favour a more sensationalist approach which neglects the broadcasting of the main process and its specificities. As a result, a trial often paralleled with the Nuremberg trial, both in importance and symbolism, is described as *'invisible for the media'*²¹ and ends up significantly undermined within the country, leaving the people of Greece uninformed regarding its developments.

The 'Democracy' frame revolves a lot around what was phrased as *'a historic decision, a win for Democracy'*²², which has been a result of the court verdict. Here, the institution of Democracy and its values is represented as being under attack by fascist forces, with the ability to protect itself through its institutions. The international impact of the verdict is also highlighted as sending a twofold message, regarding the robustness of Democracy within Europe, as well as the spirit of zero tolerance towards fascist ideologies in the Continent and beyond. Similarly to the 'Antifascist' frame, it is pointed out that society needs to remain vigilant in order to prevent a potential rebirth of neofascism in every form. The way to achieve this is through the empowerment of Democracy through education and the fortification of its institutions.

The fourth frame, 'ND as a Villain', is omnipresent in the majority of the articles. Being the newspaper of the opposition party of SYRIZA, it is unsurprising that Avgi dedicates significant space to portray ND as owning responsibility regarding the rise and domination of GD and respond to political fires from ND against SYRIZA. Specifically, ND under the previous and current leadership, is harshly criticised for having legitimised, used and benefited from GD's agenda. Contrary to the(ir) latest antifascist declarations that complimented the trial verdict, ND is represented as having cosied up with GD over time, through overt, as well as covert, communications of its various members with those of GD. Through said responding articles, the frame exposes ND as pushing forward an anti-SYRIZA and anti-Left propaganda to promote the horseshoe theory. To do this, ND is charged with using events such as the 2011 *'squares of indignation'* and the drafting of the Penal Code, to claim that SYRIZA collaborated and protected GD.

The last frame, 'Systemic Support' vividly discusses the responsibilities of different actors in the legitimising of GD in the public's perception. The most prominent actors and causes identified for providing a fertile ground for the nurturing of GD are the mainstream media, as well as the old political system. As previously mentioned in the

'Justice' frame, the media have played a crucial role in humanising GD through political and/or lifestyle shows, while concealing their true fascist identity and criminal activity, essentially allowing the broadcasting of their exclusionary narrative for a long time. However, as the frame suggests with titles such as *'The Triple Whitewashing of Golden Dawn'*²³, the media do not act autonomously, but in the interests of an outdated, conservative political system, the same one named as responsible for the memoranda of the 'Greek Crisis' and for applying anti-migration policies. This system, along with parts of the business world, is represented as having allowed GD to operate freely against the Left and marginalised populations, under the protection of state institutions, such as the police and the media coverage within a climate of decline and erosion brought by the ten-year recession.

Table 2

Frames	Framing Devices	Problem Definition	Causal Attribution	Moral Evaluation	Treatment Recommendation
Antifascism	Antifascism narrative, Disease, Wolves, River metaphors	Conservative parties incorporate Far-Right speech, Samaras' government turned a blind eye to GD's actions, GD attacked migrants, Society is not over with far-right sentiments	Conservatives, Samaras' government in the past, Mitsotakis government currently, Voters of GD, GD	Fascism is a perverse ideology, Magda Fyssa is a tragic heroine, GD hates everything that is different	Popular and continuous struggle against fascism, Uproot fascism from society, Antifascist unity, SYRIZA's electoral victory halted GD's rise
Justice	Justice narrative, Fuhrer metaphor, Nazi construct narrative, Nuremberg Trial references	GD should have been on trial long ago, GD is a criminal organization with a clear hierarchy, The media did not cover the trial adequately	GD, Mainstream Media	The district attorney is unacceptable, Society must put forward solidarity and humanity, GD was motivated by racist hatred, Fyssas and Luqman found justice, The witnesses acted bravely, The lawyers demonstrated strong morality	Condemn GD as a criminal organization, Collective mobilizations to affect the justice system
A Victory for Democracy	A victory for democracy narrative, Democratic Walls metaphor	GD was hurting and attacking democracy, The political and media system treated them as just another party for long in the past, Citizens showed tolerance towards GD in the beginning	Voters of GD, economic crisis, Immigration, political and mainstream media system	People demonstrated their democratic reflexes	Deepen democratic institutions, Citizens must fight to defend democracy
ND as a Villain	ND as a villain narrative	ND has MPs that are far-rightists, ND's agenda legitimized GD's agenda in 2012, ND tries to take political advantage of the trial, ND was enabling GD to hurt the Left, ND cozied up to GD	ND, ND's involvement in the writing of the Penal Code & the blaming of SYRIZA, K. Mitsotakis, A. Georgiadis, A. Samaras, The mainstream media	GD is violent, GD was a national embarrassment, The mainstream media are hypocritical	N/A
Systemic Support	Systemic support narrative, Parastate organization narrative	The old political system has malice against the Left, the mainstream media normalised GD, The business world funded GD, GD has acted as a parastate organization, Systemic support emboldened GD to commit murder(s)	Government, The police, GD, The political system, The memoranda, The mainstream media	GD is violent, GD was a national embarrassment, The mainstream media are hypocritical	N/A

4.3 News Frames of Kathimerini

Kathimerini features four frames in its coverage of the trial. The ‘Justice’ frame focuses on the showdown between the Greek justice system and GD, which is framed through devices that focus on its criminal and violent practices. The framing devices revolve around a narrative that underlines the historical importance of the trial and a number of metaphors that compare GD with the German Nazi party, such as stormtrooper battalions and a simile of the trial with the Nuremberg trials. The reasoning devices of the frame focus on the criminal acts of GD, and the ideology of the party as a motivator behind these actions. GD is viewed as the only culprit, meaning that by focusing on the judicial realities of the case and the actions of GD, the frame is leaving out other systemic problems that led to the rise of GD, which is not treated as a symptom, but as the disease itself. Morally, the frame sets a dichotomy between the brave and calm members of the court, and the violent and primitive members of GD. The role of ND in the prosecution of GD is also highlighted. Finally, in the treatment recommendation dimension, the frame applauds the court’s decision and sees it as an opportunity to rebuild public trust towards the judicial power as a pillar of bourgeois democracy that can hold all other powers, including political power, to account. *‘In the case of GD, Justice rose to the occasion. It demonstrated in practice that there is no place in a Democracy for bravado, there is no impunity. Now it’s up to society to do its part. Show that it does not applaud, and will not applaud ideologies that play with fire. Is it so hard to change minds? Yes and no... It will be a shame if the monster dies and its heart is still alive’²⁴.*

‘A victory for Democracy’ can also be found in Kathimerini, which is not really a surprise given that this is a frame that was sponsored by prominent members of the Greek political establishment, such as the Prime Minister and the President of the Democracy. This frame is activated by a namesake narrative, and metaphors that frame GD’s members as ‘*petite fuhrers*’ and fascism as a disease. *‘Yesterday’s condemning verdict of the appeal’s court of Athens was hailed first and foremost as a victory for Democracy. And rightly so, given that GD as a Nazi organization, never hid that its ulterior goal was the abolition of Democracy and the establishment of a regime of violence and arbitrariness. From this point of view, the Greek people managed the first blow in July 2019 by leaving the sad imitators of Hitler out of the parliament. Yesterday’s verdict completed it’²⁵.* The frame’s reasoning devices focus on the threat that GD posed to the democratic establishment, but also take aim at the party’s voters that refused to acknowledge the evidence, even when it had been produced. Some systemic issues are mentioned in this frame, such as public dissatisfaction with

austerity and migration, however, ultimately the blame is placed with the people that were swayed by the Nazi party rather than with broader systemic issues. Therefore, the solutions proposed in the frame revolve around educating the voters in democracy and strengthening democratic institutions, however, without proposing concrete actions about how these goals can be achieved.

The third frame that is reconstructed in Kathimerini is the 'SYRIZA as a villain' frame, which is mainly sponsored by ND member's quotes. Through this frame GD's rise and trial become a sideshow to the accusations between ND and SYRIZA on the matter, which is not surprising given that Greek media often frame political issues in terms of partisan conflicts. The frame is embedded in the articles of Kathimerini through the inclusion of ND politician's quotes. Although counter-arguments by the politicians of SYRIZA are also reported, these stay within the frame, as they are mostly quotes that are answering to ND's accusations. In this frame SYRIZA is accused of changing the Penal Code and the electoral system when in government, to suit their needs, but inadvertently helping GD in the process. At the same time, the fact that SYRIZA and GD both supported the NO vote in the referendum of 2015 is framed as SYRIZA being on the same side with GD on important issues, and morally that is happening because SYRIZA also rose from the same divisions in Greek society as GD. *'SYRIZA, though, threatens to justify the diagnosis that it is a child of the division of the previous decade and cannot speak another language'*²⁶. Interestingly enough, there are no treatment recommendations in this frame, which could arguably be justified because the trial did not take place in an election year and also points to the highly polarized and contentious state of Greek politics.

The final frame reconstructed from Kathimerini's articles is the 'anti-populism' frame. In this frame GD is represented as an outcome of the polarization and populism that came to the forefront of Greek politics during the era of the memoranda. The frame condemns the political violence of GD, but at the same time it brings forward the ahistorical horseshoe theory that equivocates the criminal actions of GD with agonistic views of democracy stemming from the Left. *'Additionally, no one but a few did look carefully into the quality of the country's political culture. Populism, untruthfulness, and deception, weapons that were put to use by GD till the very end, are still acceptable political tools and because politicians refuse to reject them, society persists in accepting them. GD took advantage in a murderous way, preexisting pathogenies, but it is wrong to believe that they will take these with them to the grave'*²⁷. Left populism and social media are seen as culprits, alongside the quality of the Greek political culture, whereas the end of the status quo bipartisan system that dominated

Greek politics from 1975 onwards is lamented as a factor for the rise of the far-right party. GD is framed as taking advantage of the prevalent populism in Greek society in order to rise in popularity. Therefore, the treatment recommendation dimension of the frame suggests that in order to end phenomena such as GD it is important to change the Greek political culture to one with less confrontation and more respect between the parties, as well as change the minds of GD's voters.

Table 3

Frames	Framing Devices	Problem Definition	Causal Attribution	Moral Evaluation	Treatment Recommendation
Justice	The most important trial of post-war Greece narrative, Nuremberg simile, Nazi gang narrative, Stormtroopers metaphor	GD was engaged in criminal acts and xenophobic attacks, Their Nazi ideology was the motivation behind their actions, They left behind a political gap that someone could take advantage of, The trial took too long	Pathogenies of the criminal justice system, GD and their populism	The court was meticulous, calm, and brave, GD is violent and primitive, GD members tried to self-victimize themselves, The court was not ideological, ND politicians led them to justice	The court rose to the occasion, Europe can learn from Greece, Justice ended GD's reign, Justice held politics to account, People now trust the justice system
A victory for Democracy	A victory for Democracy narrative, Catharsis, Fuhrer, Virus, Walls metaphors	Part of society refuses to see the evidence, GD threatened to topple democracy, Extreme political violence	Greece's bankruptcy, GD's voters, Public dissatisfaction with austerity and migration, Journalists	GD is brutal, Democracy does not exact revenge, The Greek people must be unified for democracy, GD is consisted of clowns, GD was a national embarrassment, ND prosecuted GD	Bettering everyday life, Less division, Educate GD's voters in democracy, Reinforce democracy
SYRIZA as a villain	SYRIZA as a villain archetype	SYRIZA changed the electoral system favoring GD, SYRIZA was on the same side with GD in the referendum, SYRIZA made changes in the penal code, SYRIZA is trying to take political advantage of the trial	SYRIZA	SYRIZA is also a child of division like GD, SYRIZA has ideological obsessions, SYRIZA is reckless	N/A
Anti-populism	Anti-establishment narrative, Horseshoe narrative, Anti-populism narrative	Political institutions in Greece still support violence, GD succeeded where the state failed, State politics cannot answer international threats, The issues that gave rise to GD are still prevalent	Social media, The fracturing of the status quo political establishment in Greece, The Left, Populism, The quality of Greek political culture	GD was a violent symptom, Populists hate freedom, Greek society has hatred and stupidity, GD was pretending to be anti-establishment	Reject racism and violence, Change politics, Respectful political confrontation, Change GD's voters

5. Discussion

There are three strands of frames that guide the discussion around the trial and focus on different aspects of it. The first strand is the ideological one, with frames that focus on ideological takes towards the trial. As the tables demonstrate, the 'A victory for democracy' idea emerges as a prevalent frame in all of the newspapers analysed. This is not surprising as it was a frame sponsored by the prime minister K. Mitsotakis and the president of the Greek democracy K. Sakellariopoulou. Such strong sponsors for a frame can ensure that it will be carried by almost every journalistic outlet in the country, however, in the examined newspapers the frame was embedded beyond simple retransmissions of elite quotes. The focus is on the ontological threat that GD posed for democracy, and the extreme political violence that it represents. Throughout the studied newspapers the frame appears somewhat uniform focusing on GD's violence as the main problem. However, Avgi and Kathimerini also raise questions about the remaining voters of the party who have shown tolerance even in the face of condemning evidence. Interestingly enough Avgi and Kathimerini, despite starting from opposite ideological standpoints, attempt to investigate the underlying causes that led to the electoral rise of GD in the preceding economic crisis and in public dissatisfaction stemming from austerity and immigration. All newspapers call for a fortification of democratic institutions and furthering the education of the citizens in democracy to avoid the rise of a similar party in the future. However, these calls are not further unpacked, ultimately remaining empty slogans.

The frame itself appears to be shallow as it is overly celebratory of the system that brought GD to justice and blaming the citizens for voting for the neo-Nazi party, leaving outside of the frame parts of the political, economic, and media elites that supported or used GD at least during the early years of the crisis. Such a frame that includes these criticisms can be found in Avgi, namely the 'Systemic Support' frame, which takes aim at the elements of the Greek mainstream system that supported GD, in order to instrumentalise it against the Left. However, this frame offers no solution and therefore remains partial as there are no suggestions as to what is there to be done, even in the form of slogans. Finally, Dimokratia carries the 'Political exploitation' frame that looks at the underlying causes of the rise of GD but from a different ideological standpoint. Through this frame the right-wing newspaper takes aim at the political establishment of Greece, which is represented as a stand-in government for Germany that rules Greece through the EU and it is not patriotic enough. The solution for Dimokratia will come from the right-wing, either through a turn of the ruling ND

towards a more hardcore right-wing approach, or a new party that will adopt the ideas of GD but not its practices.

On the other hand, the 'Anti-Fascism' frame that is found in Avgi is an ideological frame that also focuses on parliamentary political games. This frame instead of calling for a defence of democracy, as in the case of the 'A victory for democracy' one, calls for a popular and grassroots struggle against fascism under the auspices of the antifascist movement. The frame becomes political by taking aim against the current and previous ND-led governments, blaming the previous government of Antonis Samaras for turning a blind eye to the actions of GD up to the point of Fyssas' murder, and the incumbent government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis for incorporating the narrative of GD.

SYRIZA's role in halting the rise of GD is played up unsurprisingly, given the important political and economic links between Avgi and the center-left party. Similar frames are found in Dimokratia and Kathimerini, embarking from a right-wing ideological standpoint. Dimokratia features the 'Horseshoe theory' frame, and Kathimerini the 'Anti-populism' frame that contains the Horseshoe narrative as well. Kathimerini and Dimokratia forcefully promote the narrative of the two extremes, namely Golden Dawn and Syriza (or more clearly, the Left movement as a whole with Syriza as the ideologic representative in the Parliament). In Dimokratia the actions of GD are equated with the history of the Left in Greece and especially the case of the terrorist organization 17 November, whereas in Kathimerini also condemns the Left but focuses more on left and right-wing populisms that became prevalent in Greek politics throughout the 2010s. Avgi, although it does not feature a similar frame dismisses this relationship as ahistorical and disorienting while taking a step further to reveal the deeper connections between the conservative Right and the Far-Right in a number of articles.

The second strand of frames revolves around the political conflicts between the major Greek parties of the era (ND-SYRIZA) and the role that their political opponents had in the rise and fall of GD. The 'Syriza as a villain' (Dimokratia, Kathimerini) and 'ND as a villain' (Avgi) frames are present in all three newspapers, depending on the political parallelism that each outlet demonstrates. A number of accusations are thrown towards the opposing camp, while at the same time, self-reflection to determine the shared and individual contribution of each party to the legitimization and the enabling of GD is absent.

A third strand of frames are those focusing on the judicial system of Greece and the process of the trial itself. The 'Justice' frame that is found both in Avgi and Kathimerini focuses on the legal aspects of GD and the trial itself by framing the Nazi party as a

criminal organization with a clear hierarchy that was involved in criminal acts motivated by their ideology. The solution to the problem of GD here is brought about by the legal justice system of Greece and the condemning of GD solely in the court. However, such an approach to the issue of GD and extreme right-wing violence is superficial as it does not touch upon the factors that bring about its rise in the first place, or the embedding of fascist ideologies in positions of power and influence within the political system and across society. On the other hand, Dimokratia features the 'Politicized trial' frame, which is also sponsored by the lawyers and members of GD themselves. The frame is embedded in Dimokratia mainly through quotes of lawyers and members that are carried in the articles of the newspaper. This frame is the opposite of the 'Justice' frame as the trial is seen as an ideological and political charade and the verdict is represented as a decision made under the pressure of the political system and the people gathered outside of the court. Observing the independence of justice is stressed in this frame, although it should be said that bar for the condemned members of GD there was no other institution questioning the verdict or the court itself.

6. Conclusion

Frame analysis was used in this study to critically analyse the representation of the trial of GD in Greek newspapers. The sets of frames reconstructed from each newspaper were compared in order to shed light on how the press framed the trial and the range of opinions represented through the newspapers. Three different strands of frames were identified; ideological, political, and legal frames. These frames focused on different aspects of GD, its trial, and on the qualities of the other actors involved. The Left-wing Avgi balances between the mainstream approach that focuses on the reaction of democratic parties against the threat of GD and the legal response to the criminal acts of the neo-Nazi party. At the same time the leftist background and history of the newspaper lead to a more traditional antifascist response, whose sincerity is questioned due to SYRIZA's development to a mainstream social-democratic party and the extensive links between the newspaper and the center-left party.

The conservative press demonstrates a similar approach, with some slight changes to the constituting elements of the frames, or with a couple of frames found in Dimokratia that exemplify its overall more hardcore right-wing stance in comparison to Kathimerini. Overall, the conservative newspaper adopts the mainstream approach that focuses on the institutions of Democracy and Justice as the answers to the threats posed by GD. This makes sense as the current government is a conservative

government and given the political parallelism of these outlets they are more or less expected to adopt the frames promoted by the government. However, they also take aim at the Left as an expression of populism (Kathimerini), or violence (Dimokratia). Moreover, Dimokratia's inclusion of a frame that echoes the arguments of GD points that the newspaper leans more to the right on the political spectrum in comparison to Kathimerini. Finally, all the newspapers feature frames demonstrating the political game of Greece and the partisan conflicts of the two major parties (ND, SYRIZA). These frames take away the attention from the trial or from GD itself and move the spotlight to the accusations thrown around by the two parties to each other. These frames are congruent with the advocacy role of the Greek press and with the apolitical overpoliticization that Spourdakis (1989; in Papatheodorou & Machin, 2003, p. 35) mentioned that underpins public debates in Greece, as they appear overly political but they are ultimately hollow and devoid of meaning.

To make sense of the representation of the trial in the Greek media, it is important to understand the peculiarities of the Greek press system. Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) discern five major characteristics of the media system in Greece: low levels of newspaper circulation, a tradition of advocacy reporting, instrumentalisation of privately owned media, politicization of public broadcasting and broadcast regulation and limited development of journalism as an autonomous profession (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002: 176-177). Hallin and Mancini (2004) classify Greece within the Polarized Pluralist model based on those characteristics, which seem to have been exacerbated during the last decade due to the onset of the economic crisis and its devastating impact for media organizations in the country, as well as the extensive digitization of journalism that has further intensified journalistic labour (Kostopoulos 2020a). Papathanassopoulos et al (2021) note that Greek journalism is now further concentrated in the hands of fewer media conglomerates limiting journalistic autonomy even more, in a country that was hardly a beacon of journalistic professionalism. Furthermore, Kostopoulos (2020b) examines the case of the coverage of the Memoranda (2010-2017) by the Greek press and concludes that the previous trends of public debate persist as overtly polarized debates are taking place through the place, but ultimately these strategically converge over a set of commonly agreed upon political courses.

The same can be said for the debate around the trial of GD, as with the exception of Dimokratia which diverges through the adoption of more hardcore right-wing stances, Avgi and Kathimerini feature a polarized debate that is ultimately vacuous. However, it is important to note that the current (2021) ND administration follows an increasingly

neoliberal authoritarian course, whereas it has used the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to funnel state funds to private media enterprises, ultimately becoming their main source of funding. These developments have an important impact for debate in Greece, as right-wing media discourse is much more publicly influential, whereas the funding of the media can allow the government to effectively contain critique. In such a historical and socio-political setting the trial emerges as a useful tool to turn critique towards the Left and to absolve the Greek political system of any wrongdoing in the crisis of the previous decade and the rise of extreme right-wing violence. With a new economic crisis looming after the end of the pandemic, it is important as ever to study further the role of the media during the early days of GD.

About the Authors

Ms. Christina Verousi is a Doctoral Candidate and a Research Associate to the School of Criminology at the University of Leicester. Her research interests include Islamophobia, Gendered Islamophobia, Religiously motivated hate, Hate Crimes and the Far-Right, and her current work revolves around understanding the nature, extent and manifestations of Islamophobia in her home country, Greece. Orcid ID: 0000-0002-3261-7633

Dr. Maria-Nerina Boursinou is a postdoctoral research fellow in the School of Geography and Sustainable development at the University of St. Andrews. She holds a PhD from the School of Media, Communication and Sociology (University of Leicester). Her research interests include migration, Information and Communication Technologies, gender, urban studies, the Far-Right, research ethics and participatory methodologies. Orcid ID: 0000-0003-4743-5741

Dr. Chris Kostopoulos is currently a Lecturer of Media and Communication at Curtin University Malaysia. He has also authored "Journalism and Austerity: Digitization and Crisis During the Greek Memoranda". His research interests include media framing and journalistic production of content, changing journalistic practices in the face of increasing digitalization processes, media systems research, political economy of the media, and disinformation and algorithmic governance in the digital age. Orcid ID: 0000-0002-0393-6862

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: C.V. and B. M. N.; Methodology: C.K.; Formal analysis: C.V., B. M. N. and C.K.; Investigation: C.V., B. M. N. and C.K; Resources: C.V., B. M. N. and C.K; Writing - Original draft preparation: C.V., B. M. N. and C.K; Writing - Review and editing: C.V., B. M. N. and C.K; Visualization: C.V., B. M. N. and C.K; Project administration: C.V., B. M. N. and C.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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Footnotes

1. Corresponding author [↵](#)
2. Henceforth referred to as 'GD' [↵](#)
3. Eleven other members were found guilty of being members. Yiogos Roupakias was found guilty for Fyssas' murder, alongside 17 other GD's members that were accused of complicity. In total, the court proposed lengthy prison sentences for 57 of the defendants totalling in excess of 500 years (Verousi and Allen, 2021). [↵](#)
4. See for example: Golden Dawn Watch, <https://goldendawnwatch.org/> [↵](#)
5. 'Horseshoe theory', attributed to Faye (1996), advocates that the far left and the far right do not exist in the opposite ends of a linear political spectrum. On the contrary, the theory envisages the political continuum as being bent, much like a horseshoe, with the two opposing edges closing in on each other. By extension, it asserts that the far left and the far right are much more akin to each other than to the political centre. [↵](#)
6. 'SYRIZA's stance against Golden Dawn is hypocritical', October 7th, 2020 [↵](#)
7. Ibid. [↵](#)
8. Dimitris Koufontinas is a convicted prominent member of the group, currently serving a life sentence for his role in a series of deadly attacks perpetrated in Greece between 1975 and 2000. [↵](#)
9. 'Justice is not a TV reality show', October 8th, 2020 [↵](#)
10. 'Golden Dawn and 17 November', October 13th, 2020 [↵](#)
11. 'Why was New Democracy in Court?', October 9th, 2021 [↵](#)

12. 'The power of Democracy', October 10th, 2020 [↵](#)
13. 'A mother from heaven', October 8th, 2021 [↵](#)
14. 'Sugar in the quinine of national compromises', October 12th, 2021 [↵](#)
15. 'Themis limping', October 8th, 2021 [↵](#)
16. 'Justice is not a TV reality show', October 8th, 2020 [↵](#)
17. 'All of Greece is Magda', October 8th, 2020 [↵](#)
18. Henceforth referred to as 'ND'. [↵](#)
19. 'They will return and wear the sheepskin of the wolf', October 10th, 2021 [↵](#)
20. 'Not anywhere', October 8th, 2021 [↵](#)
21. 'A trial invisible for the Media', October 5th, 2021 [↵](#)
22. 'Nazis in prison', October 7th, 2021 [↵](#)
23. 'The Triple Whitewashing of Golden Dawn', October 4th, 2021 [↵](#)
24. 'Vultures', October 16th, 2020 [↵](#)
25. 'And a victory for the rule of law', October 8th, 2020 [↵](#)
26. Verdicts, October 13th, 2020 [↵](#)
27. Stretches, October 10th, 2020 [↵](#)