

## 1.2 Austerity and Opposition

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## **News negativity and public support during hard fiscal adjustment times: A case study from Greece**

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*Abstract: This study attempts to extract conclusions on how a Greek newspaper covered the severe economic conditions during the first years of Memorandums in the country and how supportive the public was towards deficit reduction measures. It follows a qualitative analysis based on news negative information during the first two years of the fiscal adjustment program with Troika. This study is an initial step for conducting a sentiment analysis in Greece and Cyprus for a longer time period by including also other newspapers.*

*Key words: Austerity measures, media coverage, negative news, public support*

## *Introduction*

The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of negative news on public opinion during the implementation of the Memorandum for the case of Greece between 2010 and 2012. The subject of our case study was the coverage of the crisis in Greece by *Kathimerini*, a popular domestic newspaper, to help answer the following question: How did public opinion respond to negative news coverage for the support of public deficit reduction during the Greek debt crisis? We believe that fiscal adjustment programs implemented by governments should have the broad approval of the public. This is a fundamental aspect of democratic theory. However, not all of the governments implement successfully fiscal adjustment programs. This is because in many times fiscal adjustment programs have their own political cost for the incumbent.

The occurrence of global financial crisis of 2007-08 exposed the structural vulnerabilities of some Eurozone countries. One of these cases is Greece where excessive deficits and macroeconomic imbalances brought the country in the brink of a collapse. Therefore, the implementation of the Memorandum between Greece and Troika was the only solution for the country in avoiding default according to the government.

However, the disapproval of the measures from a part of the Greek society together with the inflexibility of opposition to support these measures established a negative environment where violence, riots and political instability were key determinants for the failure of the first Memorandum.

In this paper we pay special attention on how media and specifically newspapers informed their readers during the first years of the Greek fiscal adjustment programs. This is because (as we will explain shortly) media coverage plays an essential role not only for informing the public but also for determining perceptions about it. Therefore, we focus on the case of the Greek newspaper of “*Kathimerini*” during the years of 2010 and 2012.

## *Austerity and Media - The Literature*

Many studies have examined why austerity programs succeed sometimes and fail at others. Most of these studies have used political and institutional factors as independent variables to provide explanations on the dependent variable (Alessina, Ardagna, and Trebbi 2006; Roubini and Sachs 1989; Ardagna 2004; Alesina et al. 1998; Alesina and Ardagna 1998; Alesina and Ardagna 2010; Alesina and Ardagna 2013; Alessina, Favero and Giavazzi, 2019). In their analysis, these studies have paid attention in the structure of the political system, the formation of the government, the role of veto players, and of course the type of fiscal policies.

Over the last few years, and because of the Eurozone crisis (and the need for some member states to take strong fiscal adjustment measures), studies on the relationship between austerity packages and popularity have increased. In addition, studies that are incorporating the role of newspapers (and the media in general) on the formation of public attitudes (although limited) are on the rise. One of these studies is Berry's (2019) on the crisis in the UK. Berry applied a thematic content analysis in combination with focus groups to show that the media can affect the perceptions of citizens for what are the causes of the crisis in the UK and how that could be resolved i.e., what policies need to be implemented. Although, we believe that Berry's study is insufficient as an initial point for scholars who want to examine the association between media content and individual attitudes due to endogeneity problems.

A significant quantitative study that sheds more light on the relationship between newspaper content and public attitudes toward deficit reduction is that of Barnes and Hicks (2018). The two authors used the UK case to show that newspaper coverage can impact an individual's opinion regarding the need for reducing fiscal deficits. It is an important study that reveals the influence of newspapers on individual attitudes during austerity times.

It is worth mentioning as well the research of Bansak, Bechtel, and Margalit (2021). The three authors studied fiscal policy attitudes instead of deficit attitudes during austerity measures. However, these scholars did not incorporate the role of media in their analysis. Fernandez-Albertos and Kuo (2020) applied experimental research to examine individual attitudes toward the composition of fiscal policies during austerity. What they found is that individuals who have economically suffered from austerity are more inclined towards spending, but at the same time, they are particularly opposed to any tax increases.

In addition, Mercille (2014) incorporated into his study the role of the media and specifically newspapers in the case of Ireland during austerity times. Mercille's study shows that Irish newspapers promoted pro-austerity measures via spending cuts instead of tax revenues. However, this study is just a qualitative one and it does not examine the role of newspapers on public attitudes. An additional study that examined fiscal consolidation measures and attitudes of individuals towards austerity is that of Khalbenn and Stracca (2020). The two authors conducted a cross-country and across-time analysis of EU countries during fiscal episodes to reveal that fiscal adjustment measures do not negatively affect public opinion. So far, it appears that all of the studies (except that of Barnes and Hicks 2018) are inconclusive in their examination of the relationship between media coverage and the austerity attitudes of individuals.

The topic becomes particularly concerning when we review the deteriorating current economic conditions in the EU, with many countries going into recession. Therefore, countries with high debt might need to take costly fiscal measures to avoid a return to a debt hang crisis.

The implementation of appropriate fiscal policies can be a catalyst for the countries to exit more smoothly from recession. Social and political volatility could emerge in cases where fiscal policies are used inefficiently, worsening the crisis deeper and making it more contentious. Therefore, our focus is to conduct a case study in a

country where fiscal adjustment or austerity measures were so difficult to implemented. This case is Greece.

The biggest problems for Greece were fiscal-related. The high public debt in combination with an overloaded public sector brought the country in a difficult situation. Between 2000 and 2008 Greece was enjoying relatively high growth rates due to the low cost of borrowing. However, the financial crisis of 2008 caused the interest rates of the country to unsustainable high levels. Low productivity and low competitiveness of the Greek economy in combination with annual increases of wages in the public sector raised the public debt to levels that were difficult to manage. In the shadow of a default (and exit from the Eurozone), the Greek government in 2010 requested financial assistance from international lenders. During the implementation of the first years of the Memorandum, unemployment rates increased to almost 30% while the country lost about 25% of its GDP. In addition, political instability was established and violent protests often made the headlines in both national and international media. After the implementation of three memorandums, the country managed to exit austerity in 2018.

### *Role of the Media on Public Opinion and on the Elite – The Literature*

The media often influences not just the country's citizens, but also its agenda and governments. In other words, newspapers determine how much attention should be paid in public discourse for an issue. Both politicians and citizens tend to focus on areas that require attention.

Furthermore, the media plays a fundamental role in shaping the agenda during electoral campaigns (Mc Combs and Shaw 1972; Dearing and Rogers 1996). Cook et al. (1983) by implementing experimental research to capture the public opinion on an issue before and after its presentation in the media they found that presenting a general problem in the media significantly changed public opinion about it.

In addition, the media can be a strong determinant of an electoral outcome because of the way they present news during campaigns (Chiang and Knight 2011; Della Vigna and Kaplan 2007; Ladd and Lenz 2009; Goidel and Langley 1995; Lacrinese et al. 2011; Bloom and Price 1975).

Arceneaux et al. (2016) conducted a study that shows how the introduction of Fox News has affected the strategic responses of Democrats and Republicans in the US Congress. The authors show that at the beginning of the electoral cycle, both Democrats and Republicans maximize their partisan support. However, as the elections approach, members of the Democratic party diminish their partisan support for their party and become more sympathetic to Republican positions. This holds true for Democratic members who reside in areas where Fox News is active. A very similar study is that of Clinton and Enamorado (2014) which shows that

representatives in the US Congress became less supportive of President Clinton in districts where Fox News was present than in districts where it was not.

Media affects public opinion on different issues, both domestically and internationally. Especially, the partisan media affects citizen attitudes on the one hand via an “echo effect” and on the other via a “boomerang media effect”. The first effect of partisan media tends to reinforce and solidify the pre-existing beliefs of the audience members who share party views and policies (Jamieson and Capella 2008). However, when the partisan media presents opinions, views, or policies against the preexisting beliefs of the audience, then it is more likely that the audience will reject the presentation of the media and may intensify further their pre-existing beliefs (“boomerang media effect”). By applying the above theoretical framework some authors have been shown indeed that the audience’s preexisting beliefs maintain when the partisan media’s content coincides with their pre-existing beliefs, but when the partisan media presents different views from their own, they tend to reject them and intensify further their pre-existing beliefs (Carmichael et al. 2017).

### *What are the Conclusions from the Literature so Far*

First, the media plays a significant role in electoral outcomes. In their pioneer work, McCombs and Shaw (1972:185) stated that “interpreting the evidence from this study as indicating mass media influence seems more plausible than alternative explanations”. In their study the two authors tested the agenda-setting hypothesis: the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward political issues.

McCombs and Shaw investigated the agenda-setting capacity of the mass media in the 1968 presidential campaign. Data analysis revealed that there is a very strong relationship between the emphasis placed on different campaign issues by the media (which according to the authors reflects to a considerable degree, the emphasis on the candidates) and the judgments of voters on the salience of various campaign issues.

Second, political elites respond accordingly to media coverage. As we indicated earlier, the media can affect the voting behavior of political parties. In particular, the US media’s content can have a tremendous influence on how representatives in Congress vote. In the European context, newspapers can influence the behavior of representatives in the parliament via their requests. Newspapers have a key role in influencing political actors because they can have an influence on other media outlets and can affect the political agenda (Walgrave et al. 2008).

However, we need to mention that not all newspapers will have the same influence on political parties/actors. The mainstream media, the biggest (in terms of circulation) and well-respected newspapers, in a country, tends to influence the actions of more political parties about specific issues (Bartels 1993; Kepplinger 2007). At the same time, we expect that in countries where political divisions are large and if these

divisions are reflected in the content of newspapers, the political parties and MPs will be more responsive to issues covered by specific newspapers.

Since different countries have different public concerns, this implies that political parties will be more responsive to these concerns. For example, a major concern of some countries is migration. Thus, we would expect that topics covered in the newspapers to have a great impact on the responses of political parties (Van der Pars 2014).

Also, political parties can respond to the press if the latter covers a topic exploring the party's main themes (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010). For example, left-wing parties have more interest in issues such as labor and welfare while right-wing parties have more interest for example on issues like reforms, privatizations, and immigration. Thus, the content of newspapers in terms of positive and negative coverage, will stimulate political parties to act accordingly (Helfer 2016).

Third, media coverage differs between pro-government and opposition newspapers. The media, and particularly, newspapers in some countries are much more politically divided compared to other countries. In countries where political divisions run much deeper, newspapers tend to support specific political parties, their positions, their rhetoric, and their policies. Lacrinese et al. (2011) incorporated specific economic policies into their analysis to observe how pro-Democratic and pro-Republican newspapers cover the news in terms of unemployment and budget deficit. The researchers found that there is bias in media coverage that is correlated to partisanship among newspaper readers. One of their empirical results was that newspapers that endorsed Democratic candidates often gave less coverage of high unemployment under Clinton than under George W. Bush, as compared to Republican-leaning newspapers. Thus, the way in which newspapers present the economic conditions in the country can have a substantial impact on the final outcome of elections.

For example, in the United States during the elections of 1992, Bush lost the presidency because media coverage was much more negative about economic conditions during his administration (Goidel and Langley 1995; Hetherington 1996). At the same time, opposition newspapers tend to present more negative news more frequently during bad economic conditions compared to good economic conditions (Kayser and Peress 2021; Jensen and Wenzelburger 2021). Also, opposition newspapers report high unemployment rates more frequently compared to pro-government newspapers (Kayser and Peress 2021).

The final and most important conclusion is that the media does affect public policies via public opinion. By taking into consideration all the previous research, we can conclude that the information covered by newspapers will affect the perceptions of readers/voters on different issues. The way newspapers present issues and the tone/valence they put, will influence the public and ultimately, the government to alter a policy. The relationship between media and public policy was a missing link from older studies, but more recent studies have included news media coverage and found a significant influence on the final policy (Neumer, Soroka, Wlezien 2019; Williams and Schoonvelde 2018).

## *Negative Media Coverage*

Without ignoring the importance of previous studies, the role of the media on public opinion and government response to public policy is a bit oversimplified. This is not only because individuals have heterogeneous preferences but also because policies taken by governments are influenced by other factors as well (Jacoby 2000; Jordan 1993; Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey 1987).

In our opinion, the key for our media examination is to do an analysis of the media to capture the degree of negativity in news coverage during austerity times. Recent studies have revealed that sentiment analysis is a much more reliable method for explaining evaluations of individuals about retrospective and prospective evaluations of economic conditions (Soroka, Stecula, and Wlezien 2015; Wlezien, Soroka, and Stecula 2017; Soroka 2006). The previous studies are important since they examined the tone or the valence of media coverage via a dynamic process of news coverage. These studies tested the changes in media tone for specific economic indicators and how these changes affected individual evaluations of current and future economic conditions.

The examination of the media is very important since it does not only influence the elites but also the masses. Across modern democracies, the media plays a central role as it both reflects and influences public opinion. In representative democracies, citizens depend on media content because they want to be informed about domestic and international events. Citizens often judge these events based on the content of the media. In addition, the media can affect public preferences for many issues.

Simultaneously, the media tone plays an essential role in formulating the attitudes of individuals. How the media transmits news in terms of tone can have tremendous consequences for both public and political elites. Previous research has shown that the tone of news can influence the attitudes of individuals on issues related to economics (Boydston, Highton, and Linn 2018; Soroka, Stecula, and Wlezien 2015; Soroka 2006; Hoang Nguyen and Clauss 2013). The way different frames are expressed can alter the perceptions of citizens in social and political life. These frames can have an influence on political elites, public opinion, and even policymakers.

Specifically, negative tone heavily influences an individuals' decisions because negative information can have a stronger impact on them compared to positive one (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, and Finkaneur 2001; Soroka and McAdams 2015; Damstra and Bukes 2021; Hester and Gibson 2003; Soroka 2006). This is because people are more inclined by nature to be more loss averse than they are motivated to pursue gains (Kahneman and Tversky 1979).

During recessions, economic news tends to become much more negative compared to better times. Lastly, media tone affects the perceptions of individuals about the real status of the economy. A vast body of literature indicates that not only public opinion but also the elites are influenced by media coverage in various ways.

For example, governments can respond to public opinion by changing policies (Soroka 2010; Ceron and Negri 2016) and these alterations of policies depend on



public attitudes. However, public opinion is influenced by the media's tone on an issue. The previous holds true for political parties of opposition as well (Thesen 2013).

The key in our case is to link news negativity during economic recessions in Greece with public opinion. We believe that variation in negative news coverage is one of the major causes why we see also variations in attitudes as well across time and across countries. Most of the studies ignored the previous ones which we believe are essential for deriving reliable conclusions.

Given that the negative tone in the media during austerity is much higher compared to better times, we would expect that individuals will become more pessimistic about the status of the economy. We do not believe that the media can have a direct effect on public opinion by making individuals support or oppose austerity. Instead, we believe that preexisting attitudes or views in association with the magnitude of negative media tones could determine individual perceptions in supporting or opposing austerity.

The pioneering work of Kahnemann and Tversky (1979; 1984) Kahnemann, Tversky, and Thaler (1991) on "Prospect Theory" reveals that people care more strongly about a loss than they do about a gain. In other words, people are loss averse. Loss-averse behavior has been tested across a large body of decision-making studies (Tversky, Slovic, and Kahnemann 1990; Shoemaker and Kunreuther 1979). For example, Bowman, Minehart, and Rabin (1999) showed that when people hear that economic conditions will deteriorate they fail to immediately cut their expenditures compared to when economic conditions are actually deteriorating. The same holds true for economic voting since economic downturns have a stronger effect on voter decisions compared to economic booms (Bloom and Price 1975; Headrick and Lanoue 1991; Soroka 2006). In addition, when Marshall and Kidd (1981) conducted a psychological experiment asking people if they would prefer to hear good or bad news first, about 80 percent of the participants chose bad news.

### *Conceptualization of Negative News Media and Public Support*

A negative media tone for austerity measures is central. Therefore, we are interested in news coverage that presents negative words that generate more pessimistic attitudes among the public. This pessimistic attitude can trigger mechanisms of resistance among the public about the negative repercussions of austerity but at the same time it can establish a fear among the public, that without austerity measures, the economic conditions might be much more severe. The latter implies a conformity for austerity while the former implies an opposition.

However, there might be other cases in which negativity tone in the news could affect support for austerity measures. In general, we can have four scenarios under which negativity tone in the news and public support are related:

First, high negativity about austerity can lead to low support for austerity. Previous research revealed that individuals maintain a loss-averse behavior. This means that

they are less willing when it comes to taking risks. In other words, they prefer the maintenance of the status quo as opposed to losing the benefits they already have. In the case of austerity/fiscal adjustment, spending and expenditure cuts as well as tax increases policies, bring negative economic conditions for individuals (wage decreases, unemployment, and loss of purchasing power). These can lead to more resistance by them. An additional and more significant explanation for this outcome is the one coming from what we call the “echo effect” of the media. If the media covers austerity/deficit reductions with a high degree of negative news then individuals with low pre-existing beliefs for austerity will oppose austerity i.e. “echo effect”. (upper square in the right corner - see graph below)

Second, high negativity in the news for austerity can lead to higher support for austerity if an individual has a preexisting belief in favor of austerity. So, in this case negativity in the news can have a “boomerang media effect” (lower square in the right corner)

Third, low negativity in the news for austerity can lead to high support for austerity. This is the case where the media can cause an “echo effect”, i.e., if an individual’s pre-existing belief is one that favors austerity, then low negativity for austerity in the news can influence individual attitudes in supporting even more austerity (lower square in the left corner)

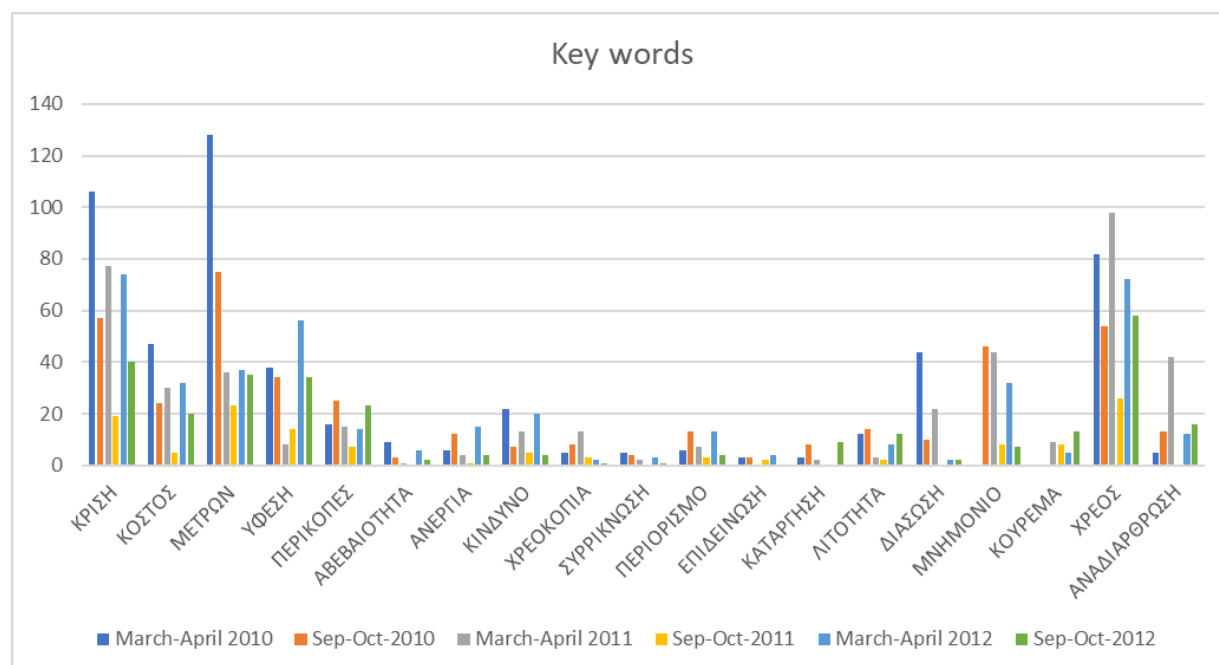
Fourth, a low negativity in the news for austerity can lead to low support for austerity if an individual has a low preexisting belief in favor of austerity. In this case low negativity in the news can cause a “boomerang media effect” (upper square in the left corner)

Pre-existing beliefs in supporting Deficit reduction	Low	Low support (“boomerang effect”)	Low support (“echo effect”)
	High	High support (“echo effect”)	High support (“boomerang effect”)
		Low news negativity for Deficit reduction	High news negativity for deficit reduction

## Capturing Negative Tone

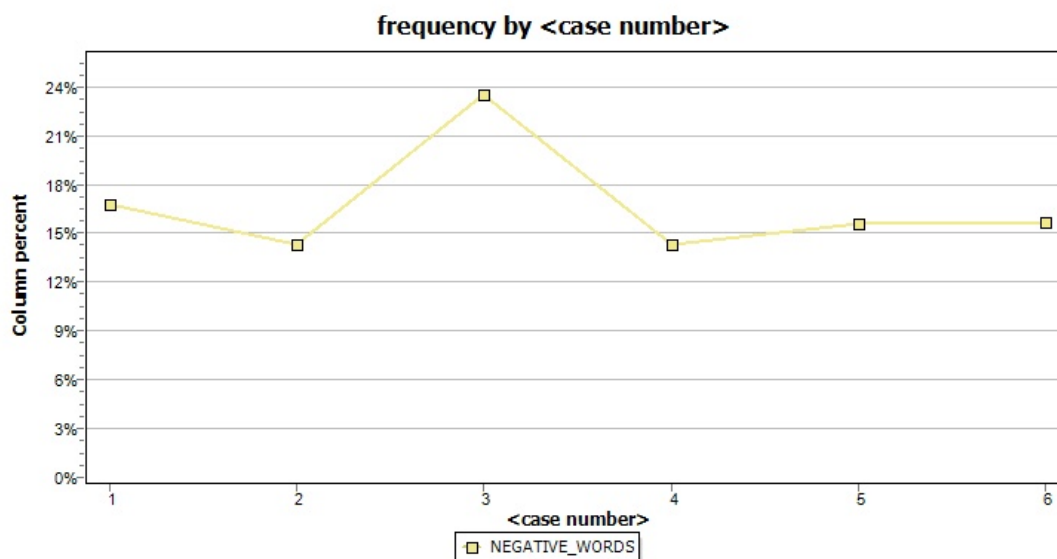
Over recent years, more and more studies are using sentiment analysis to measure the tone of articles. The advantage of this approach, compared to human coding, is that negative and positive words per article can be measured based on their frequency. Manually analyzing a large sample size of articles is beyond human ability. For the purposes of this study, we have used both QDA Miner and WordStat automated analysis packages. We need to mention at this point that to gather articles from Kathimerini followed a simple search phrase of «δημοσιονομική προσαρμογή». We believe that, although using this search phrase may decrease efficiency, on the other hand, it can increase the validity of our results for answering our research question. We first did a Word Frequent Analysis using QDA Miner. We identified words that refer or imply negativity based on their frequencies. In addition, we used WordStat as well for identifying these negative words and we created our dictionary. Specifically, we used extraction tools from WordStat to establish our dictionary and based on our dictionary we created a bag of words. Therefore, we identify negative words via QDA Miner and then we used WordStat extraction tool to gather all of these words.

After this process we ended up with the following graph:



From our established dictionary these negative key words appeared more often.

The distribution of negative key words as a percentage of total words in the dictionary across time is illustrated in the graph below:



Number 1 indicates March-April 2010, number 2 indicates September - October 2010, number 3 indicates March - April 2011, number 4 indicates September - October 2011, number 5 indicates March - April 2012 and number 6 indicates September - October 2012

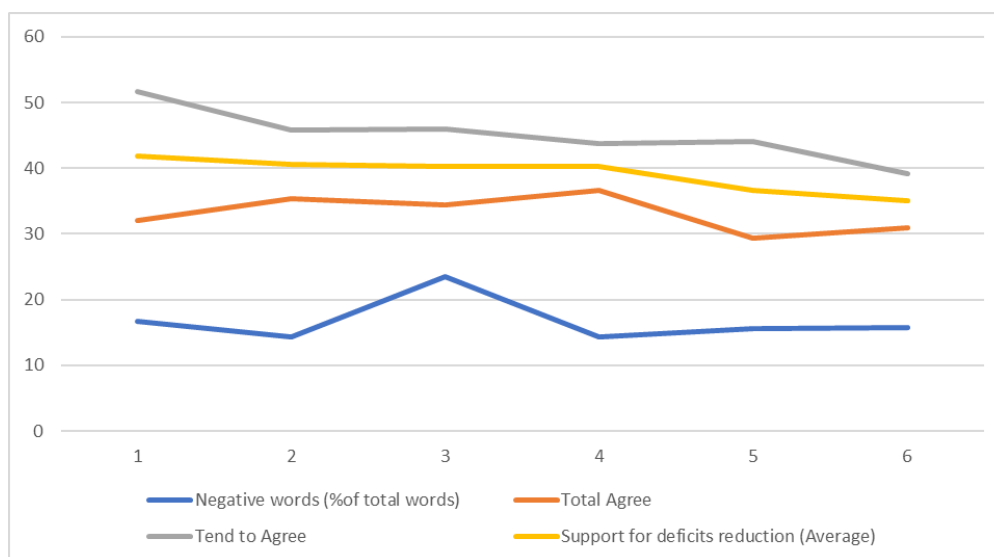
From this graph we can observe that variation in the news negativity is high between first and fourth. Specifically, this variation is more intensive between second and fourth cases.

It is worth mentioning that our dependent variable is the support of public opinion for the reduction of public deficits. Data was collected from Eurobarometer from 2009 to 2015, with two rounds per year for questions associated with austerity measures. These rounds were in May and November. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, we decided to collect news articles two months before every round of Eurobarometer. For example, for May 2010 we collected news articles during March and April 2010 and for November, we collected articles for September and October 2010. We followed the same process for 2011 and 2012.

The specific question used with Eurobarometer was as follows:

**“Measures to reduce the public deficit and debt in (OUR COUNTRY) cannot be delayed”**

Eurobarometer’s question ranges from 1 until 4. An answer of 1 means “Totally agree”, and answer of 2 “Tend to agree”. Therefore, we decided to take both the average of the two values and the values for both answers.



The above diagram indicates the distribution of negative words as a percentage of our dictionary words for each bimonthly news article containing the word of “δημοσιονομική προσαρμογή” (blue line). The diagram indicates that for the years 2010 and 2011, there is a decline in negative words used by Kathimerini newspaper. However, after case number 2, we can clearly see an increase in negativity news that reaches the highest level in the graph. That was the time where the first Memorandum was agreed. This fact might be related to the deterioration of economic conditions and to the discussions that were taking place in the media about the non-sustainability of the debt. However, between cases 3 and 4, we observe a significant decline in negativity news and afterwards a stabilization.

The three other lines indicate Eurobarometer’s data for “total agreement” with deficits reductions (red line), “tend to agree” with deficits reductions (gray line) and the yellow line indicates the average values. From the three lines we can see that the “total agreement” line for deficits reduction follows a slight inverse relation with negative distribution of words in the newspaper. As the negative news decline support for deficit reduction increases while as negative news decline increase support for fiscal adjustment decreases. This is consistent with theories of negativity as described in the previous sections. However, we need to emphasize and clarify at this point that the strength and reliability of the previous conclusion can only be tested with regression analysis for both aggregate and individual level (something which will be done shortly for the purposes of this PhD).

## *Conclusion*

Since the start of the Greek debt crisis, and during the implementation of the first Memorandum, we were witnesses of great scale reactions in the streets of Athens and other major cities of Greece. The question is: why were there so many reactions in Greece compared to other countries like Cyprus and Ireland? The paradox in the Greek case was that despite the majority of public opinion being in favor of deficits reduction reductions, it was difficult for the Parliament and opposition parties to reach a consensus about the fiscal adjustment program. By examining the negative distribution of news coverage, we have noticed that the support for deficit reduction was relatively constant when the negative news tone was declining.

However, support for deficit reduction fell sharply when the distribution of negative words in the news increased between September and October 2011. This outcome is consistent with the theories of negativity and how people respond stronger to negative information compared to positive ones. However, it is unclear if the negative news tone was the real reason for dwindling public support towards deficit reduction and its impact is difficult to measure. The next steps for my research are to observe a longer time period of media coverage for both Kathimerini and the NEA newspaper. This will help me to derive a bigger picture of public opinion responses to the negative tone expressed in the news for the support of public deficit reduction.

At the same time, my plan is to follow the same process for the case of Cyprus. We can extract more reliable results by conducting a comparative case study between the two countries. This is because the process of implementing the fiscal adjustment program in the case of Cyprus was much easier compared to Greece. In the case of Cyprus, both the public opinion and mainstream opposition parties were supportive of the government. The media as an independent variable has a crucial role to play in this. The case of Kathimerini demonstrates that public opinion is influenced more strongly by negative news compared to positive ones. Specifically, we observed that an increase in negative news coverage causes a decline in the support for deficit reduction.

However, we need to mention that more valid results will come out from our sentiment analysis and also by testing data on individual level. This will provide us the capability to compare frames and to analyze them on how negative, positive or neutral were during the economic crises in both Cyprus and Greece and how the public responded to these news frames.

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# Explaining the extreme right-wing political violence in Southern Europe

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10<sup>TH</sup> Biennial PhD Symposium on Contemporary Greece & Cyprus



Conceptualization

01

Research Design

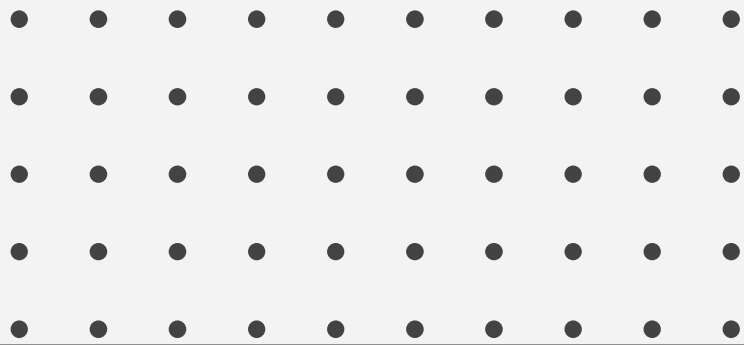
02

Preliminary Results

03

Conclusion

04



# Conceptualization

Topic: Drivers of right-wing political violence in Southern Europe (2008- 2022)

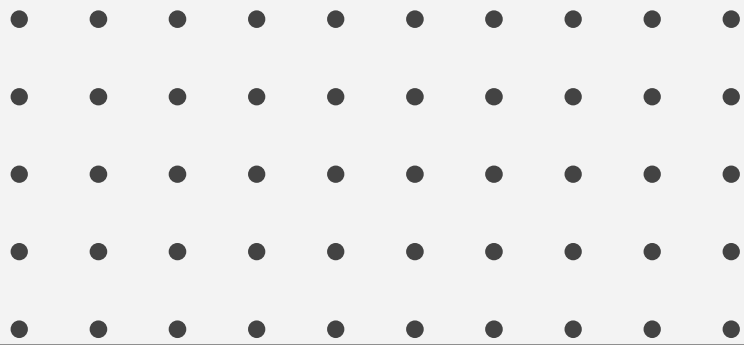
Gap: Far-right electoral performance <-> Protest actions

Puzzle: Illegitimate and costly practice (Hainsworth 2000; Tilly 2003) | Increasing phenomenon (Pirro et al 2022; Ravndal 2018)

Research Question:

Why right-wing violence has been more extensive in Southern Europe while in other European areas not?

- Why right-wing violence has been more extensive across Greece and Italy than in Spain and Cyprus?
- What are the activist's motivations leading to the implementation of violent tactics?



# Conceptualization

## LITTERATURE REVIEW:

- Terrorism Studies: Norbic countries, lone wolf actors, preventing extremism (Bjørngo 1995)
- Social Movement Theory: Political opportunity structures, frames, networks (Della Porta, Caiani, Wagemann 2012)
- Social Psychology: Activists' motivations: identity, ideology, instrumentality (Klandermans and Mayer 2005)

# Research Design Methods and Data

## Protest Event Analysis

- Protest- event approach (Hutter 2004)
- 4,845 protest events of far-right actors in 11 EU countries (2008 – 2022)
- FARPE dataset
- Information: time, place, issue of mobilization, repertoire of contention

## Interviews

- Semi-structured interviews with far-right activists and elected officials in Greece and Italy
- Information: political socialization, motivations and justifications of violence, organizational structure, identity-building mechanisms





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# Research Design
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## Study 1
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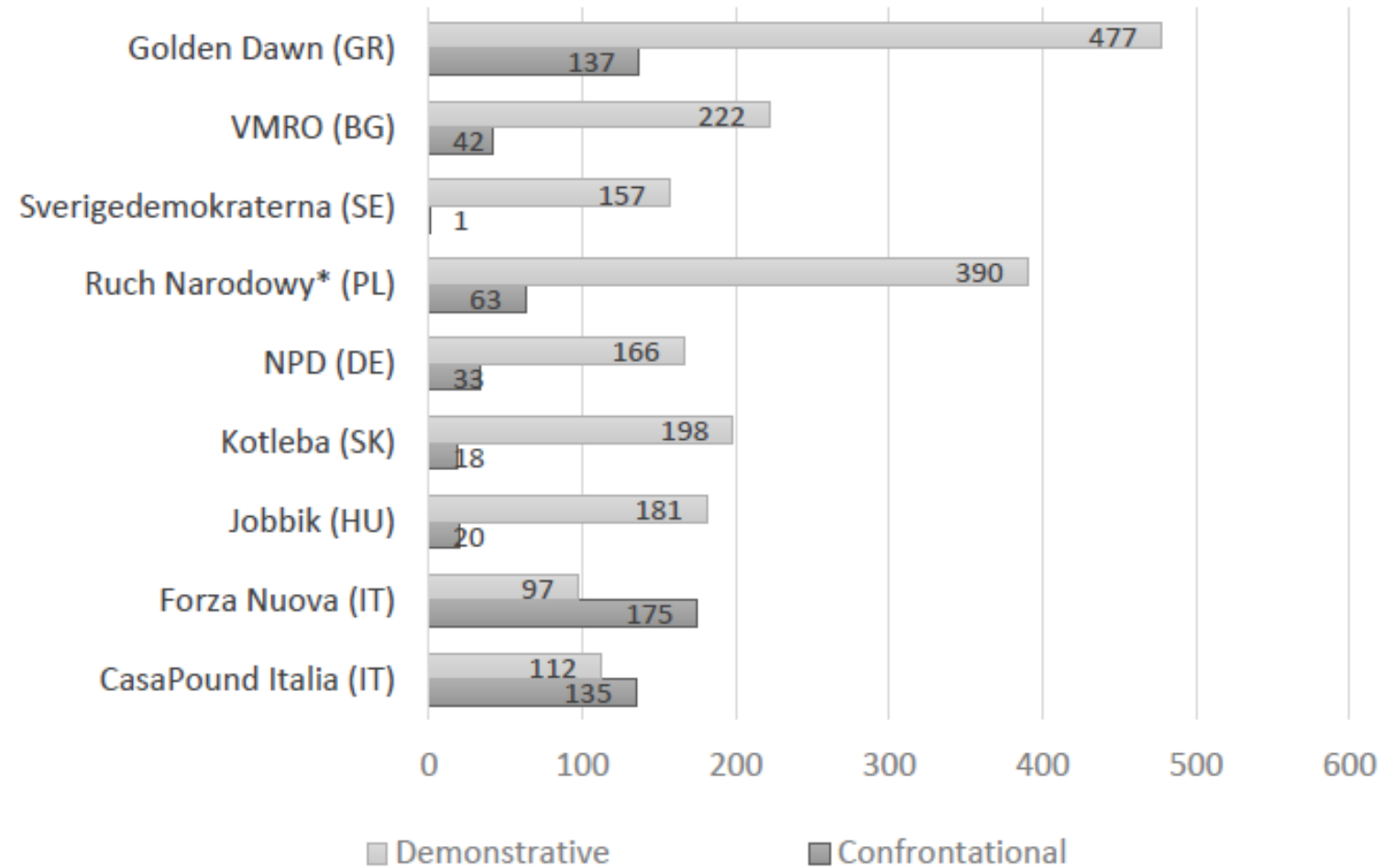
Comparative analysis of right-wing violence in 11 EU countries

Description of right-wing violence and its characteristics: actors, repertoire of action, issues

Overview of the spread of right-wing violence overtime (2008 – 2022)

Aim: Highlight general trends and identify countries with higher level of violence

## Protest repertoire (2008-2018)



Different propensity towards confrontational and violent actions in the protest arena  
(2008-2018)

Source: FARPE project

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- • **Research Design**
- • **Study 2**
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Explaining the drivers of right-wing violence in Europe (11 countries)

Three explanatory models used as complementary models:

- **Opportunities model:** political and discursive opportunities (Koopmans 1996)
- **Grievances model:** cultural, economic, institutional grievances (Bjorgo 1997)
- **Resources model:** visibility, network, representation (Caiani et al., 2012)

Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to analyze interactions between models

**Figure 1 Explanatory Variables**

Theory	Expectations	Measures
<b>Opportunities</b>		
Political Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low electoral support for far-right parties</li> </ul>	Share of MP right-left seats: ParlGov
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Left-wing government</li> </ul>	Left-right cabinets: ParlGov
Discursive Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authoritarian legacies</li> </ul>	No authoritarian legacy (0), authoritarian legacy (1): Gattinara and Froio 2014
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High degree of polarization</li> </ul>	No reaction (0), verbal reaction (1), contentious reaction (2): CFP
<b>Grievances</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural: High inflow of migrants and asylum seekers</li> </ul>	Total annual inflow of foreign population: OECD
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic: Negative economic outlook</li> </ul>	Economic performance index: (Khramov and Lee 2013)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional: High dissatisfaction with democracy</li> </ul>	Standard Eurobarometer
<b>Resources</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low public visibility</li> </ul>	Google Trends data
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not embedded in large networks</li> </ul>	Share of events organized: in isolation (0), with others (1): CFP
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of representation in public offices</li> </ul>	Share of MP seats: EJPR-PDY

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# Research Design
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## Study 3
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Causal mechanisms leading to right-wing violence in Southern European Countries

(Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Spain)

Case- oriented research: **contextual factors** and **meso-level** explanations of violence

Sub- question: Why right-wing violence has been more extensive across Greece and Italy than in Spain and Cyprus?

Analysis: **Contextual factors** combined with **activists' frames** and perceptions of external reality (Caiani et al. 2012)

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# Research Design
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## Study 4
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Qualitative analysis of the micro dynamics of violence

42 semi-structured interviews with far-right activists and representatives: Golden Dawn (Greece) and Forza Nuova (Italy)

Activists motivations leading to violence: **ideology**, identity, instrumentality

Violent socialization and identity building mechanisms

# Preliminary Results

## Study 4

Motivations: **a) ideological: express their views**, b) identity: awareness of belonging to a group, c) instrumental: influence the political environment.

Activists driven by **ideological motivations are more likely to implement violent tactics**, compare to activists with identity and instrumental motivations.

*“My participation is ideological. I participate in FN because it's ideological concrete. I like to fight for my ideas, I love fighting the ANTIFA because this is political, we don't use fire, we don't use knives only baseball sticks. Yeah, I believe in my idea and I don't have a problem fighting (...). I use violence to express my ideas, if people don't want me to express my ideas, these people are violent and I respond with another type of violence. But I am happy because I like it. This is normal. I love to fight against ANTIFA and the police”* FN activist

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- • Preliminary Results
- • Study 4
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Far-right actors as violent spaces of socialization for new activists.

Violence as a fundamental identity building mechanism: martial arts, group trainings, ultras and toxic masculinity

“Body to body for the ultimate body” Guiliano Castellino (FN official)





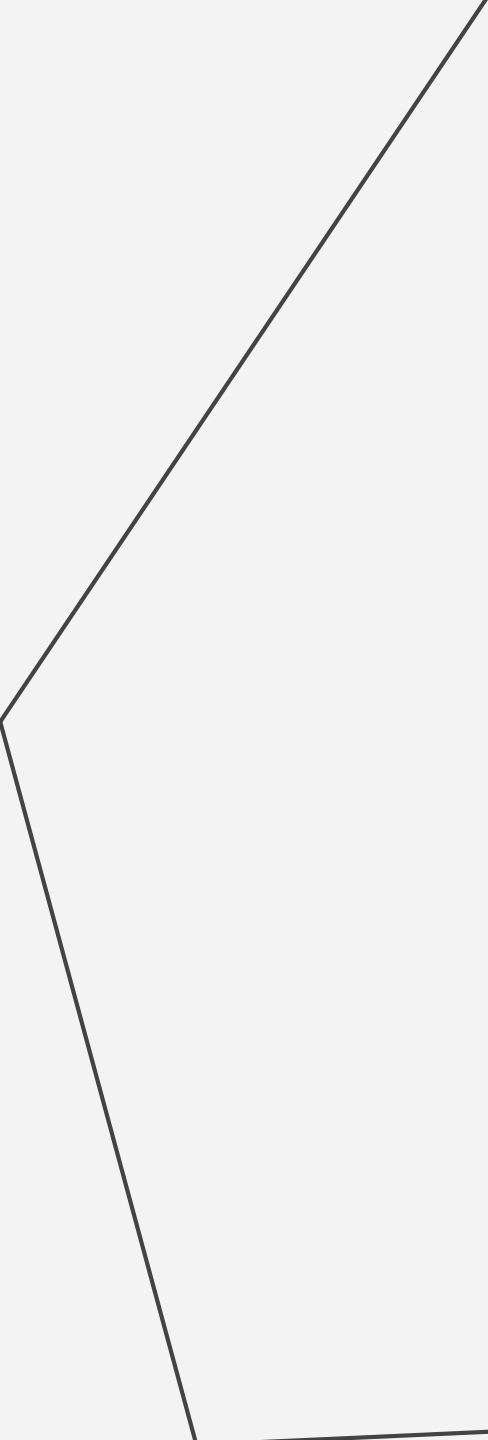
# Conclusion

## Contribution:

- Cross-national comparative study on 11 countries
- Mixed methods research design: Large-N protest event data and interviews
- Far-right ‘movement parties’ as a real-world phenomenon

## Limitations:

- QCA technicalities
- PEA: media selection bias (Hutter 2014)
- Interviews: positionality (Blee 2002)



# Thank you for your attention!

Do you have any questions?

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