

Hellenic Observatory Research Programme

«Low-intensity violence in crisis-ridden Greece:
evidence from the far right and the far left»

Policy Brief

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«Low-intensity violence in crisis-ridden Greece: evidence from the far right and the far left»

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1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the murder of Alexandros Grigoropoulos, a 15-year-old student shot by a police officer in December 2008, Greece has experienced a new phase of radicalization (Economides & Monastiriotes 2009), marked by an extended use of violence (Sotiropoulos 2018: 11). By its unprecedented magnitude and *durée*, the ongoing financial crisis (Featherstone & Papadimitriou 2017), as well as its blueprint on the party system (Dinas & Rori 2013; Rori 2016), have triggered the emergence of circumstances that promote the toleration, acceptance and use of violence (Georgiadou & Rori 2014; Georgiadou et al. 2019; Capelos & Demertzis 2018).

We focus on different expressions of politically motivated violence from 2008 onwards and identify their repertoires, the actors involved, their targets. Among different dimensions and levels of intensity (della Porta 2013), we concentrate on violent episodes of low intensity. Actors involved in low-intensity violence are not only members of formal organizations or groupings of strict hierarchical structure (Roell & Worcester 2010: 4). Many violent actors belong to loose or *ad hoc* networks and cultivate ties either with formal/informal organizations or sub-/counter-cultures (Ultras, skinheads, etc.) (Galariotis et al. 2017; Caiani & della Porta 2018; Zaimakis 2016; Tipaldou 2012). Low-intensity violence is often performed “in a non-militarised manner” and used in local areas as a means to take control over specific places, issues and resources (Balcells et al 2015: 4-5). It can also serve, however, as an anteroom to terrorism and high-intensity violent activities (Kalyvas 2015: 126). Polarization, ghettoization and neighbourhood segregation are phenomena that breed the ground for the rise of different subtypes of low-intensity violence (Roell & Worcester 2010; Dinas et al. 2016: 86). Kinds of violence function like “connected containers” insofar as some of them are linked to or overlap with others (Kostakos 2010: 115; Kostakos & Antonopoulos 2010). Forms of low-level violence may change degree and intensity and mutate into higher impact conflicts (Lemos 2018).

We systematically monitor violent events stemming from both the far right and the far left in a timespan of eleven years. Our aggregate data testify a significant sharpening of violence on both edges of the political spectrum from the beginning of 2008 to the end of 2018. We overall registered 2,051 violent events, of which 1,594 stem from the far left and 457 from the far right. Evidence detects an increasing trend of low-intensity violence, the qualitative and quantitative analysis of which points to a diffusion of its use by a plethora of actors.

In this report, we first present the method used for the data collection. We then analyse preliminary findings on the magnitude and the evolution of political violence in the timespan of the last eleven years. We classify the actors, the targets and the events by distinguishing meaningful categories on the far right and the far left and screen the frequency in which they appear. In the last section, we discuss policy implications related to our findings and offer recommendations.

2. Methodology

We employ event analysis in order to collect events of low-intensity violence. Event analysis has become a key method in conflict, foreign policy and protest/social movement studies (Hutter 2014; Koopmans and Rucht 2002,) as it provides techniques to select events and develop data banks according to specific definitions and rules. It is a method for extracting events from diverse sources of data. Given that no systematic, official data on direct expressions of politically motivated violence exist from 2008 onwards – likewise before 2008 – our data stem mainly from media sources (newspapers, online news media platforms, broadcast news, internet). We furthermore used data from observatories, NGOs, as well as big data collections and institutional sources in order to enhance, improve and control our data (Table 1). We double-checked our data in order to avoid any duplication from our sources.

We developed a codebook of event types in order to code incidents of left-wing and right-wing low-intensity violent attacks, as well as their actors and targets. Driven by existing literature and theories, we were guided by sources and data on violent events (CAMEO, EUROPUB project, XENOS project, etc.) in order to detect the different types of incidents relevant to our topic, the entities (actors / targets) and the main elements tracking the events (location / time they took place) (Koopmans & Statham 1999; Galariotis et al. 2017).

According to the aforementioned description, we conducted a detailed explorative analysis of our data sources in order to monitor the types, entities and elements of low-intensity violence. Our analysis is both driven by the theoretical framework (concept-driven) *and* the empirical data (data-driven). By implementing a human coding technique, we created a comprehensive database of incidents of low-intensity violence from 2008 onwards. The combination of a concept-driven and a data-driven approach enables us to develop an enriched database that comprises a total of 2,051 violent events throughout the entire period under study.

Media sources ¹	Other sources ²
Avgi	Official:
CNN Greece	Court of Appeal, case files on Golden Dawn's Trial
Enikos.gr	Hellenic Police
Efimerida ton Syntakton	Ministry of Education
ERT Greece	
Ethnos	Big Data:
Iefimerida	XENO@GR
in.gr	PALOMAR
Huffingtonpost Greece	
Kathimerini	Observatories:
Naftemporiki	Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN)
Newsbeast.gr	Racist crimes watch
News247.gr	
Proto Thema	Foundations, NGOs, Communities:
Skai.gr	Golden Dawn Watch
Ta Nea	KEERFA. Movement United Against Racism and Fascist Threat
The Toc Greece	KIS. Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece
To Vima	<u>Rosa Luxembourg Foundation</u>
Vice.com	

Table 1. *Datasets.*

3. Findings

- Politically motivated violence has increased during the crisis
- The level of far-left violence is bigger than of the far-right's
- 2018 was the most violent year for both far left and far right actors
- Low-intensity political violence comes mainly from collective rather than individual actors
- Far-left actors hit material and far-right actors hit human targets

1,594 episodes stem from the far left and 457 from the far right. The level of violence on the far left is 3.5 times bigger than the one on the far right over a period of eleven years of study. Although there are fluctuations in the evolution of action of far right and far left actors, the

¹ We focused on a variety of media sources which cover a wide range of the political landscape. Both traditional and digital media are used to control the validity of each reported violent incident. The precise numbers of newspapers' readership are published on the the Athens' Daily Newspaper Publisher Association official website: <https://www.eihea.com.gr/eihea.php?contentid=67&langflag=en> . Data on the popularity of Greek information websites and online media platforms are published by the Reuters Digital News Report: <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org> . Data on the audience of tv channels and programs can be found at <http://www.arianna.gr/gr/data/default.htm> .

² Apart from official data sources, we used big data from XENO@GR research project which examined the evolution of the phenomenon of xenophobia in contemporary Greek society from the 1990s onward (official website: <http://xenophobia.ilsp.gr/?lang=en>) and PALOMAR which is an automated Computational Journalism platform for scalable processing of data streams of news sources and social media (official website: <http://palomar.ilsp.gr>).

timeline of violent events testifies a quasi-constant increasing trend on both kinds of violence starting in 2014. After 2010 the increasing trends on the far left are stronger than the decreasing. To the exception of 2017, violence on the far left increases more than on the far right in the post-2014 years. Interestingly, the peak observed among the far right violent events in 2012 coincides with Golden Dawn’s entrance in Parliament after having won 6,97 % of the total valid vote. The downward turn that started in the middle of 2013, follows the beginning of its criminal investigation starting after the murder of the anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas (Ellinas & Lamprianou 2016).

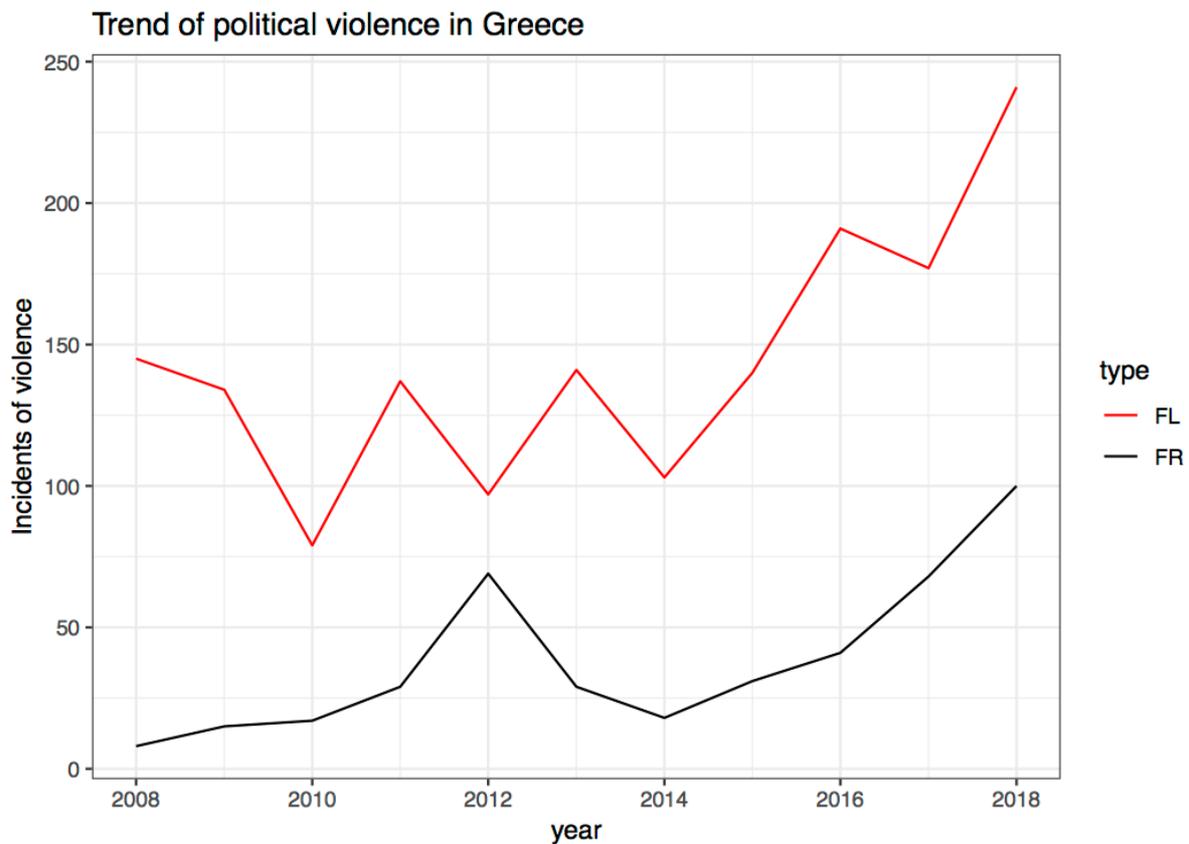


Figure 1. The evolution of far right and far left violence, 2008 – 2018.

The distribution of events per year permits us to identify highs and lows in the period under study. So far, the less violent year has been 2010, whereas the most violent was 2018. 2018 has been the most violent year of both the far right and far left actors. However, far left violent events were strongly present throughout the entire period of time, whereas far right violent incidents were occasional before 2011.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Far left	145	135	79	138	97	145	103	140	192	178	242	1,594
Far right	8	17	18	36	81	32	20	32	41	68	104	457
Total	153	152	97	174	178	177	123	172	233	246	346	2,051

Table 2. The distribution of violence among the far right and the far left per year.

3.1 Actors

The first classification of violent events identifies the actors. For this, we explore the manifestation of incidents in which they have been involved. Since the forms of action developed by the far right and the far left displays similarities but also differences – each political space following divergent ideologies, political aims, targets and organizational configurations – a common classification for the two kinds could not be followed, as it would distort meaningful types of actors. Hence, actors’ classification on the two edges present both common and singular types. On the far left, we have identified six categories: groups/organizations³, trade unions, citizens, anarchists, students and a number of unknown actors. Among the far left, anarchists are the most frequent actors, being followed by identified groups and organizations and then by members of trade unions. On the far right, we have identified seven categories of actors: groups/organizations, employers/security employees, hooligans, police officers, individual citizens, students and a series of actors of unspecified characteristics. The organized actors are the most frequent, being followed by the series of unknown actors and the violence attributed to members of the Hellenic police. The type of actors of a significant number of far left and far right events is unknown.

Far left actors	N of incidents	Shares(%)	Far right actors	N of incidents	Shares (%)
Anarchists	836	52.3	Groups/Organizations	333	72.9
Groups/Organizations	321	20.1	Unknown	33	7.2
Members of trade unions	200	12.5	Citizens	31	6.8
Unknown	92	5.8	Police officers	32	7
Citizens	81	5.1	Employers	17	3.7
Students	64	4	Students	9	2
			Hooligans	2	0.4
TOTAL	1,594	100	TOTAL	457	100

Table 3. *Far left and far right violent actors.*

Both classifications reveal that numerous violent episodes are not attributed to individual actors. On the contrary, low-intensity violence is a matter of collective action and goes in tandem with organization. Interestingly, the evolution of violent attacks per actor on the far left reveals that the action of organized groups and anarchists increases over time, whereas that of institutionally represented professional interests (trade unions) decreases as of 2016 and so does student movement in the post-2014 period.

³ For both far right and far left actors, organized action is marked under the label groups/organizations. The difference between groups and organizations pertains to different levels of organizational capacity and duration of action.

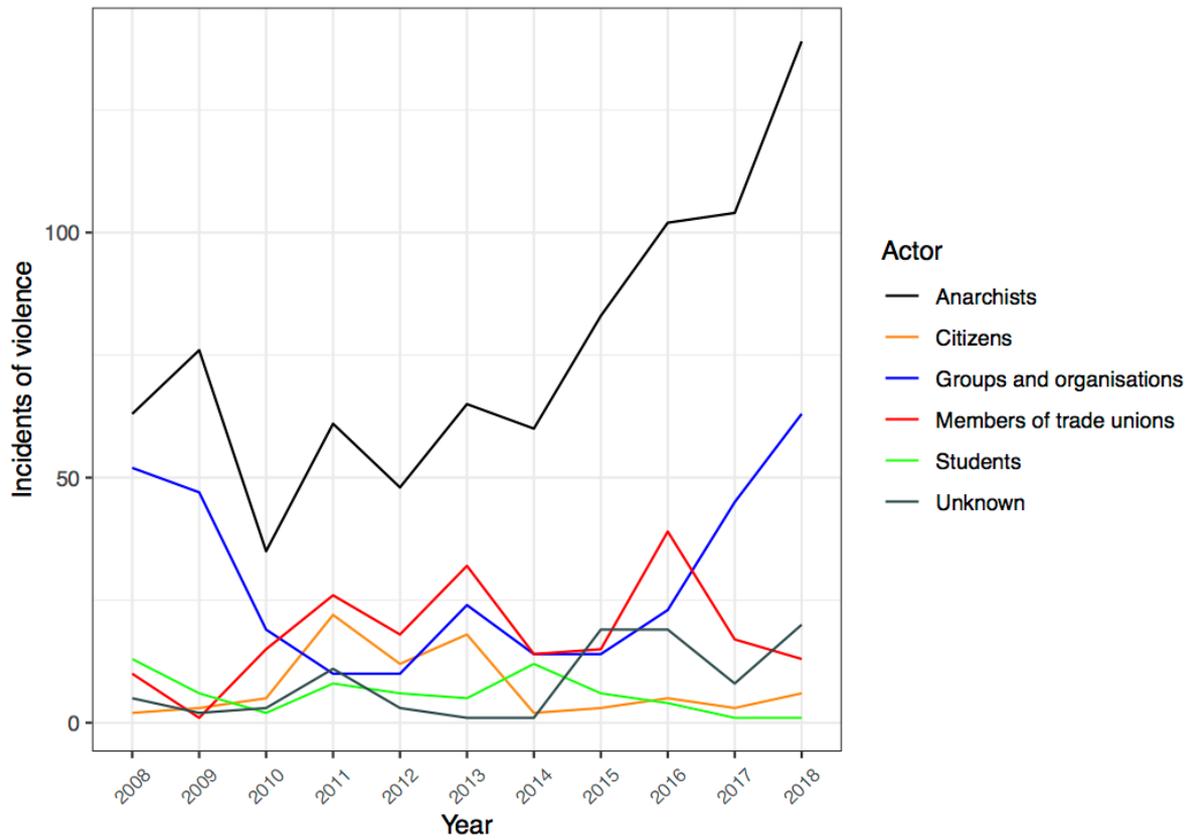


Figure 2. Evolution of far left violence per type of actor.

Violent action on the far right is clearly strategically organized, since it stems majoritarily from groups and organizations until 2012 and rises again among them since 2014, testifying that the ongoing trial of Golden Dawn has only temporarily demotivated far right activism. The violent organized action on the far right seems to be in 2018 slightly higher than what it was in 2012.

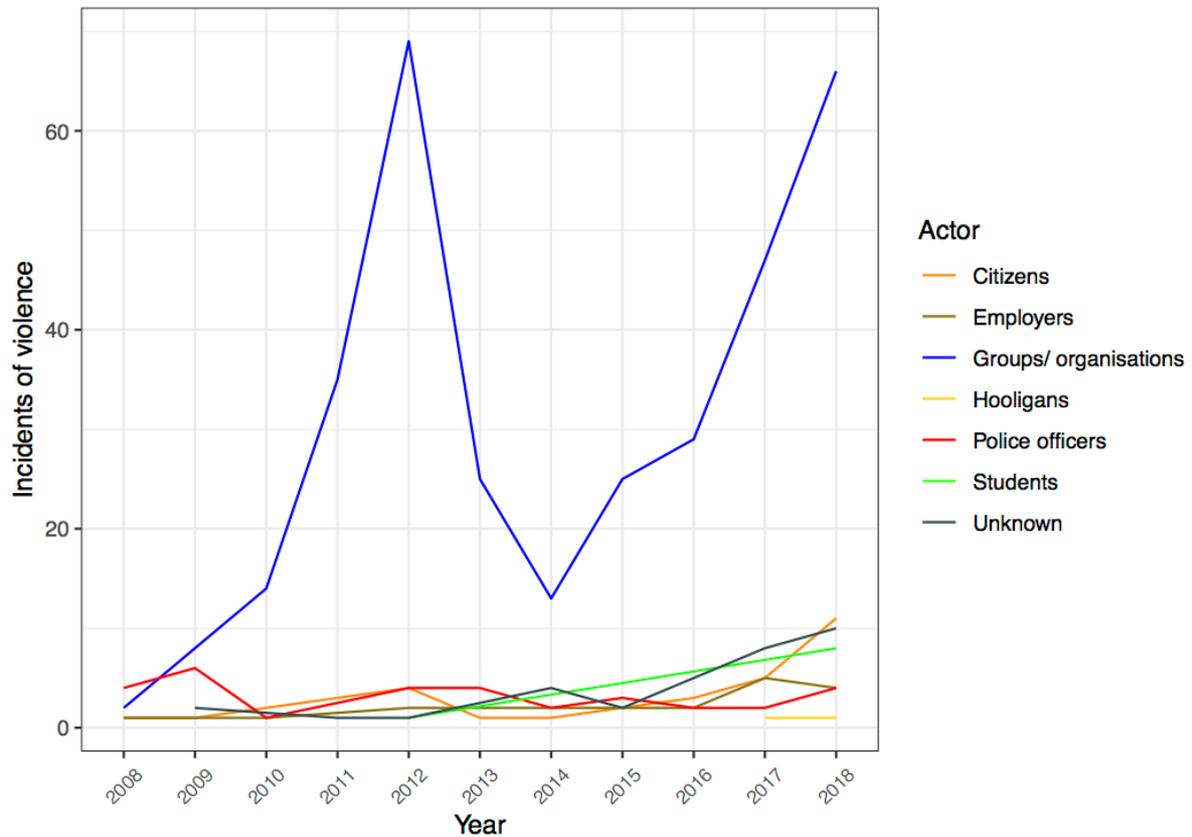


Figure 3. Evolution of the far right violence per type of actor.

The breakdown of violence by organized actors on the two political components permits us to identify both their internal configuration and the evolution of those actors over time. Evidence on the distribution of organized action on the far left reveals a proliferation of organizations in the period starting in 2008. In the next two figures we plot the organizations having committed violent incidents equal to or higher than eight in the period under study. Some organizations cease to exist, whereas others appear. Among them Rubicon is currently the most active.

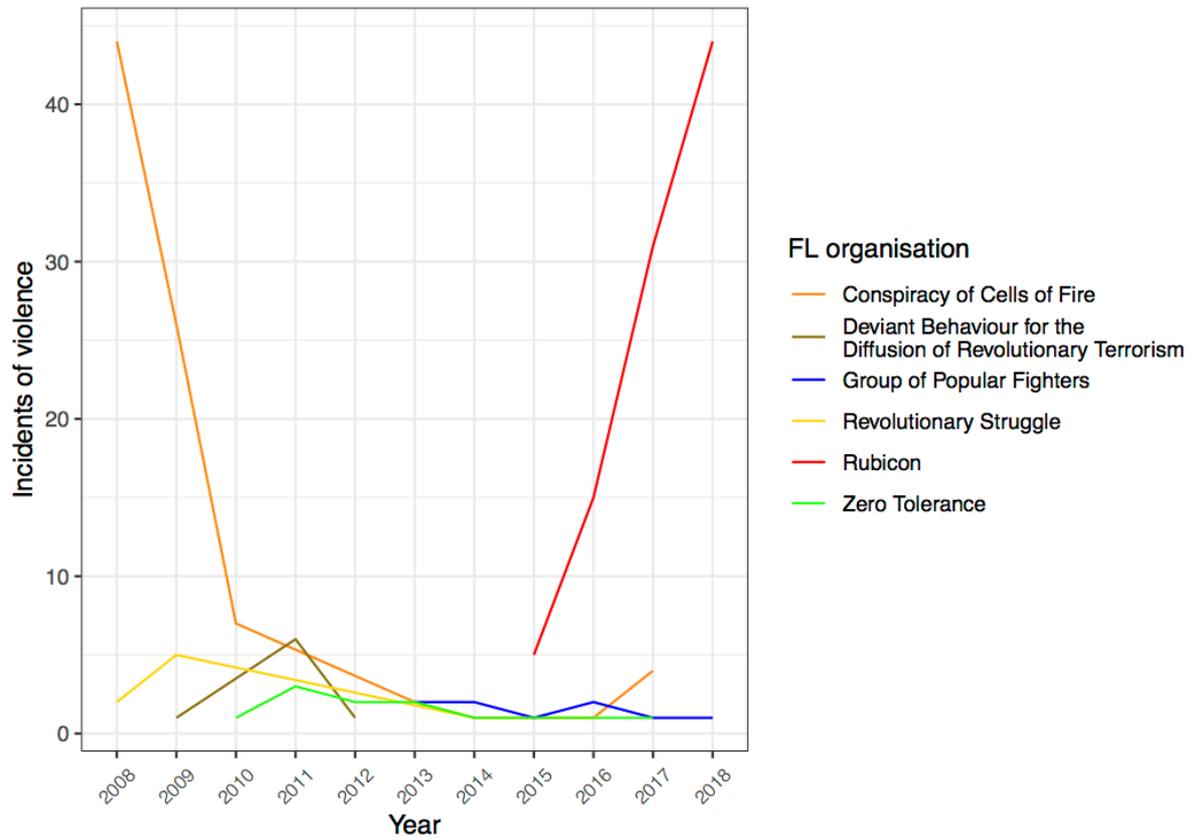


Figure 4. *The evolution of violent action by the most active organizations on the far left, 2008-2018.*

Even though we observe a proliferation of organizations on the far right, the most numerous actions are committed by unidentified activists. Golden Dawn’s violent action reaches its zenith in 2012 and is ever since in a mostly decreasing trend, which might be correlated with the ongoing trial of its leader and cadres, that prompted diversification of the party’s activist strategy. Nonetheless, as of 2015 far right activism increases, with unorganized activists or groups of outraged citizens taking the lead.

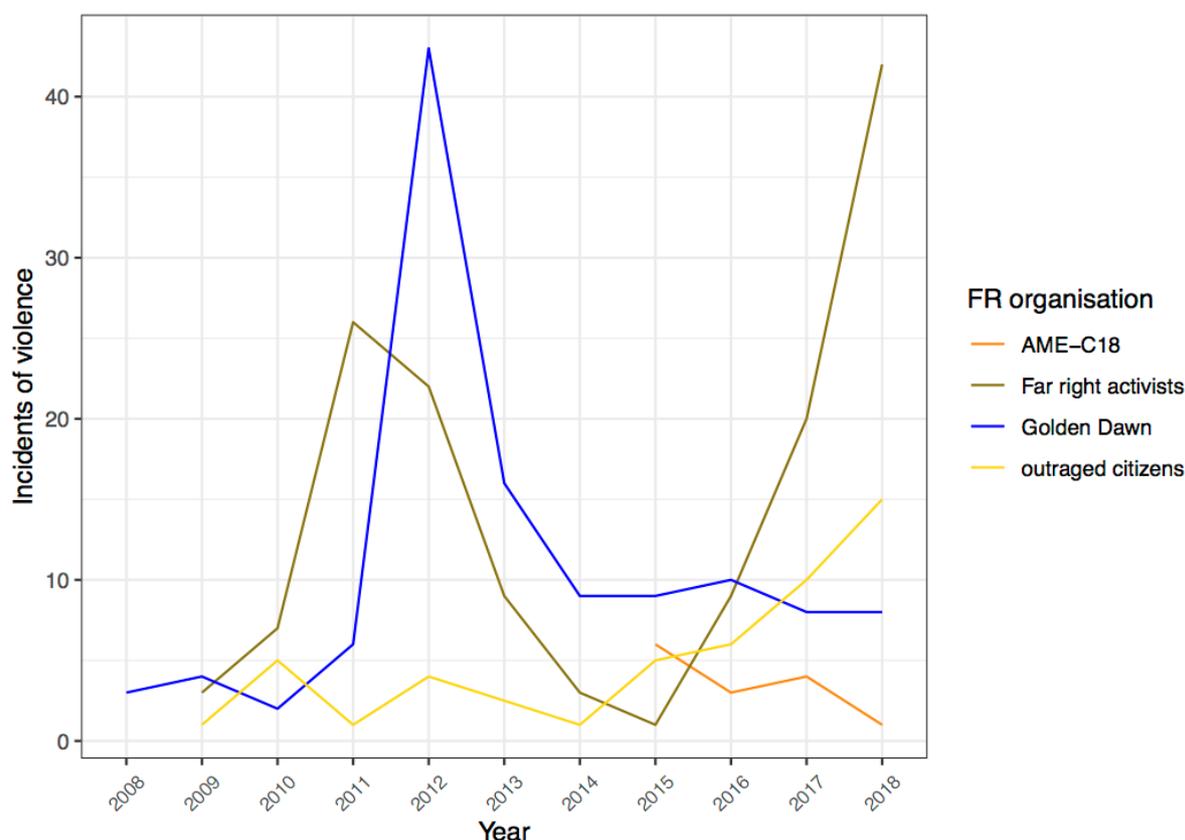


Figure 5. The evolution of violent action by the most active organizations on the far right, 2008-2018.

3.2 Targets

The second classification sheds light into the targets of violent actors. We have identified human and material targets hit by actors on the far right and the far left. The majority of targets on the far left are material (63.6%), whereas the vast majority of targets on the far right are human (77.8%).

Type of target	Far left		Far right	
	N of incidents	Shares (%)	N of incidents	Shares (%)
Human	563	36.3	356	77.8
Material	999	63.6	101	22.1
Both	32	2	NA	NA
Total	1,594	100	457	100

Table 4. Types of targets on the far right and the far left.

Violent actors on the far right and the far left tap on different human and material targets. When we delve into the far left, we see that whereas anarchists attack almost equally human and material targets, identified organizations and trade unions have a clear preference for material targets.

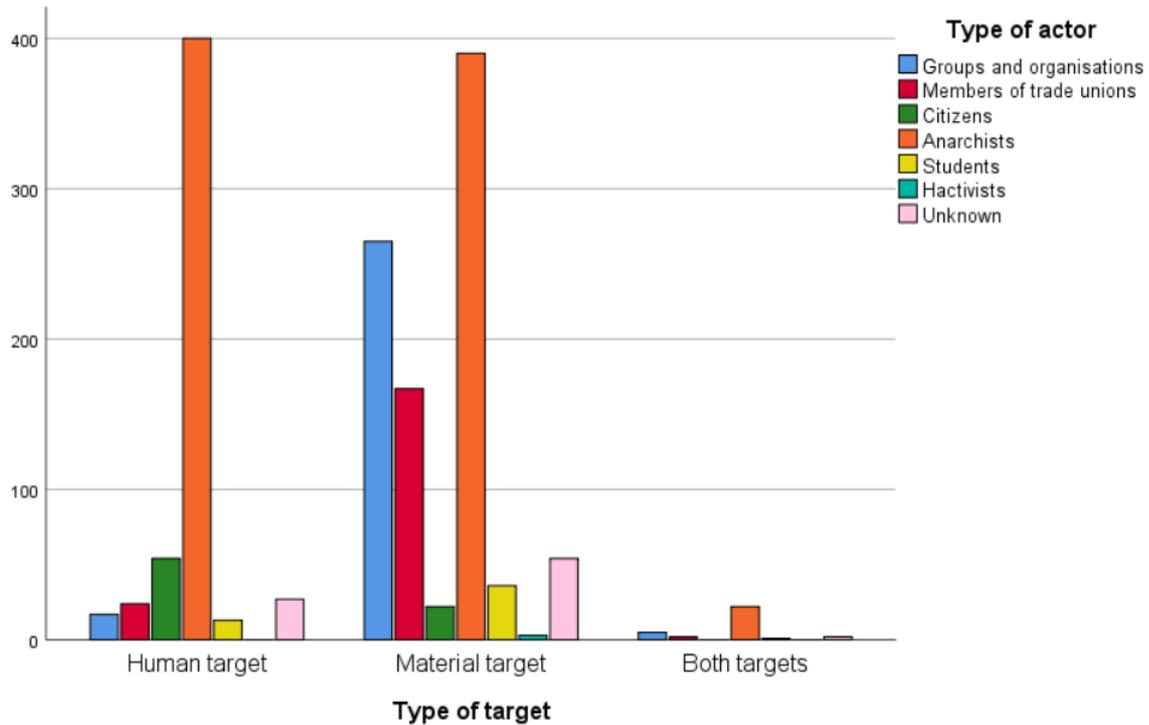


Figure 6. Distribution of targets per actor on the far left.

Among 999 far left material targets 44.6% are public buildings and state properties, 27.7% are private companies and professional spaces, 8.3% party headquarters, 5.7% vehicles, 3.1% embassies and 1.2% religious spaces. Among 563 far left human targets, 76.2% aim police officers, 7.9% politicians, 5.8% employees, 5.5% far right activists.

Zooming into the far right attacks per type of target reveals that the vast majority of human and material targets stems from groups and organizations, whereas the second most numerous actor is police officers. At the same time, police officers are the main human targets aimed and reached by far left violent actors.

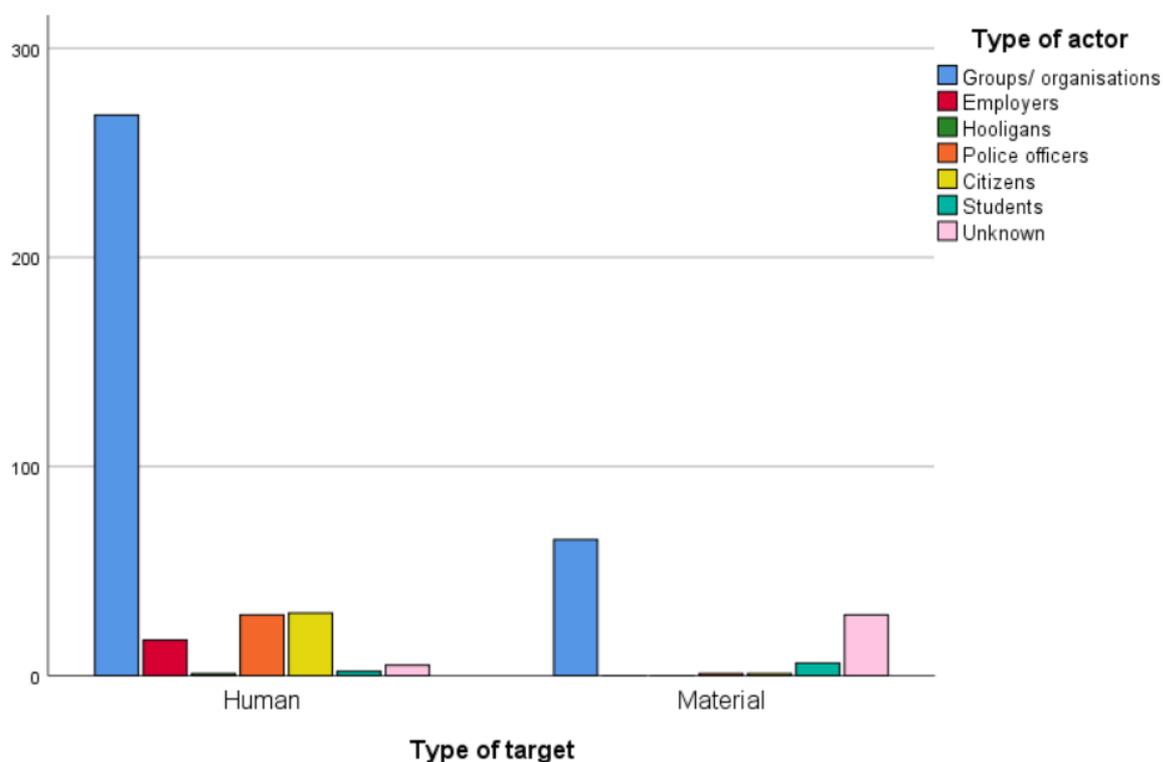


Figure 7. Distribution of targets per actor on the far right.

When we delve into the distribution of 356 attacks towards human targets inside the far right, we see that the majority among them are immigrant and refugees (58.6%), followed by far left activists (14.6%) and citizens without specified characteristics (13.2%). Among 101 material targets, the most preferred by the far right are religious spaces (38%), anarchist and left-wing spaces and squats (25%), schools (11%) and shelters (7%).

3.3 Events

The types of violent action differ between the far left and the far right. Among actors of the far left we distinguish nine different types, of which riots and attacks against far right activists (30.6%), squatting and invasions (25.8%), arsons (22.1%) and attacks by using paint, stone or mauls (9.8%) are the most frequent. On the far right, we classify them equally in nine types, of which assault, beating and torture are the most frequent (32%), followed by armed attacks (21.8%), riots, pogroms and attacks against far left activists (17.7%), as well as vandalisms and repeated desecration against Jewish monuments and places for Muslim worship (10%).

4. Policy-related observations

- Political violence in Greece is a domestic product and it affects productivity and economic performance
- Preventing strategies should consider the resources, recruiting and networking of violent actors
- Tailor-made policies given the characteristics of political violence should be designed
- Cultural training and increased sanctions for police officers is required
- Educational institutions need to face the phenomenon of far-left and far-right violence being popular among students

In contrast to current trends of violence in Europe triggered by Islamic terrorism and religious fundamentalism, political violence in Greece is a purely domestic product. Whereas these types of violence remain the primary violent treat in Europe⁴ (Counter Extremism Project; Neumann 2014, 2016) – mainly committed by immigrants and/or actors having an immigrant background (Roy 2007) –, low-intensity violence in Greece is conducted primarily by indigenous actors. This first systematic monitoring of politically motivated low-intensity violence in crisis-ridden Greece permits us four preliminary recommendations.

First, political violence has tripled from 2008 to 2018. Far left violence is 3.5 times bigger than far right violence when we look at the aggregate numbers over time. Even though the rhythm of increase is not linear, comparing the levels of 2008 to those of 2018 points to an increase of 1.7 times in the violence committed by the far left and 12.5 times in the violence committed by the far right. Our evidence shows the proliferation of organizations on both spectrums, even though the majority of violent incidents is perpetrated by specific actors. Regardless of causes, all those alarming trends imply concentration of human and material resources, socialization networks and strategies of recruitment. Any preventing strategy for tackling the phenomenon, should start by taking into account those parameters.

Second, the alarming increase of both far left and far right violence after 2014 testifies deficient and ineffective repression. Policing should take into consideration the specific configuration of political violence with respect to actors, targets and events and design tailor-made policies which will deal with those inner characteristics of Greek political violence.

Third, we found 31 human targets and 1 material being hit by police officers. Beyond the abuse of institutional power and the illegal activity, this evidence testifies association of cells inside the police with far right action. It requires institutional vigilance and direct action both preventive and repressive. Life-long cultural training to police officers and raising the cost through sanction for such interference are *sine qua non* policies.

Four, 4% of far left violence and 2% of far right is acted by students. Even though the numbers seem low, it should be mentioned that this type takes into account violence

⁴ Data from the Counter Extremism Project can be found in the official website <https://www.counterextremism.com/>. Other relevant sources : 2016 OECD report on States of Fragility https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/states-of-fragility-2016_9789264267213-en#page1.

committed within or during student movements. One should not underestimate that students involved in violence are in reality more, since a parts of them are captured under the actor type anarchists, group/organization and/or unknown. Anarchism is highly popular among university students, whilst anarchists have consistently been involved in protest movements against reforms in higher education (Vradis & Dalakoglou 2009). Violent action by adolescents can be linked to radical and extremist behaviours in adulthood. Educational institutions need to face this phenomenon, by priming democratic principles, multiculturalism, tolerance through civic education.

Finally, violence affects productivity and impedes economic growth: foreign investors avoid conflict-affected countries and national entrepreneurs fear that their businesses will be targeted (OECD 2016). Political violence has a negative impact on tourism, as it reduces tourist arrivals (Neumayer 2004). Although systematic studies on the economic consequences of violence in Greece do not exist, the cost of the December 2008 riots has been estimated more than 100 million Euros, whereas the trading turnover in Athens was reduced by 1.5 billion Euros (*To Vima*, 14/12/2008).

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