

CRIME AND ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

The Complexity of Crime and Crime Politics in Greece since 2009

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Description and explanation of the relationship between economic downturn and crime have to date been limited by the narrow scope of criminal activity characteristically selected as a focus by pertinent criminological scholarship. Efforts to examine the relationship have overwhelmingly approached it through the prism of common property and violent offences, or, and to a lesser degree, white-collar crime. As a consequence, appreciation has been impeded of the existence and heightened political significance of diverse and complex connections between a wider array of forms of criminality during times of economic downturn. To demonstrate the value of such connections to the study of the relationship between economic downturn and crime, we draw on the contemporary experience of crisis-hit Greece, where the political importance of associations between corruption, common property and violent offences, and illicit political violence, has made them indispensable components of any account of the linkages between economic downturn and crime in the Greek context.

Keywords: economic downturn, financial crisis, corruption, common property and violent offences, political violence, politics of crime, Greece

Introduction

There has been widespread concern about the causes and impact of the recent and ongoing international economic downturn upon societies across the world. As with previous such downturns, one of the issues to have received particular attention in political, media and public discourse has been the relationship between rising socio-economic hardships and crime. For their part, criminological studies of economic downturn and crime have overwhelmingly approached the subject through the prism of common property and violent offences, or, and to a lesser degree, white-collar crime. This has led to an analytical neglect of the ways in which economic downturn and levels and patterns of crime may be associated with one another from a more holistic perspective that includes not only white-collar crime, but also illicit political violence. Equally overlooked as a consequence of this narrow approach have been the important connections which may exist between different forms of criminality; connections that are apparent as much in the prominent roles they can serve in the political arena as in justifications invoked by perpetrators for their participation in lawbreaking activities.

With a view to helping extend the scope of research on the relationship between economic downturn and crime, this article offers a multidisciplinary review of pertinent literature, and uses the present experience of Greece to draw attention to the existence and heightened political significance of interplay during times of economic downturn

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between a wider range of criminality than has hitherto been explored. Greece constitutes a prime case for examining the relationship between economic downturn and crime given the depth of the country's prevailing financial crisis and the magnitude of the political and socio-economic ramifications that have ensued. Greece was plunged into recession in 2008 and full-blown financial crisis in 2009, since which point its economy has continued to shrink with a persistence unmatched by current comparisons. The onset of financial crisis triggered a major realignment in the configuration of political power in the country, with a collapse in support for the left pillar of a centrist two-party system that had been in place for over 30 years, and the entry to parliament of an extreme far-right group with a reputation for engaging in physical violence. Meanwhile, the recession and austerity measures adopted to meet the conditions of successive bailouts had a significant and asymmetrical impact on the country's socio-economic environment. Unemployment surged from 9.4 per cent in April 2009 to 22.6 by April 2012, the poverty rate leapt from 20.1 to 30.3 per cent between 2009 and 2011, living standards dropped, falling particularly sharply from late 2010 onwards, and negative health outcomes rose dramatically (ELSTAT 2012; EC 2012*b*). The poor have suffered disproportionately from the loss of income caused by the austerity measures, and poverty rates have been highest amongst those with least access to political power (Matsaganis and Leventi 2011; Matsaganis 2012).

The aptness of drawing on the case of Greece additionally stems from the fact that the country's crisis has set in sharp relief evidence of a diverse and complex relationship between crime and economic downturn, whilst Greece's present experience also offers stark testimony of the importance of differing forms of crime to political life during times of financial crisis. To illustrate the varied relationship between economic downturn and crime in Greece, this article shows that the criminogenic impact of the financial crisis has lacked linearity and uniformity not simply in terms of common property and violent crime, but also in relation to white-collar crime in the form of corruption, and illicit political violence. To underscore the significance of both the presence and the interconnections of multiple forms of criminality to political life under current conditions in Greece, the article points to the ways in which crime in different manifestations has played a vital part in inflaming public anger against traditional mainstream political parties, as well as serving as a key means by which these parties have attempted to manage heightened public anger, both symbolically and physically.

Economic Downturn and Crime

Efforts to assess the relationship between economic downturn and crime have been hindered, on one hand, by the limited availability of relevant data and the distortive effect various intervening events (e.g. the criminalization of given behaviours and heightened investigative and prosecutorial activity once a crisis has arisen) may have on gauging the timing and prevalence of crime, and, on the other hand, from problems relating to the international comparability of data (see further Shover 2000; Van Dijk 2008; Levi 2010; Huisman 2011). Against this background, scholarship on the relationship between economic downturn and crime has characteristically taken a fragmentary approach to the subject. Criminological research has centred on the potential criminogenic impact of economic downturn, and has overwhelmingly framed this in

terms of the effects of economic downturn on the prevalence and seriousness of common property and violent offences. Far less attention has been paid in criminological studies to the links between economic downturn and white-collar crime. Such studies have addressed the capacity of white-collar crime to generate and exacerbate economic downturn, and have largely examined white-collar crime separately from other types of offending (rare exceptions being [Box 1987](#); [Detotto and Otranto 2012](#)). Scholarship primarily outside criminology, meanwhile, has explored the criminal causes and criminogenic effects of economic downturn with reference to illicit political violence, namely violence for political ends that is criminalized, from organized action by sub-state groups in the domestic arena (also commonly termed ‘serious crime’ or ‘terrorism’), to mass public disorder, to abuses of policing powers by the state.¹

Despite the dearth of holistic approaches to the relationship between economic downturn and crime, notable similarities regarding the complexity of the relationship are apparent in the findings of studies addressing different forms of criminality. As concerns the effects of economic downturn upon common crime, empirical realities have problematized widespread presumptions that the rising levels of socio-economic hardship associated with economic downturn are invariably criminogenic. In the United States and Britain, for example, long-term trends of falling levels of property and violent offences have been found to have continued unabated in recent years, as measured both by police-recorded crime statistics and by victimization surveys (see e.g. [Campos *et al.* 2011](#); [Finklea 2011](#); [van Dijk and Tseloni 2012](#)). Amongst non-Anglo-phone countries experiencing economic downturn in the late 2000s, moreover, not all have seen rising rates of police-recorded crime and, where a growth in crime has been recorded, it has not always included serious violent offences such as robbery and homicide ([UNODC 2012a](#)). A host of past studies have more generally found only a mild positive link between economic recession and certain types of property crime (e.g. burglary) and little to no correlation between economic recession and crimes against the person (see, amongst others, [Thomas 1927](#); [Radzinowicz 1941](#); [Henry and Short 1954](#); [Short 1980](#); [Cantor and Land 1985](#); [Cook and Zarkin 1985](#); [Arvanites and Defina 2006](#); [Cook 2010](#); compare [Rosenfeld 2009](#)). In fact, the relationship between recession and common crimes has been found to be contingent upon factors such as rates of inflation and the magnitude of the obstacles posed to criminal activity through the use of incarceration and the relative size, or more effective reach, of law enforcement ([Baumer *et al.* 2013](#), forthcoming; [Institute for Economics & Peace 2013](#)). By contrast, there has been scant research into the macroeconomic impact of common crime trends themselves, and findings from the few studies that do exist in this area have been mixed. Whereas some studies have found no effect of crime upon the economy, in certain jurisdictions with lower levels of economic development, rising crime levels have been found to have stimulated declines in Foreign Direct Investment and to have exerted such high costs on public and private material assets as to have contributed to national economic underdevelopment; factors that may be associated with economic downturn (see e.g. [Detotto and Pulina 2012](#); also [Pshisva and Suarez 2010](#)).

¹ Another possible explanation for the relative neglect of corruption and illicit political violence by criminological literature addressing the relationship between economic downturn and crime may be because they tend to be numerically rarer crimes, in terms of recorded events, than common property and violent offences. Given the significance of their human, financial and political ramifications, however, we suggest that they ought to compel comparable criminological attention. On the more general neglect of white-collar crime and terrorism from mainstream criminological enquiries, see further, respectively, [Simpson and Weisburd \(2009\)](#) and [Mythen and Walklate \(2006\)](#).

With regard to the impact of economic downturn on white-collar crime, the available studies have indicated the absence of a clear relationship between the two. Downswings in the business cycle may bring about a rise in certain forms of white-collar crimes (from general insurance fraud to insider trading and loan fraud), whilst other white-collar crimes, such as professional ‘superfrauds’ and plastic card fraud, may decline during recessions (the latter, for instance, in response to technological advances) (Levi 2010; Gill 2011; Gunnlaugsson 2012; see also KPMG 2013). Meanwhile, white-collar breaches of criminal as well as civil law have themselves repeatedly been found to play a major role in stimulating financial crisis, through accumulated pressures produced by pervasive fraudulent practices in business sectors such as banking, accountancy and telecommunications (see e.g. Calavita *et al.* 1999; Nguyen and Pontell 2010; Huisman 2012; Friedrichs 2013). In industrialized countries, weaker controls against corruption have also been strongly associated with larger fiscal deficits, which have been more likely to trigger financial crisis due to their perceived unsustainability (Kaufmann 2010).

The relationship between economic downturn and illicit political violence has also been examined from causal and reverse causal perspectives, with similarly complex and variegated outcomes. Periods of economic contraction and consequent increases in youth unemployment have been associated with an increased likelihood of terrorist activities, but only for high-income democratic societies (see further Blomberg *et al.* 2004; Caruso and Schneider 2011). Furthermore, whereas a clear connection has been identified between the magnitude of budget cuts and social unrest in Europe, this has not been found to be the case elsewhere, and economic downturn itself—whether or not in Europe—has been shown to have an ambiguous relationship with social unrest (Ponticelli and Voth 2011). There is also evidence to suggest that economic downturn is strongly linked to excessive police violence, although the latter may continue even after the economy improves (Box 1987; Fuentes 2005). Insofar as the macroeconomic effects of illicit political violence are concerned, terrorist activity has been found to have a negative effect on economic growth only in states with low levels of politico-institutional development, high political instability and persistent terrorism, whilst other forms of political violence, including unruly mass protests, have been found to have no robust or significant effect on economic growth (Meierrieks and Gries 2013; Jong-A-Pin 2009). In sum, scholarship has found the relationship between economic downturn and political violence to be heterogeneous over time and space, reflecting the intricate effects of other intervening variables such as national level of economic development, degree of politico-institutional stability and direction of foreign policy (Piazza 2006; Meierrieks and Gries 2012).

Whilst the complexity and apparent irregularity of the relationship between economic downturn and crime may have served to deter greater criminological commitment to the topic, its pertinence as a subject of criminological enquiry has been reinforced by the prominence it has repeatedly attained amongst political, media and public opinion within national arenas. Indeed, the reasons why the relationship between economic downturn and crime should regularly attract such attention, when the empirical grounds for concern have remained so unclear and inadequate, are a puzzle that has been explored in its own right. This line of research constitutes a small but significant part of a long tradition of criminological and other scholarship that has investigated efforts by political elites to further personal, in-group and affiliate interests either by discursively evoking the issue of crime (primarily in street form

yet also in violent political and, rarely, white-collar manifestations; see e.g. [Quinney 1977](#); [Garland 2001](#); [Kappeler and Kappeler 2004](#); [Simon 2007](#); [Altheide 2006](#); [Levi 2009](#); [De Castella *et al.* 2009](#); [Wacquant 2009](#)), or even by supporting crime itself, tacitly or actively promoting illicit political violence by so-called ‘parastate’ actors (see e.g. [Ganser 2005](#); [Poynting and Whyte 2012](#)). In the particular context of economic downturn, researchers have highlighted the ways in which actual or phantom crime growth may be exploited by politicians as a convenient distraction for public anxieties. In their classic *Policing the Crisis*, for example, [Hall *et al.* \(1978\)](#) suggested that the moral panic over muggings by young black men in Britain in the early 1970s was in good part an invention of the then ruling Conservative party, intended to manage the political challenges posed by the ascendancy of free-market policies and the related recession in the country at the time. The deployment of emotive discourse by politicians helped to open the door for an intensification of the coercive power of the state, and simultaneously encouraged the deflection of the economic and ontological insecurities of the broader public onto a marginalized and disaffected black youth population (for similar studies in the United States, see e.g. [Gilmore 2007](#); [Hagan 2010](#)).

To date, however, there has been relatively little scholarly interest paid to the ties, political as well as practical, that can bind different forms of criminality, not least in times of economic downturn. From some quarters, there has been acknowledgement that politicians and political parties may use one form of crime to detract public attention from another. It has been argued, for example, that political actors may focus their discourse on common crime problems as a ‘smoke screen’ to divert the public eye away from rather more politically sensitive elite white-collar crimes ([Chambliss 1999](#)). Nevertheless, to our knowledge, pertinent scholarship has thus far overlooked the heightened political significance of a complex interplay between a greater number of key types of crime and especially between three major types which may accompany economic downturn: common property and violent crime, white-collar crime and illicit political violence. Similarly under-appreciated appears to be the potential during periods of economic downturn for one type of crime to practically incite another, as when, for example, extensive elite engagement in white-collar crime provokes backlash in the form of illicit political violence perpetrated by sub-state groups. Drawing on the case of Greece, we seek below to illustrate why any analysis of the relationship between crime and economic downturn needs to explore the links that may exist between different forms of lawbreaking, in terms of both their actual or perceived occurrence and their representation in the political and public domains.

White-Collar Crime

White-collar crime has been a core component of the relationship between the financial crisis and criminal behaviour in Greece, and has had crucial ramifications for political life in the country. More particularly, corruption—in the form of either entirely illegal or semi-licit frauds and abuses of public office and policy for private gain, committed across business, public and official sectors through a gamut of practices, from accounting and banking to bribery, nepotism and patronage—is commonly recognized to have played a major role in increasing the susceptibility of the Greek economy to financial crisis. Furthermore, in the first few years following the emergence of the crisis, despite

a few symbolic arrests and prosecutions, elite corruption and official impunity towards it appeared to continue undiminished. This contributed to the significant escalation of public anger towards traditional mainstream parties, thereby also raising the political need for strategies that would manage widespread disaffection, central to which became common crime and political violence. This section begins by reviewing the fractious efforts to apportion blame for corruption in the wake of the crisis, before turning to evidence of the persistence of elite corruption and official impunity towards it after the crisis began, and considering the political implications of the resultant growth in public anger against traditional mainstream parties.

Crisis, corruption and blame

A large number of domestic and international commentators have identified patterns of corruption in Greece as a core factor contributing to the emergence of the country's financial crisis in 2009, organically related to over-expenditure and mismanagement of public funds (e.g. Lynn 2011; Manolopoulos 2011). Although corruption in Greece was evidently not the cause of a crisis ultimately produced by the reverberations of a shaken international financial system (Varoufakis 2011), the part played by corruption in exacerbating weaknesses of the national economy helps to explain why it was Greece that succumbed first and most deeply to crisis in the Eurozone. Yet, whilst there has been a degree of consensus that corruption increased the vulnerability of the Greek economy to collapse, considerable controversy has remained as to which form of corruption caused greatest damage to state finances, and whether the general public or political elites bear primary responsibility in this regard.

On one hand, there has been the thesis—exemplified in the immortalized pronouncement of Greece's Deputy Prime Minister in 2010 'we ate it all together' (*To Vima*, 22 September 2010)—that all levels of Greek society shared blame for the growing precariousness of the Greek state's finances before crisis struck, because they were complicit in, and benefited from, practices of patronage, petty corruption and tax evasion. According to this perspective, a sufficient segment of the public colluded in the clientelism which lay behind unnecessary and under-qualified public sector appointments, and the official authorization of unfair and illegal practices, such as legalizations regularly granted to illegally constructed properties (see e.g. Skouras and Christodoulakis 2011; Transparency International–Greece 2012). Similarly, the public is said to have connived in practices of patronage that underpinned a patchwork of social protection privileges accorded to diverse trades groups but withheld from others; for instance, the inclusion of hairdressing and cheese-making, but not fire-fighting or rubbish collecting, within the state category of 'hazardous and arduous professions' that warranted early retirement. Above and beyond complicity, certain interest groups from amongst the general public—whether regional or trade constituencies—have been repeatedly accused of resisting the efforts of politicians to carry out structural reforms that promised to dislodge patron–client relationships (see Featherstone 2011). Additionally, the populace has routinely been characterized as systemically lazy and devious—traits alleged to have played an egregious role in simultaneously burdening and depriving state finances (see Bratsis 2011).

There has clearly been a high level of recognition by the Greek public that corruption is a major national problem—a view shared by 98 per cent of respondents to a

survey in 2011. A poll carried out in 2012 also found a significant minority of Greeks acknowledged that society bears some responsibility for the economic problems facing the country. On the other hand, there has been a strong conviction amongst the Greek public that corrupt practices are most pervasive amongst national-level politicians, and that it is government which is primarily responsible for the country's financial crisis (EC 2011b; PRC 2012). One issue that has encapsulated public concerns about blame and the relative distribution and impact of corrupt practices has been tax evasion.

Tax evasion, a vice widely acknowledged to be endemic in the country, is estimated to have accounted for 48 per cent of the country's budget deficit shortfall in 2008 and to have contributed to a steady increase in tax revenue shortfalls in the years preceding the eruption of the financial crisis in 2009, despite the Greek economy enjoying a 4 per cent growth rate over the same period (Skouras and Christodoulakis 2011). Yet it is amongst the top 10 per cent of the population in terms of income that tax evasion has been most common (Matsaganis and Flevotomou 2010), with more lucrative professional occupations that display closest ties to members of parliament being the most tax-avoidant (Artavanis *et al.* 2012). As the Head of Investigations at the Greek Finance Ministry's Financial and Economic Crime Unit (SDOE) was reported to have pointedly remarked in 2012, although tax evasion has long been systemic in the country, its elites have played a central part to this effect: in particular, elected politicians have been practically 'immune' to investigation, thanks not least to the parliament's use of delaying tactics to undercut pertinent SDOE enquiries (*Die Welt*, 8 June 2012).

Persistent grand corruption and official impunity

Following the onset of the Greek financial crisis in 2009, public disaffection about the apportioning of blame for corruption was to be exacerbated by the leniency that continued to be displayed by traditional mainstream politicians towards grand corruption. One of the most important developments in this regard concerned steps taken by the two political parties that dominated government over the decades following the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974—centre-left PASOK and centre-right New Democracy—to avoid legal responsibility for their own involvement in a series of major corruption scandals that had rocked Greek politics in the late 2000s.

One of these scandals revolved around a close relationship between the Vatopedi monastery from the autonomous monastic state of Mount Athos and high-ranking members of New Democracy, which had led to a land-swap agreement between the monastery and the state that not only appeared to be based on official decisions of dubious legality, but also cost the public purse an estimated €100–150 million. Other major scandals which erupted in the late 2000s concerned bribery by foreign firms to secure civil and military defence contracts; an area of state expenditure of unparalleled contribution to the level of public debt, and one which is thought to have long provided a cover to unregulated payments and personal wealth generation for politicians. It emerged that, between 1997 and 2002, for example, Siemens Hellas had paid over €100 million in bribes to high-ranking politicians from PASOK and New Democracy, as well as to senior officials, in order to win telecommunications contracts, including for the task of establishing a surveillance system known as C4I in advance of the country's hosting of the Olympic Games in 2004. The highly complex system proved operationally

dysfunctional from the moment it was due to launch (Samatas 2011). In a similar case, it was uncovered that, during the early 2000s, the German company Ferrostaal had paid an estimated €230 million in bribes to members of the PASOK government, as well as to civil servants, military officials and middle men, to secure the sale of several submarines to the Greek state, which were subsequently proved to be unusable.

The way in which these scandals were addressed in the midst of the financial crisis drew public attention to the considerable protection from prosecution enjoyed by politicians for crimes of corruption. In accordance with Art. 86 of the Greek Constitution, serving or former members of the Cabinet or Undersecretaries can only be prosecuted with the consent of parliament itself. Such consent, which requires nothing less than an absolute majority within parliament, must be provided no later than the end of the second yearly session of parliament following that which began after the offence was committed. Moreover, Law 3126/2003 provides a short, five-year statute of limitations for the criminal liability of ministers, which was successfully invoked in 2011 by PASOK and New Democracy MPs to evade legal responsibility for the Siemens and Vatopedi scandals (Transparency International–Greece 2010). The Ferrostaal case was the exception that proved the rule, with the scandal leading to a rare high-profile arrest—that of former PASOK Minister of Defence Akis Tsochatzopoulos in 2012. At the time of writing, he has been convicted of tax fraud and is currently being tried for related charges of money laundering, including the charge of accepting a bribe of €8 million for the submarine deal.

Equally crucial to rising public disaffection in the years since the emergence of the financial crisis were regular, if usually elliptic, insights provided by the media into the persistence of impunity displayed by traditional mainstream politicians towards corruption perpetrated by other wealthy elites in the country, extending protection from prosecution to those who engaged in fraud, embezzlement and tax evasion. A piece of legislation introduced in 2010 (Law 3904), for example, provides for charges to be dropped against individuals suspected of embezzlement if the funds are returned prior to prosecution. This law attracted public ire for its role in the largest of the multiple scandals to emerge after 2009 from the Greek banking sector, involving Lavrentis Lavrentiades, a pharmaceuticals and media magnate who became the president of Proton Bank. Along with a cabal of associates, Lavrentiades was alleged to have embezzled millions of Euros, a fraction of which (€51 million) provoked initial official investigations. In an apparent if ultimately unsuccessful attempt to avoid prosecution, Lavrentiades had subsequently returned €51 million to the bank.²

The Greek government also introduced a tax amnesty in 2010, contradicting political rhetoric that pledged commitment to countering tax evasion and money laundering. Although this measure was widely criticized for failing to raise the significant funds promised and for allowing evaders to pay only small fines in order to avoid being subjected to a tax investigation, a further amnesty scheme was again under consideration by the government in 2012, only to be dropped due to international pressure in early 2013. More provocative still was a scandal which erupted in late 2012 after revelations that, between 2010 and 2012, PASOK Ministers of Finance George Papaconstantinou

² More recently, in 2012, Lavrentiades was charged with fraud in association with accusations that Proton Bank had issued bad loans worth approximately €700 million to companies he owned or with which he was related. At the time of writing, he is being held in pre-trial detention.

and Evangelos Venizelos had failed to ensure investigations were undertaken into over 2,000 wealthy Greeks suspected to have engaged in tax evasion, whose names were on a list allegedly provided by then French Minister of Finance, Christine Lagarde, and which was subsequently 'lost'. As of mid-2013, official investigations that had been launched in the meantime into the substance of the allegations concerning the names on the list were moving remarkably slowly. More generally, there were to be very few prosecutions of wealthy tax evaders in the years following the start of the financial crisis, notwithstanding a slow rise in the number of token high-profile arrests carried out with media fanfare. Furthermore, whilst the overall magnitude of petty corruption fell with the onset of the crisis in 2009, alongside a significant drop in the reported size of bribes requested in public and private sectors ([Public Issue 2011](#)), income under-reporting amongst the wealthiest of the population appeared to increase, contributing to an overall rise in tax evasion ([Matsaganis and Flevotomou 2010](#)).

Public anger and political elites

Although public frustrations in Greece with grand corruption and official impunity towards it have long stood at a very high level by European comparison, they have been aggravated in the wake of the financial crisis. Tensions have been raised by the assertion of traditional mainstream politicians that all levels of society shared blame for bringing the system to crisis through corruption, at the same time as these politicians absolved themselves of responsibility in cases of grand corruption and extended immunity of prosecution to their elite counterparts in business and media sectors. Illustrating the scale of public anger against the country's political elite, a large-scale opinion survey carried out in 2011 found that 28.6 per cent of respondents would be prepared to attack politicians with eggs and yoghurt, 16.1 per cent would be prepared to beat up political figures and 12.5 per cent would be prepared to set fire to the vehicles of parliamentarians and ministers ([To Vima, 11 March 2012](#)). This anger has been vented both physically and politically: low-level assault and intimidation of politicians has reportedly grown more common (see e.g. [Ta Nea, 9 June 2012](#)) and, during 2012, in the first elections to be held after the financial crisis broke, voters punished PASOK and New Democracy.³

In past eras, clientelism could help to mollify mass consternation over elite corruption in the country ([Dobratz and Whitfield 1992](#)), but conditions of austerity today have precluded this expensive option. Meanwhile, revoking general impunity towards elite corruption remains unconscionable so long as it might jeopardize elite backing for the political status quo. One way in which PASOK and New Democracy have sought to manage widespread anger without losing elite support has been to divert public attention towards issues of common crime and immigration.

³ At the general elections held in October 2009 (just one month before the country's financial crisis broke), PASOK won 43.9 per cent of the vote, and New Democracy 33.5 per cent. In May 2012, inconclusive elections were held in which PASOK received 13.2 per cent, whilst New Democracy took 18.9 per cent. The next round of elections, in June 2012, saw New Democracy achieve 29.7 per cent, whilst PASOK support slid further to 12.3 per cent. Meanwhile, voter turnout dropped from 70.9 per cent in 2009 to 62.5 per cent in June 2012. (Election data are available from the website of the Greek Ministry of the Interior.) As many commentators suggested, the fact that New Democracy gained a slim majority of votes in the election of June 2012 was less a positive public endorsement signalling the rehabilitation of the party's reputation and more a reflection of public anxiousness to avoid the country's exit from the Eurozone.

*Common Crime and Immigration*⁴

Since the financial crisis broke, dominant political discourse in Greece has increasingly focused on common property and violent crime, and especially as these may be linked to immigration. This discourse cites police-recorded crime statistics showing both an important rise in the prevalence of thefts, burglaries and robberies since the onset of the crisis and a significant overrepresentation of non-Greek individuals amongst known perpetrators of these offences. This discourse also associates crime with a rise in other social phenomena, such as urban poverty and degradation, which signify deterioration in quality of life and lead the public to believe it is at heightened risk of criminal victimization. To the extent that there has been an actual increase in crime and associated phenomena, and that this increase has been driven by the recession and subsequent austerity measures, it is a paradox of no small proportion that the very parties responsible for managing the socio-economic life of the country have joined the far-right in systematically maintaining common law-and-order issues in the public eye, even though doing so risks further undermining their popularity. Yet this has been a strategy aimed at displacing mass discontent, not only about the socio-economic austerity agenda and the unequal distribution of its negative effects as such, but also about the audacity and impropriety of the elites promoting it. This strategy appears to have had considerable success, insofar as public concern about crime has stood at exceptionally high levels by European comparison since the crisis began, and fear of criminal victimization and punitiveness towards offenders seem to have undergone a substantial increase, particularly in connection to immigrant populations, when crime rates themselves have failed to provide unequivocal support for such attitudes.

In what follows, we first note the significant weight accorded to a nexus of common crime and immigration, and to purportedly associated phenomena, in dominant political discourse and public attitudes in Greece since the onset of the crisis. We proceed to demonstrate that, whilst the crisis has seen an overall rise in police-recorded rates of common property and violent crime, the specifics of this rise problematize the way it typically registers in dominant political discourse and public attitudes. We go on to show how the financial crisis has stimulated the occurrence in public and especially urban areas of other social phenomena—immigrant poverty, drug use and homelessness—whose evocation has also contributed importantly to fear of crime and punitiveness amongst the citizenry. The section closes with an account of the strategic functions that dominant political discourse about crime and immigrants seeks to perform.

⁴ The statistical information provided in this section on levels and patterns of crime in Greece is based on the authors' analysis of primary data that have been made available online by the Hellenic Police and the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection. Calculations of rates per units of population were conducted on the basis of estimates made available online by the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) of the country's total population on 1 January each year. As no such estimate was available for 2011 and 2012, use was made of ELSTAT's projected figures for those years, which are congruent with prior population estimates. A general population census was carried out in 2011, but Greece has yet to issue adjusted estimates and related statistics for past years reflecting the results of the census. The 2011 census, which is not strictly comparable to the previous census of 2001, suggests that the size of the population was overestimated in the interim and has slightly declined, rather than risen, over the course of the decade (ELSTAT 2013). Expected adjustments are not likely to affect the pattern of the trends reported in this article.

Political discourse and public attitudes to crime

Since 2009, as the financial crisis began unfolding in Greece, dominant political discourse has grown ever more heavily preoccupied with what is presented as an inexorable rise in common property and violent crime in the country, conflating it with immigration and other social phenomena such as urban poverty and degradation. A nexus of crime, illegal immigration and urban poverty and degradation, for example, was central to the political agenda in the lead-up to the national elections of May and June 2012, with PASOK, New Democracy and the neo-fascistic far-right party Chrysi Avyi ('Golden Dawn'), amongst other parties, openly linking the issues to one another in competition for xenophobic votes. PASOK Minister of Citizen Protection Michalis Chrysochoidis pointed the finger of blame for a 10 per cent increase in muggings and robberies within 2011 on illegal immigrants, also referring to their poor living conditions in central Athens as 'a ticking bomb for public health'. The leader of New Democracy and now elected Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, meanwhile, pledged to reclaim Greek cities from illegal immigrants and their purported criminality and infectious diseases. The most extreme messages came from Chrysi Avyi, which mainly based its campaign on an anti-immigrant platform under the slogan 'So we can rid this land of filth', and saw its electoral support increase from a meagre 0.29 per cent of the vote in 2009 to 6.92 per cent in June 2012, thus winning 18 out of 300 seats in parliament. All this discourse was accompanied by government action in the form, for instance, of intensified policing of immigrants and an effort to introduce legislation that would provide for the detention of immigrants and asylum seekers suspected of representing a danger to public health (HRW 2012).

Efforts to draw attention to crime in connection with immigration and urban conditions in the country continued unabated after the elections and the formation of a coalition government dominated by New Democracy and PASOK. In a series of highly publicized parliamentary speeches and media appearances, incoming Minister of Citizen Protection Nikos Dendias highlighted what he called the 'unbelievable number of foreigners participating in serious crime' (*To Vima*, 8 July 2012), linking illegal immigrants more specifically to homicide, drug trafficking and other forms of lawbreaking, as well as to urban squalor (*Athens News*, 5 August 2012). Due to illegal immigration, Dendias opined, Greece 'is being lost. Never since the coming of the Dorians, 4,000 years ago, has the country been subject to an invasion of such magnitude. ... This is a bomb at the foundations of society and the state'. 'Immigration', he went on to exhort, 'may be an even greater problem than the economy' (*To Vima*, 6 August 2012). A dramatic new policing initiative reinforced the message: a multi-site 'sweep' operation paradoxically named 'Xenios Zeus' ('Hospitable Zeus'), in which the police detained thousands of immigrants whilst running checks on their legal status (Cheliotis 2013a, forthcoming).

Dominant political discourse appears to have had a considerable effect on public attitudes. According to Eurobarometer survey data, although concern in Greece about crime as an important national issue has been surpassed in the wake of the financial crisis by heightened concern about such matters as the country's economic situation, unemployment, inflation and government debt, it has stood at high levels by EU comparison. Indeed, public concern about crime more than doubled in Greece between 2008 and 2009, before returning to pre-crisis levels thereafter, whereas the average national rate of concern about crime in the EU concurrently almost halved following a

steady gradual decline. Thus, although Greece has been in line with (and has, in fact, led) the broader EU trend towards growing economic concerns amongst the public within member states, its extraordinarily stabilized rate of public concern about crime came to exceed the respective EU average (EC 2008; 2009; 2011a; 2012c).

Since the onset of the financial crisis, moreover, rates of fear of criminal victimization have been found by domestic research to be very high in Greece, and appear to have risen substantially, at least insofar as the data permit comparisons with studies for previous years (on which see Cheliotis and Xenakis 2011). In a nationwide survey by Giannakopoulou (2011) in 2010/2011, for instance, almost nine out of every ten respondents thought that crime had increased significantly over the past five years, two-thirds reported that they often or sometimes thought about the possibility of becoming a victim of crime and close to half reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe, or altogether avoiding, walking alone in their area of domicile after dark. High rates of anxiety were also found specifically about forms of common crime (e.g. mugging and robbery). In the same survey, the most commonly identified cause behind heightened fear of crime concerned current economic conditions and financial uncertainty, more so than the increasing number of immigrants and minorities in the country or rising crime itself, which seems to be indicative of an underlying belief that poverty and socio-economic insecurity increases the propensity of those most subjected to them, characteristically immigrants, to engage in crime (see also *To Vima*, 27 May 2012). There is evidence to suggest that public punitiveness in Greece has also stood at very high levels since the onset of the crisis, and appears to have undergone a substantial increase, especially as regards non-Greek offenders (Giannakopoulou 2011; *To Vima*, 27 May 2012; Political Capital 2012), again insofar as the data allow for comparisons with previous research (see Cheliotis and Xenakis 2011; Jackson *et al.* 2011).

Rates of property and violent crime

At first sight, police-recorded data seem to offer some explanation for the level and composition of political and public attitudes towards crime since the beginning of the financial crisis. A deeper look, however, finds these attitudes to be exaggerative and grossly biased.

Between 2009 and 2012, the total annual volume of burglaries and thefts rose by 20.9 per cent, from 72,658 to 87,912, whilst the rate of burglaries and thefts per 1,000 inhabitants rose by 20.3 per cent, from 6.4 to 7.7. The total annual volume of robberies during the same period increased by 27.2 per cent, from 4,708 to 5,992, whilst the rate of robberies per 1,000 inhabitants increased by 26.8 per cent, from 0.41 to 0.52. Amongst the total number of burglars and thieves known to the police for the years 2009–12, Greeks were the majority (constituting 31,615, or 53.1 per cent, of 59,490 known burglars and thieves), but non-Greeks were overrepresented in proportion to their estimated one-tenth share of the general population (constituting 27,875, or 46.8 per cent, of 59,490 known burglars and thieves). As concerns robberies, however, non-Greeks were both the majority (4,585, or 52.7 per cent, of 8,684 known offenders) and were again proportionately overrepresented.

It would nevertheless be misleading to conclude that trends in political and public attitudes towards crime have been commensurate with actual crime trends. Indeed,

despite the fact that public concern in Greece about crime as a national problem has exceeded the European average, the latest comparable data show actual crime rates in the country to have been moderate by European standards (UNODC 2012*b*). Even acknowledging a rise in crime rates, a closer look at police-recorded data reveals variable trends, in terms of both levels and patterns, across different offences. Between 2011 and 2012, in fact, the volume of burglaries and thefts fell by 9.2 per cent and that of robberies by 9.7 per cent. The occurrence of certain types of violent crime has meanwhile undergone an overall drop since the onset of the financial crisis, whilst the percentile rise in the occurrence of other types of violent crime is far less impressive when expressed in terms of absolute numbers and rates per units of population, but also when compared to the pre-crisis period. Thus, between 2009 and 2012, the total annual volume of police-recorded rapes decreased by 21.9 per cent, from 214 to 167, and by 26.3 per cent as a rate per 1,000 inhabitants, from 0.019 to 0.014. At the same time, whilst the total annual volume of homicides rose by 15.3 per cent, this was from a low 143 to a slightly higher 165 (and it actually fell by 10.3 per cent between 2011 and 2012). As a rate per 1,000 inhabitants, the volume of homicides rose by 16.6 per cent from 2009 to 2012, but again, this was from a mere 0.012 to just 0.014. One way or another, the increased volume of homicides remained consistently below the peak volume experienced in recent decades: that of 203, or 0,018 per 1,000 inhabitants, in 1997.

Equally, trends in the composition of offenders known to the police problematize stereotypical representations and perceptions of ethnoracial minorities as the prime actors behind the alleged crime boom in the country since the onset of the financial crisis. Between 2009 and 2012, for example, the absolute number of Greeks amongst offenders known to the police for thefts and burglaries rose by 60.2 per cent, from 5,957 to 9,545, whereas the respective number of non-Greeks increased by a comparatively modest 13.7 per cent, from 6,313 to 7,184, also dropping slightly, by 1.7 per cent, between 2011 and 2012. In 2009, Greeks comprised 48.5 per cent of all offenders known to the police for thefts and burglaries, but their proportion had climbed up to 57 per cent by 2012. As concerns robberies, the absolute number of Greeks amongst offenders known to the police rose by 65.3 per cent between 2009 and 2012, from 782 to 1,293. The respective number of non-Greeks underwent a significantly lower rise by 37.4 per cent, from 796 to 1,094, and it actually shrank by 19.4 per cent between 2010 and 2012. In 2009, the proportion of Greeks amongst all offenders known to the police for robberies stood at 49.5 per cent, but had reached the majority, at 54.1 per cent, by 2012.

In terms of rapes, the number of Greeks amongst known offenders fell by 4 per cent between 2009 and 2012, from 124 to 119, whilst the number of non-Greeks underwent a drop over 11 times as great, by 46 per cent, from 128 to 69. As a result, although non-Greeks were overrepresented in proportion to their share in the general population, both in all annual counts and the overall total for the four-year period at issue, Greeks grew to constitute the majority of known rapists by any measure (as has long been the case except for a brief interval between 2007 and 2009). Finally, as concerns homicides, the number of Greeks amongst known offenders only grew by 2.8 per cent between 2009 and 2012, from 249 to 256, whilst the number of non-Greeks grew by 26.6 per cent, from 124 to 157, although it fell by 12.7 per cent from 2011 to 2012. In any case, whilst non-Greeks were overrepresented in proportion to their share in the general population, in both all annual counts and the overall total for the four-year period at

issue, Greeks were once again responsible by any measure for most homicides (as has long been the case uninterruptedly).

Here it should be noted that the data available do not allow for determining whether ethnoracial minorities are more likely to be victims of homicide in Greece, as has been established elsewhere in Europe (see e.g. Liem *et al.* 2012). The heightened prevalence of racist violence in contemporary Greece, however, would seem to point in that direction (even though perpetration of homicide against members of ethnoracial minorities does not need to be motivated by the ethnoracial background of the victim). Reports by domestic and international NGOs, for example, have claimed that racist violence has been escalating rapidly in the country in recent years; indeed, Greece has been described as ‘the most acute example’ of the way in which the financial crisis has fuelled racist violence in Europe (RED 2012: 4; see also HRW 2012; NCHR 2011b).⁵

In any case, there are multiple reasons why police-recorded crime statistics in Greece need to be treated with particular caution when used as a proxy for actual crime rates. These range from the reported ease with which the Greek police file unwarranted charges, to their systematic over-policing of immigrant communities, including so-called ‘sweep’ or ‘cleaning’ operations and a propensity to stop-search and arrest immigrant individuals to a greater degree than Greek persons, to the fact that immigrant individuals are easier to arrest due to the comparatively unsupportive social and physical environment in which they find themselves, to the tendency of Greek citizens to report crimes to police authorities even when cases are frivolous and their specifics largely uncertain, just as they are more likely to report crimes when offenders are believed—rightly or wrongly—to be immigrants (Cheliotis and Xenakis 2011; see also AI 2009). Indeed, given that the police forces have been exempted from mass redundancies in the public sector and that their ‘sweep’ operations have become more frequent and aggressive since the financial crisis broke out, it is reasonable to assume a degree of inflation in the proportional share of immigrants in police-recorded crime statistics.

‘Signal disorders’ and public attitudes to crime

Compounding public fear of criminal victimization and punitiveness towards offenders in light of the vagaries of actual crime as expressed in police-recorded data, dominant political discourse in Greece has conflated crime with a rise in other social phenomena since the onset of the financial crisis. These phenomena, elsewhere termed ‘signal disorders’ (Innes 2004), commonly indicate deterioration of ‘community well-being’ or ‘quality of life’, and lead the public rightly or wrongly to believe that it is at increased risk of criminal victimization.

Past studies have shown fear of crime in Greece to correlate positively with perceived high ethnic heterogeneity of one’s area of residence (Ceobanu 2011; Semyonov *et al.* 2012), with personal exposure to drug-related problems in one’s

⁵ As concerns official data on racist violence in Greece, they are highly unreliable and bound to underestimate its prevalence, not only because of practices of under-recording and insufficient investigation, prosecution and punishment of such cases by the police and judicial authorities, but also because of under-reporting by victims due to lack of confidence in the Greek criminal justice system, fear of reprisals and active dissuasion by the police (AI 2012; HRW 2012; NCHR 2011b; RED 2012).

neighbourhood (such as finding syringes left by drug addicts; [van Dijk *et al.* 2007b; 2007a](#)), and with perceived degradation of the built and physical local environment ([Vakiari and Kontargyri 2009](#)). Other research has found punitiveness in Greece to be significantly greater amongst citizens who rank immigration into the country as the most important social problem (see further [Cheliotis and Xenakis 2011](#)). Couched in these familiar cognitive associations, dominant political discourse is bound to have bolstered levels and patterns of fear of crime and punitiveness in the country since the onset of the financial crisis by extending discussion of the crime–immigration nexus to include references to increased prevalence in public areas of immigrant poverty, drug use and homelessness (see e.g. [EC 2011b](#)). Considered alone, these references contain an important element of truth, at least insofar as the manifest occurrence of each of the phenomena in question is said to have risen in central urban locales more particularly, although their association with crime remains debatable at best and dubious at worst.

At the same time as high and increasing rates of unemployment have been forcing legal immigrants to leave Greece and irregular immigration into the country appears to have stabilized, there has been a flow of poor immigrants into the centres of Greek metropolises, where established support networks may help them find work and affordable housing. Whilst the distinct physical characteristics of immigrants, their poverty and their differential use of urban space (e.g. congregating in public squares in search of work) have made them visible in Greek local contexts ([Kandyli and Kavoulakos 2011](#)), such visibility has become all the more prominent as the density of urban immigrant populations has increased.

The case of drug use in public places is similar. In itself, the rate of recorded drug use in Greece has long been, and continues to be, one of the lowest in Europe, whilst the latest estimate of problem drug users in the country showed a decline from 2009 to 2010, as did the police-recorded rate of deaths caused by drug use. Moreover, the annual volume of police-recorded drug-related offences and the corresponding number of accused persons have dropped in the country since 2009. Yet the financial crisis has brought a mix of rampant unemployment, worsening personal and household finances, the growing inability of social networks (e.g. family and friends) to provide support in the process of seeking or following drug addiction treatment, and the imposition of drastic reductions to state funding for core drug rehabilitation agencies, which has pushed an increasing number of drug addicts, Greeks as well as non-Greeks, out onto urban streets. As police ‘sweeps’ of central urban areas have also been displacing drug addicts into new districts and neighbourhoods, the visibility of problem drug users has inevitably heightened in the eyes of the broader public (see further [EKTEPN 2011](#); [EMCDDA 2011](#)).

Homelessness, unlike immigration and drug use, has risen since the onset of the financial crisis both as a phenomenon in itself and in terms of its manifestation specifically in central urban areas. According to aid organizations, the combination of spreading unemployment and poverty, heavy funding cuts to social services and the suspension of housing benefit caused Greece’s homeless population to swell by an estimated 25 per cent between 2009 and 2011, reaching around 20,000 people. Importantly, the composition of homelessness has grown to extend well beyond poor immigrants and drug addicts, and increasingly includes middle-class Greeks who have fallen into bankruptcy ([EC 2012a](#)), although it is the former two groups that are primarily targeted by the police during ‘sweep’ operations.

The political benefits of failure

It seems plausible that an increase in some forms of common property and violent crime since 2009 may have been driven by the economic downturn, which has also generated conditions that help exaggerate the prevalence of common property and violent crime in the public mind, propelling to the spotlight the very ‘problem populations’ the state and its police authorities are claiming to be ‘sweeping’. Such outcomes, however, are politically problematic only in appearance, for they furnish convenient distractive problems and ample supplies of suitable scapegoats onto which mass socio-economic anxieties and anger with political elites may be transferred, respectively. In a similar vein, it is only superficially counterproductive that Greek political elites publicly confess their own failure to sufficiently come to grips with crime and related phenomena—a view widely shared by Greek citizens, who have long expressed low and falling levels of confidence in the police and the broader justice system of the country, on the one hand, and have shown high and rising levels of support for a ‘get tough’ approach to crime control, on the other hand (Cheliotis and Xenakis 2011; see also Hough *et al.* 2013, forthcoming). Self-confessed ineffectiveness here serves to signify the persistence or incessant emergence of problems that help to justify the continued displacement of mass socio-economic anxieties onto common crime and of anger with political elites onto weak out-groups. In the last analysis, if common property and violent crime are expedient problems, this is not because they necessarily lend themselves to successful government intervention. It is rather because they are fields where the open acknowledgement of failure by elites in office may bolster the status quo by focusing attention on law and order and maintaining demand for its prioritization by government (see further Cheliotis 2013b).

As well as helping to displace public anger against traditional mainstream parties, thereby also allowing it to be discharged onto marginalized segments of the population instead, the political prioritization of the common crime and immigration nexus has combined with the admission of inadequacy in addressing it to support the management of persistent public anger by providing fodder to political violence.

Illicit Political Violence

Trends in illicit political violence are as important to elucidating the effects of the financial crisis on crime as they are testament to the political significance of crime since the onset of recession and austerity. The socio-economic pressures unleashed by the financial crisis were widely expected to propel violent campaigns by covert groups identified as far-left or anarchist that had been increasingly active over the 2000s, and which have been the consuming focus of the Greek state’s domestic counter-terrorism activities (Xenakis 2012). It has also been suggested that, in the wake of the financial crisis, socio-economic pressures have fuelled repeated instances of public unrest throughout the country to the point of risking a general and sustained breakdown in law and order. Yet such expectations have been defied by actual trends in political violence: there has been no clear correlation to date between the cumulative pressures of the crisis and austerity measures, on one hand, and violence perpetrated in protest by either organized anarchist and leftist actors or demonstrators and strikers, on the other hand. It is rather the excessive use of force against peaceful protesters by the police,

as well as organized violence from far-right actors against immigrants, anarchists and leftists, which have seen an ascent since the crisis began. Successive governments have nevertheless downplayed and facilitated violence carried out by the police and far-right groups. Governments have instead focused public attention and state efforts on tackling threats posed by anarchist and far-left groups conducting organized attacks, and by those participating in mass protests against austerity measures and political corruption. In so doing, governments have effectively supported the development of an environment that is intimidating to actors challenging the current status quo.

This section begins by shedding light on trends in anti-systemic violence, before setting out the factors that have served to limit unrest, placing particular emphasis on the role of violence by the police and far-right groups. We conclude this section by elaborating on the ways in which traditional mainstream parties have been able to capitalize on police and far-right violence.

Anti-systemic violence and its limits

Expectations of growing instability in Greece following economic downturn (see e.g. [Papadopoulos 2012](#)) initially seemed to be validated by an escalation in officially recorded attacks by covert political organizations identified as left-wing or anarchist—the number of such attacks rising from 13 in 2008, to 15 in 2009 and 20 in 2010 ([Europol 2010](#); [2013](#)). The most prominent groups active during this period, such as Epanastatikos Agonas (Revolutionary Struggle), Synomosia Pynon tis Fotias (Conspiracy of Fire Nuclei, or Conspiracy Cells of Fire) and Sehta Epanastaton (Sect of Revolutionaries), issued public proclamations explaining the reasons for their attacks, in which accusations against political, business and media elites for their corruption, as much as their rapaciousness, featured highly ([Xenakis 2012](#); [Kassimeris 2012](#)). By summer 2010, it seemed as if the threat might be intensifying, with Sehta Epanastaton—the most lethal of these organizations—promising to turn the country into a ‘war zone of revolutionary activity’ ([Xenakis 2012](#)). However, during the very time frame in which the impact of the austerity measures was increasingly being felt by Greek society and by the youth in particular, political violence from sub-state covert groups to the far-left of the political spectrum was actually dropping significantly. Following a series of arrests and seizures of weapons over the course of 2010 and 2011, only six attacks were officially recorded in 2011 and only one in 2012 ([Europol 2013](#)).

Similarly, more general assumptions that the country has been on the verge of sustained mass unrest appeared to be supported by repeated outbursts of public disorder, the growing politicization of many Greeks and immigrants, and their accruing experience of mobilization (see e.g. [Kouvelakis 2011](#); [NCHR 2011a](#)). Less than a year before the financial crisis broke, Greece had experienced its worst unrest for decades. Sparked by the lethal shooting of a teenager by a policeman in Athens, weeks of sit-ins, demonstrations and clashes between protesters and police took place nationwide in December 2008. After the financial crisis had been unveiled and the first package of austerity measures was being communicated to the Greek public, the ensuing political and trade union protests in May 2010 saw riots break out in cities across the country. Demonstrators attempted to storm the parliament building in Athens and, from amidst the mass protest, a covert group firebombed a bank, killing three workers ([Xenakis 2012](#)).

During these protests, anger with elite corruption, as much as with the distribution and impact of financial austerity, were commonly vocalized by participants, as

epitomized by their familiar chant ‘thieves, thieves’. Athens was reported by the media to have become a ‘war zone’, if at the hands of the public, in the summer of 2011, in October 2011 and in February 2012, each time that the Greek parliament voted to approve austerity measures in order to secure international bailout funds. The disorder that broke out in February 2012 was decried by the prime minister as the worst since 2008, and the burning of historic buildings in the centre of Athens offered dramatic illustration of an apocalyptic future which—according to parliamentary debate—threatened the country.

Yet, by early 2013, there had been no replay of the month-long unrest of December 2008. Public disorder in the years following the onset of the financial crisis has been of a far lesser scale than that which preceded the crisis. Socio-economic hardships helped to ignite disorder in December 2008, but subsequent trends in public mobilization which accompanied harshening of socio-economic conditions illustrated that deterministic expectations of the relationship between the two were fallacious (Kaplanis 2011). Already by 2012, most expert observers claimed there to be only a small risk of a major social explosion in Greece within the next few years (Hughes 2012).

Deterring unrest

A variety of factors explain why, after social unrest engulfed Greece in December 2008, it failed to mount as socio-economic conditions worsened. The deaths associated with the mobilization of May 2010 are likely to have played a role in strengthening aversion amongst protesters to the escalation of violence during and following demonstrations (Renn *et al.* 2011). In any case, however, opportunities for social unrest were reduced as protest and strike activities, which would otherwise provide a context from which unrest could spread, failed to gain momentum during this time.

In recent years, participation in demonstrations and strikes has been more likely to be stymied in its infancy due to the greater use of anticipatory judicial and policing measures. For instance, whilst the majority of strikes in Greece are declared by courts to be unlawful, an amendment passed by parliament in 2009 provided for the judicial decision-making process determining legality of strikes to be expedited (Lampousaki 2009). The police, for their part, have repeatedly carried out hundreds of preventative detentions in advance of planned demonstrations, reportedly targeting leftists and anarchists who had been detained or arrested during skirmishes after previous protests. The potential for unrest has also been inhibited by a rise in the use of excessive violence by the police, which has served as a powerful deterrent to mobilization by would-be protesters and strikers. According to Amnesty International, the number of reported cases alleging excessive use of force and other ill-treatment against peaceful protesters by the Greek police showed a particular increase between 2010 and 2012, the period in which the austerity measures began to be implemented (AI 2012).

Similarly, unrest has been deterred by mounting violence from far-right groups, accompanied by inaction or even collusion by the police. Far-right groups have been known to mobilize at demonstrations in order to intimidate or attack far-leftist and anarchist protesters, sometimes doing so from alongside or behind police lines, and the ensuing clashes have served to swiftly dissipate demonstrations and discourage future participation amongst the general public. Meanwhile, although not uncommon before

the crisis began, attacks against immigrants by far-right groups have since seen notable growth in both frequency and intensity. Black-clad platoons of men armed with sticks and shields have regularly patrolled immigrant-dense districts in Athens, and have carried out attacks against people and property around Greece, often once again with the apparent complicity of police contingents. These platoons have widely been alleged to be peopled by members of Chrysi Avyi, but it was not until several months after the party entered parliament for the first time in 2012 that it ceased denying any involvement (HLHR *et al.* 2010; HRW 2012; Xenakis and Cheliotis 2013). To the extent that Chrysi Avyi has accepted responsibility, it has proclaimed its actions to be aimed at re-establishing law and order in the country—a justification widely reproduced to explain the emergence, persistence and spread of far-right violence. Recent reports revealing that some police have been directing crime victims to seek assistance from Chrysi Avyi indicate that the appeal of this rationale has been self-fulfilling. Ultimately, whether intentionally or not, the intimidation of victims and neighbourhoods by far-right violence may have also cultivated fear of physical risks in participating in local mobilizations that can feed into mass protest against austerity measures and elite corruption.⁶

Above all, government has played an essential role in the cultivation of an environment hostile to strikes and protest, and thus to unrest, by maintaining state impunity towards violence by the police and the far-right. On occasion, traditional mainstream parties have offered rhetorical and legislative commitments to countering such violence, but these have led to little substantive change. For instance, following repeated calls for the establishment of an independent police complaints body made by Amnesty International, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, the office legally promulgated in 2011 by the Greek state in response has been criticized for lacking independence and an adequate mandate. Any prospect of a government-directed halt to the intensification of police violence towards protesters looked even less likely after the passing of Law 4058 in 2012, Art. 19 of which exempts law enforcement officers caught in the process of committing a crime or shortly thereafter from immediate arrest and speedy referral to trial, so long as the act takes place during and because of the exercise of their duties. More generally, despite years of lobbying by non- and inter-governmental organizations, there has been a clear failure to ensure that the Greek state meets European Union and broader international standards in terms of recording, monitoring, and swiftly and effectively prosecuting police and far-right violence, as well as delivering appropriate punishment for perpetrators and compensation for victims. All too often, police and far-right violence and the inadequacy of state responses have been downplayed, and even justified, in dominant political discourse (AI 2012; Basille and Kourounis 2011; HRW 2012; Xenakis and Cheliotis 2013).

The electoral dividend of coercion

In facilitating coercion by the state and the far-right, traditional mainstream parties in Greece have sought to maintain an environment in which persistent public anger about

⁶ This is not to deny the fact that far-right violence, as is also the case with excessive police violence, has provoked counter-mobilizations by victims and groups sympathetic towards them (Xenakis and Cheliotis 2013).

austerity measures and elite corruption is contained. Support for coercion, alongside the fanning of public fears about terrorist violence and the prospect of social disintegration, has also allowed these parties to indulge authoritarian and xenophobic segments of the population in order to attract their vote, as well as nurturing a convenient electoral alternative for voters deserting the centre ground.

Authoritarian and xenophobic attitudes in Greece saw a sharp upturn from 2009 onwards, and were accompanied by electoral gains for far-right parties, their combined share of the vote rising from 5.9 per cent in 2009 to 8.5 per cent in 2012.⁷ PASOK and New Democracy were able to take direct advantage of this development in 2011, when they included the far-right party LAOS in a coalition government designed to ensure the safe passage of austerity measures through parliament (*Political Capital* 2012). Indirectly, PASOK and New Democracy have benefited from the subsequent rise in popularity of Chrysi Avyi, which has functioned to absorb votes bled by them and that might otherwise flow to their main competitor for office: Syriza, the Coalition of the Radical Left. In addition to mirroring Syriza's highly popular anti-austerity platform, Chrysi Avyi has drawn in voters wanting more decisive action on the fronts of law and order and immigration than proposed by Syriza. Certainly, in the elections of June 2012, large swathes of PASOK and New Democracy supporters did transfer their vote to Syriza, helping to increase its electoral share from 4.6 per cent in 2009 to 26.9 per cent. Yet a substantial proportion also shifted their support to Chrysi Avyi, thereby contributing to Syriza's narrow defeat (*To Pontiki*, 21 June 2012).

Conclusion

The findings of this article offer a number of theoretical contributions to criminological knowledge on the relationship between economic downturn and lawbreaking. First, financial crisis may be associated with a broader range of criminal behaviours than has typically been acknowledged in the literature. In the case of Greece, corruption and political violence have been as important as common property and violent offences to grasping the connections between the crisis and criminal activities. Second, the criminogenic impact of financial crisis may lack linearity and uniformity, not just in terms of common property and violent offences and white-collar crime, as previous research has suggested, but also as regards illicit political violence. In the Greek case, whilst illicit violence identified as emanating from far-left or anarchist groups initially rose but then fell, mass public unrest did not gather momentum, and violence perpetrated by the police and far-right groups saw an ascent. Third, there may be heretofore underappreciated linkages between a wide variety of criminal behaviours themselves, which are intensified and thereby rendered all the more discernible in times of financial crisis, and which call for further criminological examination. In Greece, issues of elite corruption and common property and violent offences have been used, whether singly or in conjunction with one another, as grounds for a variety of domestic actors to engage

⁷ Far-right votes were divided between LAOS (Popular Orthodox Rally) and the neo-fascistic party Chrysi Avyi. In 2009, LAOS won 5.6 per cent of the vote, whereas Chrysi Avyi received just 0.3 per cent. In June 2012, LAOS dropped to 1.6 per cent, whilst Chrysi Avyi took 6.9 per cent of the vote.

in political violence. Meanwhile, the escalations of police and far-right violence have together worked, directly or indirectly, to deter violent unrest.

Additionally, and this stands as a fourth theoretical contribution of the article, our focus on a wider spectrum of crimes has allowed us to identify a more complex relationship between crime and politics in times of financial crisis than has been considered to date in pertinent literature. In Greece, a broadened conception of crime is crucial to fully apprehend the roots and scale of public anger to have developed against traditional mainstream parties since the emergence of financial crisis, the political pressures that those parties have faced as a consequence and the strategies they have employed in response. Public anger has been fuelled not simply by rising socio-economic hardship and the unfairness of austerity measures, but also by crime issues that have been associated with the crisis as well. These issues have especially concerned the persistence of elite corruption and official impunity towards it since the crisis began, in addition to efforts by traditional mainstream politicians to place disproportionate blame on society for corrupt practices that contributed to the crisis in the first place. Given the counterproductive nature of inverting castigation for corruption as a strategy for deflecting public anger, politicians have sought to divert and constrain it through discourse and state practice focusing on common crime and illicit political violence. On one hand, encouraging fear of common crime in conjunction with immigration, as well as of mass disorder and far-left and anarchist violence, has aimed to displace public anger onto more convenient targets. On the other hand, facilitating far-right and police violence has worked to contain the electoral and physical expressions of persistent anger.

One should not conclude from the above that crime as an object of political manipulation necessarily delivers complete or durable success in managing an irate public during times of financial crisis. To the contrary, the depth and breadth of public anger can place limits on the effectiveness of efforts to control it. These limits have been demonstrated in the case of Greece by the precariousness of the political status quo and the rise of Syriza. At the same time, however, the fact that traditional mainstream parties have been able to remain in office since the onset of the crisis, even if by coalition government, is testimony to the efficacy of their endeavours to contend with very high levels of public anger, achieved in considerable part by exploiting the issue of crime.

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