

Golden Dawn's Rhetoric on Social Networks: Populism, Xenophobia and Antisemitism

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Abstract : New media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter introduced the world to a new era of instant communication. An era where online interactions could replace a lot of offline actions. Technology can create a mediated environment in which participants can communicate (one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many) both synchronously and asynchronously and participate in reciprocal message exchanges. Currently, social networks are attracting similar academic attention to that of the internet after its mainstream implementation into public life. Websites and platforms are seen as the forefront of a new political change. There is a significant backdrop of previous methodologies employed to research the effects of social networks. New approaches are being developed to be able to adapt to the growth of social networks and the invention of new platforms. Golden Dawn was the first openly neo-Nazi party post World War II to win seats in the parliament of a European country. Its racist rhetoric and violent tactics on social networks were rewarded by their supporters, who in the face of Golden Dawn's leaders saw a 'new dawn' in Greek politics. Mainstream media banned its leaders and members of the party indefinitely after Ilias Kasidiaris attacked Liana Kanelli, a member of the Greek Communist Party, on live television. This media ban was seen as a treasonous move by a significant percentage of voters, who believed that the system was desperately trying to censor Golden Dawn to favor mainstream parties. The shocking attack on live television received international coverage and while European countries were condemning this newly emerged neo-Nazi rhetoric, almost 7 percent of the Greek population rewarded Golden Dawn with 18 seats in the Greek parliament. Many seem to think that Golden Dawn mobilised its voters online and this approach played a significant role in spreading their message and appealing to wider audiences. No strict online censorship existed back in 2012 and although Golden Dawn was openly used neo-Nazi symbolism, it was allowed to use social networks without serious restrictions until 2017. This paper used qualitative methods to investigate Golden Dawn's rise in social networks from 2012 to 2019. The focus of the content analysis was set on three social networking platforms: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, while the existence of Golden Dawn's website, which was used as a news sharing hub, was also taken into account. The content analysis included text and visual analyses that sampled content from their social networking pages to translate their political messaging through an ideological lens focused on extreme-right populism. The absence of hate speech regulations on social network platforms in 2012 allowed the free expression of those heavily ultranationalist and populist views, as they were employed by Golden Dawn in the Greek political scene. On YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, the influence of their rhetoric was particularly strong. Official channels and MPs profiles were investigated to explore the messaging in-depth and understand its ideological elements.

Keywords : populism, far-right, social media, Greece, golden dawn

Conference Title : ICPPD 2021 : International Conference on Populism and Populist Democracy

Conference Location : Rome, Italy

Conference Dates : September 16-17, 2021