

FROM CRIMINALS TO TERRORISTS AND BACK?

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Author: Eleni Fotou



GREECE QUARTERLY REPORT

INTRODUCTION

General description of terrorism in Greece

In the past five years, Greece has consistently been one of the EU countries with the most arrests for terrorism and large-scale attacks. In 2017, Greece was 10th in Europe in arrests (15 arrests total) and 5th in Europe in terms of larger-scale attacks (8 attacks). Despite the high numbers, terrorism in Greece is manifested in a different manner than in Central and Northern European countries and mainly involves left-wing and anarchist/nihilist groups. The 2018 Europol EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) found that “in Greece, left-wing and anarchist terrorist groups and individuals continued to have enhanced operational capabilities and access to military-grade weapons”. These groups target predominantly multi-national corporations, government buildings, and prominent individuals within the police or the government with the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

The high sentences attached to terrorist offences (average of 17 years) in Greece does not seem to be a deterrent to active terrorists, as arrest

numbers in the past several years have increased, from 28 individuals arrested in 2015 to 31 in 2016, and to 36 in 2017. Furthermore, a total of 12 people were arrested on charges related to left-wing and anarchist terrorism.

Extremist groups—the case of the Rubicon

Greek anarchist groups appear to have a gatekeeper role from induction into nihilist ideology and conversion to terrorism. Anarchist groups are funded through their members and have a large presence in Hellenic universities and urban settings. Usually, a local group takes over an abandoned building where they host a variety of events, from film screenings to concerts to speeches, attracting youth and members of the public while promoting their agenda.

That agenda focuses on solidarity with imprisoned anarchists and terrorists, particularly with the terrorist organisation “Conspiracy of Fire Cells”, and most recently with vehemently protesting in favour of granting convicted terrorist Dimitrios Koufontinas leave from prison.

One of the most characteristic groups is Rubicon, an organisation that surfaced in the past five years and is situated at the forefront of the discussions

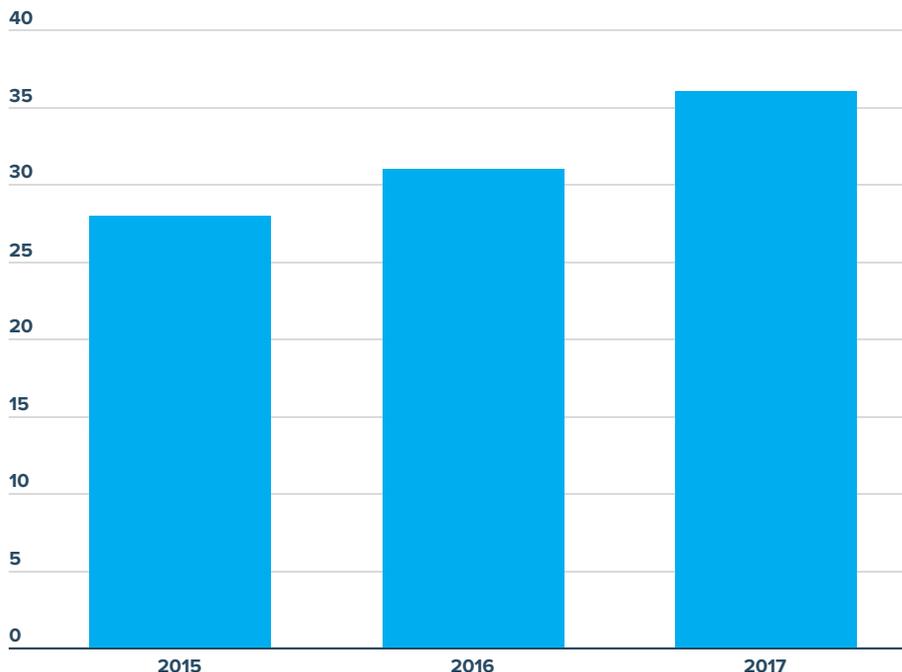


Figure 1. Terrorism-related arrests (source Hellenic Police Data, www.astynomia.gr)



Picture 1. Rubicon member posing in Raqqa (Source: <https://www.cnn.gr/news/ellada/story/112080/melos-toy-royvikona-epestrepse-apo-ti-rakka-opoy-polemise-sto-pleyro-ton-koyrdon>)

on the induction into terrorism in Greece. Members of Rubicon have even travelled to Syria to lend support to local Kurdish freedom fighters, with pictures of an armed individual appearing in 2017 in front of a building in Raqqa with the words “Rubicon” and “Raqqa 2017” graffitied in Greek onto the wall, becoming the first Hellenic radical group to be actively involved in the Syrian war (pictured above).

Although the anarchist extremist groups claim that they are part of European anarchist networks such as Federazione Anarchica Informale/ Fronte Rivoluzionario Internazionale (FAI/FRI, Informal Anarchist Federation/International Revolutionary Front), there is no evidence of formal cooperation.

Migration

While jihadi terrorism is not prevalent in the country, migration is the main political focus and a key issue in the anarchist extremist agenda, which supports fully the complete dissolution of state borders. With close to one million people arrested for irregular migration to the Greece in 2015 and 7,000 people crossing the borders daily, there has been speculation that the high volume of immigrants and state of unpreparedness for the humanitarian crisis has allowed a number of jihadis, other Islamic terrorists, and organised crime networks to benefit from the situation and cross into other Schengen areas.

For example, a high-level Al-Qaeda terrorist

who passed through Greek borders from Turkey was arrested in his attempt to receive political asylum in the country.

The image of a dead child, 3-year-old Alan Kurdi lying on a beach in Kos, published in 2015, acted as a catalyst in the shift in the European Commission’s policy on migration and an increase in humanitarian aid offered in Greece.

After 2015, the migration flows decreased, but most of the chief countries of origin are in the Middle East and Africa (table 1). In addition, migrants seem to prefer crossing over land, through the border with Turkey, rather than using the sea route. After the failed military coup in Turkey, there has also been a steady increase in the migration of Turkish nationals.

There is wide discussion on whether known jihadis use the migration routes through Greece and what the Hellenic authorities’ response to information received from European agencies has been. The fact remains that up to this point, no known jihadis have been included among the individuals in this database (arrested in 2015).

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Individuals with complex stories— Dimitrios Koufontinas

The case that won the most headlines this year was the preferential treatment given in the case of Koufontinas. He is a founding member of the largest terrorist organisation in Greece, the group November 17 (N17). He was charged with more than 200 offences and convicted of participation in 11 assassinations, grand theft, terrorist attacks, and participation in a terrorist organisation. He received in an appeals court 11 life sentences plus 25 years. Since 2017, he has continually applied for and been granted leave from prison, amounting

to more than 18 days of leave in 2018. This has caused a global outcry, especially from the US and the UK, as he was personally responsible for the assassination of one British officer and two American officers stationed in Greece. While in prison, he has published two books that became best-sellers. He was never employed in his life, but he received a monthly salary from N17 of 1,373.88-1,761.08 euro per month. He studied law but dropped out before graduating, and he was also interested in apiary studies.

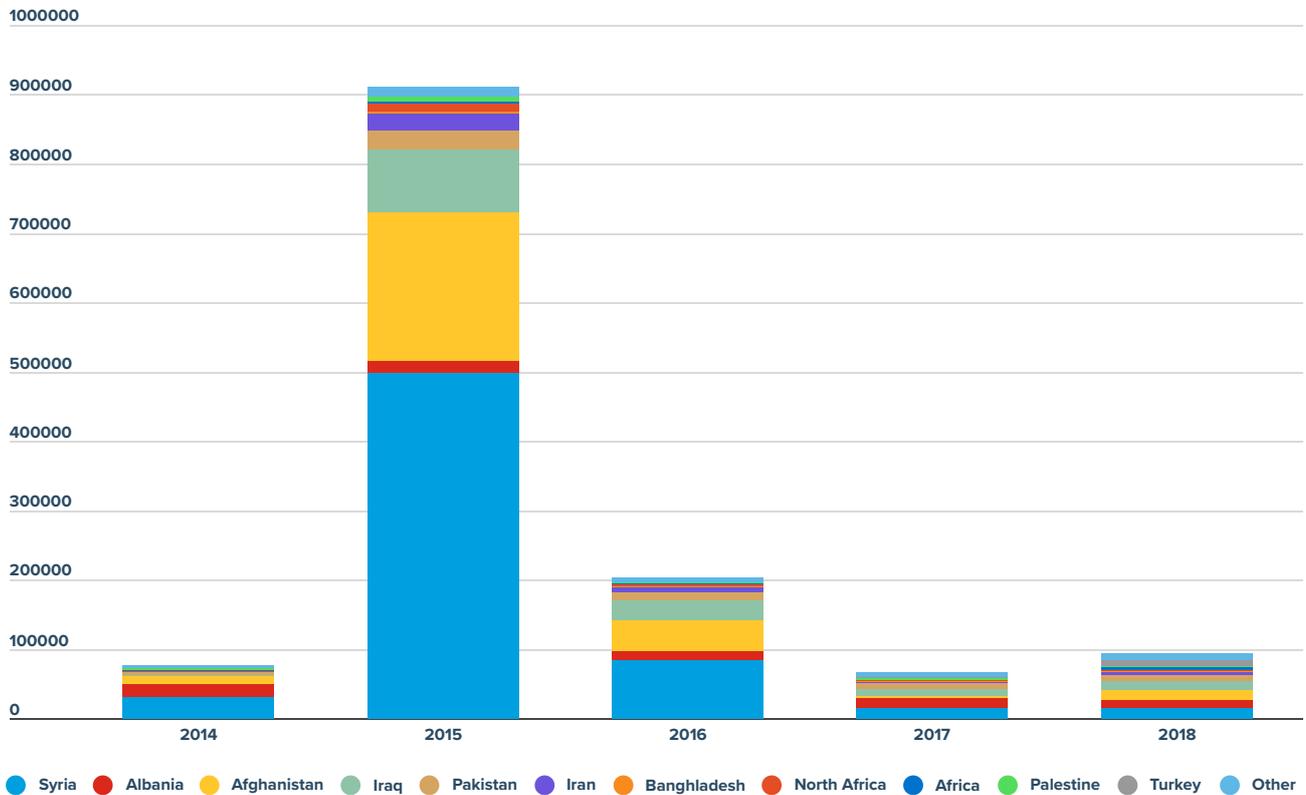


Figure 2. Migration to Greece 2014 - 2018 (Source: Hellenic Police statistics on migration, www.astynomia.gr)

THE 2015 ARRESTEES FOR TERRORISM

This quarterly report refers to data collected with regards to Greece and individuals researched for their arrests for terrorism under specific legislation (Law 3259/2004) in 2015. The information was gathered through open sources, including media archives, government sources, and police records and statistics. In addition, the terrorists themselves have published various materials, from blogs to YouTube videos to newspaper articles to books, that were also used as sources. In total, the database comprises 28 individuals, of whom 26 were arrested in 2015 by the Hellenic police, 1 was killed during a police raid and 8 remain fugitives; and, 2 individuals were arrested on international warrants. The ideology they expressed was overwhelmingly left/anarchist extremist (18/28) while 5 individuals were arrested as part of the peculiar group “E”.

Most of the 2015 arrests were the capture of fugitives who had been wanted for more than a year. One individual was a core member of N17, the most prolific terrorist group operating in Greece, and over the course of one year, when he was on the run, he became involved in numerous other criminal activities, connecting with members of another terrorist group, common criminals, and organised criminals he had met earlier in prison, then using these connections in the outside world. Following his arrest, the Hellenic police were able to compile enough evidence leading to the arrests of more than 15 individuals, all included in the database. This is a clear example of how a crime-terror nexus could manifest close connections with established terrorists and other criminals and, ultimately, a method with which the nexus could be explored by authorities to produce significant arrests.

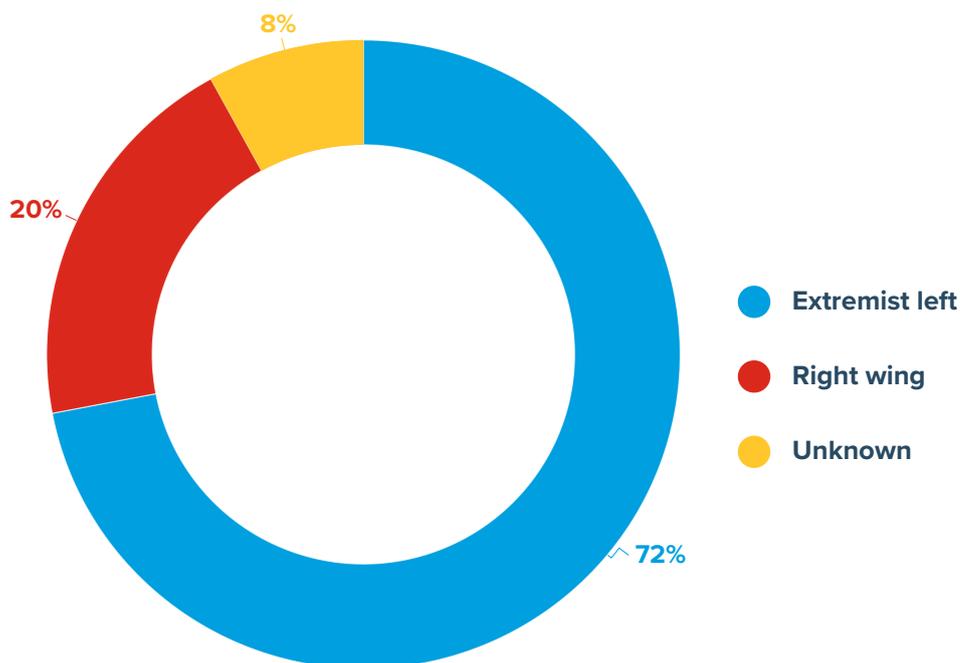


Figure 3. Ideology of the 2015 arrestees

The latter could be tentatively classified as an extremist right-wing organisation, having as a fundamental belief the superiority of Greeks over all other races, which pose a threat, but the ideology is based on a belief in the Ancient Greek gods, Zeus in particular, and the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who they believe was an alien who arrived on Earth to preach the superiority of the race.

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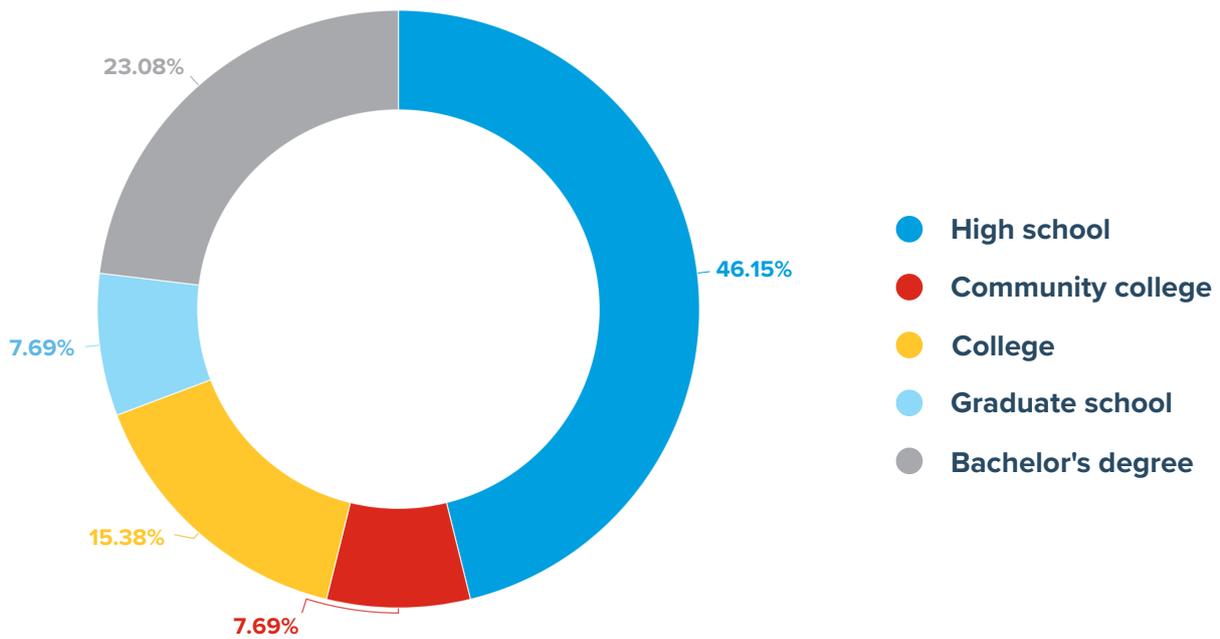


Figure 4. Education

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS

As mentioned above, one of the most significant findings relates to the strong correlation between the results of this database and national averages. With the exception of the delinquent behaviours exhibited by these individuals, their socio-demographic parameters profile an average person in terms of education, employment status, and nationality. Most of the individuals in the database completed high school while a third received higher education.

Although almost half (13 out of 28) were unemployed at the time of arrest, this figure should be viewed with caution, as the unemployment rate in Greece at the time was extremely high (25%). None of the arrestees was a minor and the majority were in their thirties (12 out of 28). With the exception of 5 individuals, the majority of the arrestees were not religious, being either atheists or adhering to a secular lifestyle. The 5 individuals mentioned above believed in the 12 gods of Ancient Greece.

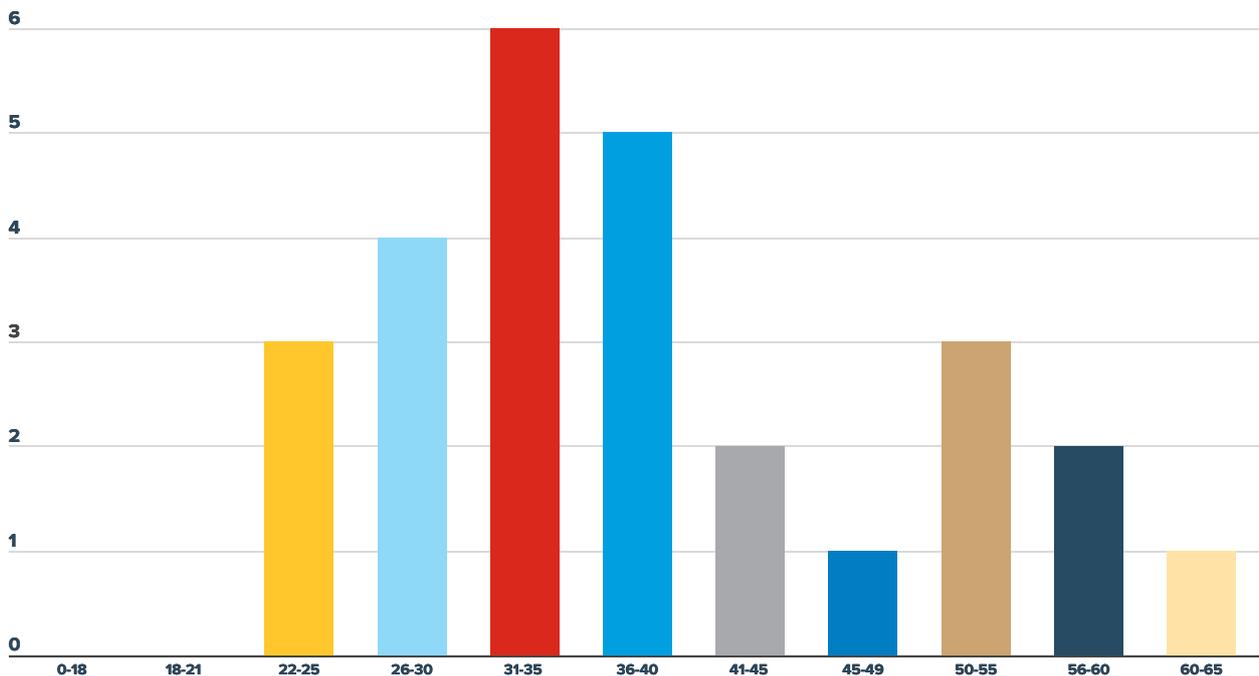


Figure 5. Age at the time of the 2015 arrest

Gender and terrorism

Although the majority of the arrested individuals are male (24 out of 28), the women among the larger group who become active in terrorism were not passive members of the organisations in which they were inducted. Moreover, they usually have a familial connection to another member of the organisation. Included in the database is the mother of two convicted terrorists, the wife of one, and the girlfriend of another.

These women are vocal about their beliefs, not unwilling participants in the terrorist group's

Nationality/origins

Although there is substantial evidence in support of jihadis using the high volumes of refugees to pass through Greece, there are various reasons for the lack of arrests of jihadi terrorists in Greece. One example of the use of the migrant transit route by jihadis is the case of 2 individuals who were documented and processed as Syrian refugees in October 2015 on the island of Leros, only to blow themselves up in the attacks in Paris merely one month later.

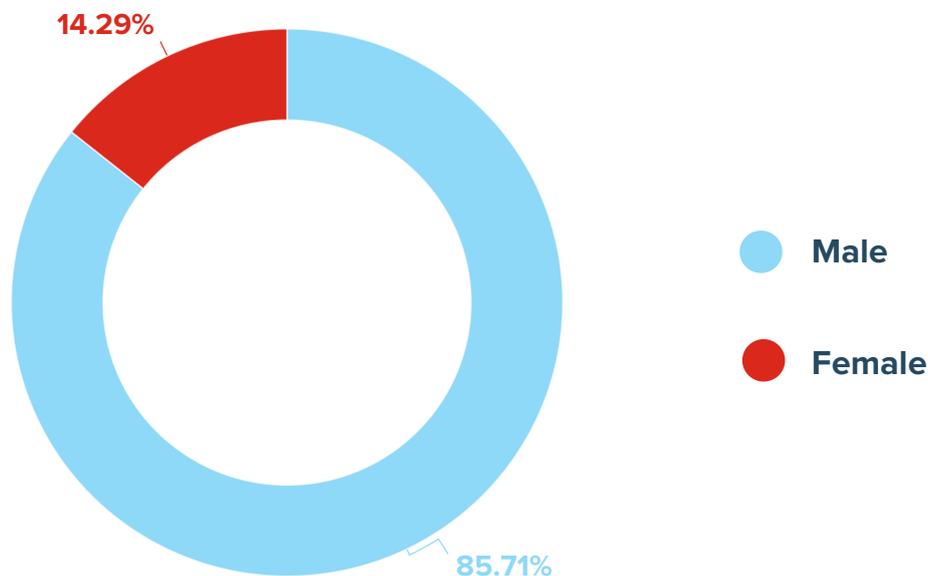


Figure 6. Gender of 2015 arrestees

activities. For example, 1 of the women, the mother of the two convicted terrorists, has published a novel, wherein she states that “anarchists are the People’s Saints”. Another case of interest is a younger individual who actively participated not only in the procurement and recruitment of new members but also in armed robberies.

Left-extremism—A family affair

Another interesting finding up to this point is the familial relationships present among individuals in the database. One-third of the arrestees in the database (9 out of the 28) have either a sibling or an intimate partner who was incarcerated at the time for terrorism or terrorist-related offences. This is a point for further qualitative analysis, as a similar pattern was observed previously among members of the N17 terrorist organisation.

The main reason behind the failure of the Hellenic police in identifying jihadis has been the combination of the high flows of migrants and the limited resources and diminished capacity due to the economic crisis, which in 2015 was at its highest level at the time. In the present database, the prevailing majority of the individuals are Greek nationals, with Albanian-born permanent residents in Greece also having a significant presence. This comports to other findings supporting a domestic aspect to terrorism in Greece. Urban settings are more popular for establishing networks among left-wing extremist terrorists, and this is also where most of their targets are located, though the entire mainland is within the scope of their “procurement” activities, mainly armed robberies. With the anarchist/extreme left having a stronghold in the Exarcheia area of Athens, it is ripe for networking, acting as a “safe haven” for all marginalised individuals.

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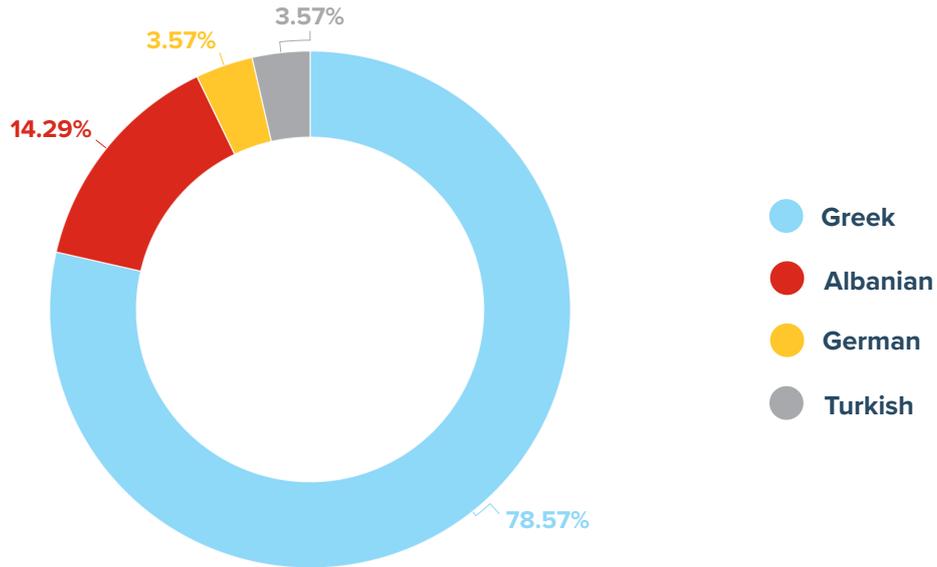


Figure 7. Nationality

CRIMINAL HISTORY

The majority of the individuals (61%) have a record of a prior arrest before 2015. Most of the individuals were previously arrested in relation to thefts or armed robberies (9 individuals) while 4 were charged with participation in organised crime, 4 individuals had drug-related offences, and 4 had illegal firearms charges. All of the individuals who had prior offences, incarcerations, or arrests had multiple offences attached to them. Although there are petty crimes attached to the individuals in the database, felony offences prevail.

CRIME-TERROR NEXUS

Established connections were present in 12 out of the 17 (71%) of the individuals who had a record of a prior arrest. These connections were almost exclusively formed in Korydallos Prison while individuals were incarcerated and awaiting trial. This is a significant finding in support of a crime-terror nexus, and further analysis should be conducted, exploring whether this occurs in correlation with extremist left ideology or there are other factors present that have not yet been investigated. Moreover, there is evidence that

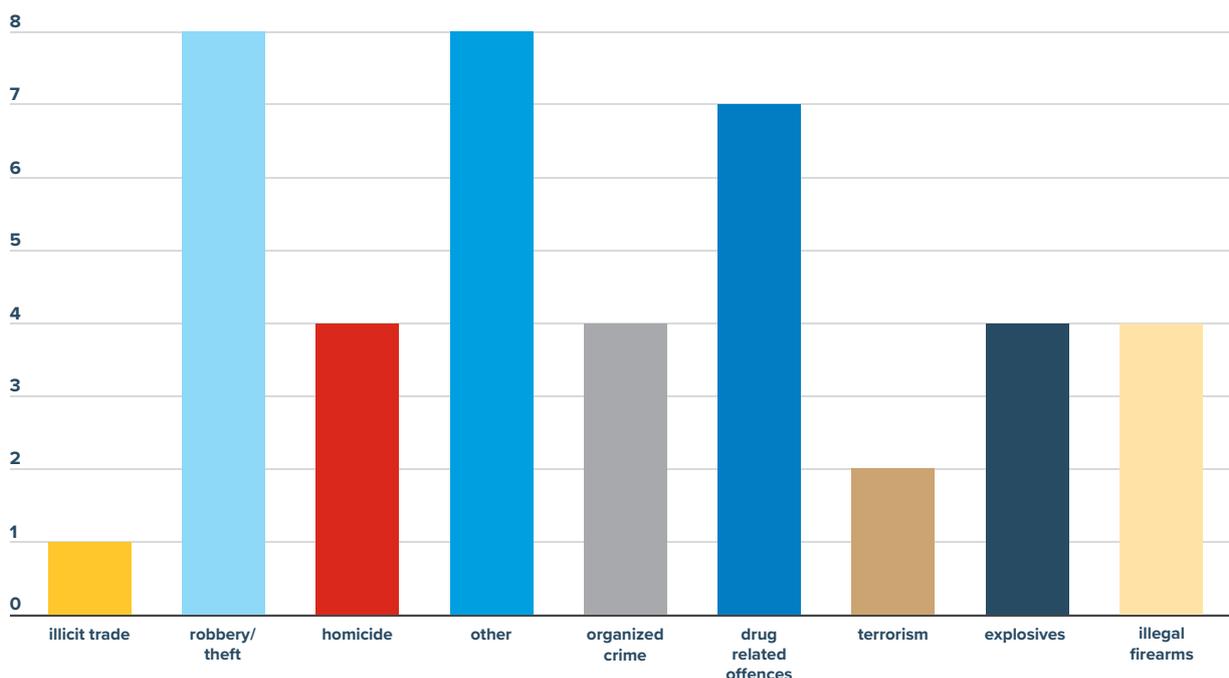


Figure 8. Charges

individuals who are arrested for the first time and are included in the database, especially the women, were introduced by their incarcerated family members to their associates during the prison's visiting hours. This appears to be a significant supporting factor in the role that prisons have on the radicalisation of individuals.

RADICALISATION VARIABLES

Radicalising variables in Greece seem to follow three trajectories:

Family/Associates

The individuals in this category had either familial ties with known or already incarcerated members of terrorist organisations, mainly N17, OPLA, and Conspiracy of Fire Cells. Of the 28 individuals, 8 (29%) had familial ties while 13 individuals (46%) had known associates who were involved in a terrorist organisation.

Socio-economic and political events

The investigated year 2015 was a turbulent one in terms of economic and socio-political developments in the country. First, the Greek financial crisis and its effects were felt by the middle classes and was a particular contributing factor that altered the political scene. One of the terrorist organisations represented by individuals (5) in the database, specifically utilised the economic crisis in their manifesto. The Syrian refugee crisis sparked social reactions in the country, on both ends of the political spectrum. While the extremist left and anarchist groups acted in solidarity with refugees and freedom fighters, the extremist right-wing parties and groups viewed the influx of migrants as a threat to their view of the European way of life.

Prison

Incarcerated individuals with terrorist affiliations seem to find correctional facilities to be fertile ground for radicalising individuals. The people who are approached are usually prolific criminals, whose skillset is positively viewed by the terrorist organisation. These individuals usually had long criminal records, involving theft and armed robbery. These arrangements are mutually beneficial for the criminals as well, as they use the political agenda attached to terrorists to veil their criminal behaviour.

FINANCING

At this time, there is no evidence that Greek terrorist groups are financed from abroad. Of the 28 individuals examined, 7 used illegal means (usually armed robberies) as their primary financial support, both at the individual and organisational levels. The anarchist networks usually hold solidarity events, such as concerts and other cultural events that support incarcerated individuals. Furthermore, some of the individuals have published works that provide additional income for them, and potentially for their organisations.



