



Antifeminist Regress in Greece Today: The Politics of ‘Active Dads’ and ‘Fertility’ Campaigns

SPECIAL ISSUE

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the resurgence of antifeminist politics in Greece from 2010–2024, a period defined by economic and socio-political crises. It analyses how patriarchal, nationalist, and homophobic discourses have strategically targeted feminist and LGBTQIA+ rights, focusing on key actors, such as the Greek Orthodox Church, far-right groups, and new antifeminist factions that promote ‘men’s rights’ under the pretext of equality.

The nub of our argument is that, in the context of intensified antifeminism in Greece in the critical years of 2010–2024, two critical cases, the 2021 ‘mandatory joint custody’ law and ongoing anti-abortion campaigns, constitute strategic and partly successful assaults on established women’s rights, marking a novel and disquieting development. To our knowledge, these events have not been extensively researched in recent social science studies despite their significance in reinforcing patriarchy and the way they reflect mutations of antifeminist politics in Greece today. This paper seeks primarily to contribute to a first mapping of this critical territory that remains uncharted to date. A more specific argument is that the end of this period witnessed the rise of a ‘fathers’ rights movement,’ which fully replicates the discursive frames and repertoires of action of the international ‘men’s rights movement.’ These transnational frames include the claim that men’s equal rights and children’s welfare are undermined under prevalent legal-institutional arrangements.

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Such ‘fathers’ rights politics’ poses new strategic threats to women’s rights and equality, requiring particular attention.

Our study highlights the critical implications of these developments, which align Greece with the global rise of authoritarian, antifeminist movements and serve to consolidate patriarchal power structures.

INTRODUCTION

The incrimination of feminism has been a leitmotif of social conservatism in Greece. During the dictatorship in 1967–1974, the notorious motto ‘Fatherland–Religion–Family’ (*Πατρίς–Θρησκεία–Οικογένεια*) summed up the conditions that a ‘law-abiding’ subject must fulfil according to the nationalist ideology of the post-war right. Despite advances in gender equality and LGBTQIA+ rights, including significant reforms enacted in the 1980s and 2010s, patriarchal, nationalist, and homophobic norms still underlie Greek society today ([Athanasίου 2018](#)).

In the contemporary national context from 2010 to today, antifeminist and anti-LGBTQIA+ politics have occurred in a deeply critical conjuncture. The dramatic economic crisis and the perceived ‘refugee crisis,’ coupled with the defeat of the left-wing promise incarnated by the SYRIZA government in 2015–2019, set the stage for the rise and mainstreaming of far-right regressive politics, reaffirming in effect the historical triplet ‘Fatherland–Religion–Family’ of Greek socio-political reaction ([Siaperá and Papadopoulou 2023](#); [Vasilaki and Souvlis 2023](#)).

During the financial crisis, harsh neoliberal reforms deepened gender inequalities, as female unemployment rose and women’s growing dependence on family members reinforced their adoption of more traditional roles at home. The sharp decline in birth rates, driven by the lack of resources and mass emigration (‘brain drain’), amplified alarmist calls to address women’s fertility and fueled growing opposition to feminism, which supports reproductive rights and self-determination. Immigration was increasingly portrayed as an additional threat. Fearmongering about ‘population replacement’ gained ground, and far-right nationalist voices moved from the margins to the center of political discourse. Far and alt-right discourses attribute the societal and economic decline to a decreasing number of births due to abortions, the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community, and women’s ‘careers,’ while the enactment of same-sex marriage rights has triggered diverse reactions reasserting traditional gender roles in parenthood. The governing New Democracy party, which succeeded the SYRIZA administration, has sought to win over extreme-right voters by adopting antifeminist and anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies—notably through illegal and often lethal pushbacks of migrants and through the enactment of a new family law, which will be explored in detail in the following.

Our paper seeks to offer a critical overview of antifeminist mobilizations in recent years in Greece. First, we set out the broader scene of reactionary opposition to feminism and LGBTQIA+ rights and recognition, noting the rise of new actors. We then subsequently delve into two cases of late antifeminist intervention that sparked organized feminist rejoinders to them, the ‘Active Dads’ and the ‘Fertility’ Conferences. What singles out these antifeminist attacks in the period of reference (2010–2024) is that they were not merely manifestations of persisting sexism and patriarchal violence nor only expressions of opposition to new pro-feminist and pro-LGBTQIA+

reforms initiated by state actors; instead, they may be considered strategic endeavors taking aim at established feminist conquests and institutional frameworks to promote reforms in a reactionary direction. In other words, they are new inroads of reactionary politics proper.

The nub of our argument is that, in the context of intensified antifeminism in Greece in the critical years of 2010–2024, the strategic and partly successful assaults on established women’s rights are a novel and disquieting development. To our knowledge, these events have not been adequately researched in recent social science studies, despite their significance for the reinforcement of patriarchy and the mutations of antifeminist politics in Greece today. This paper seeks primarily to contribute to a first mapping of this critical territory that remains uncharted. A more specific argument we seek to substantiate is that the end of this period witnessed the rise of a ‘fathers’ rights movement,’ (FRM) that fully replicates the discursive frames and repertoires of action of the international ‘men’s rights movement,’ (MRM), of which FRMs are a subsector. These transnational frames include the claim that men’s equal rights and children’s welfare are undermined under prevalent legal–institutional arrangements. These ‘fathers’ rights politics’ pose new strategic threats to women’s rights and equality, requiring particular attention.

ANTI-FEMINIST AND ANTI-LGBTQIA+ ACTORS AND AGITATION IN 2010–2024

ACTORS

Given the deeply ingrained patriarchal culture of Greek society, antifeminist and anti-LGBTQIA+ actors have been always present since 1974, when the military dictatorship fell. They involve mainly the Greek Orthodox Church, the political and cultural right, the far right, and also members of other political parties and sectors of civil society infused with this culture. However, the actual landscape of antifeminist and anti-LGBTQIA+ politics is more convoluted.

Traditional conservative and far- or extreme-right forces, typically represented by the Orthodox Church, the official religion of the state, and the currently outlawed neo-Nazi ‘Golden Dawn’ party, have openly voiced their opposition to feminist and LGBTQIA+ demands and to reproductive rights, standing for a staunch, even violent homophobia. Showing consistency, Golden Dawn female MPs have targeted feminism and gender equality as ‘deceptive, ineffective, and disorienting women again from commitment to motherhood [...] and the growth of the national community [...] a “new order” tool of hegemonic international forces’ ([Anastasiadou and Samara 2022, 18](#)). Moreover, Golden Dawn has framed gender violence as a fundamentally racial issue, whereby Greek women are assailed by ‘immigrant hordes’ ([Anastasiadou and Samara 2022, 16](#)). Feminist activists are represented by extreme-right proponents as part of a conspiracy to undermine Greek culture, while they are simultaneously instrumentalized as part of a vulnerable group supposedly threatened by Muslim immigrants. Women’s bodies are symbolically depicted as the glue that holds the nation together through biological ties ([Athanasίου and Tsimouris 2013](#)), so their bodies need to be kept away from so-called invaders ([Pappas 2013](#)). This may appear as a typical femonationalist discourse that juxtaposes women’s rights against Muslims and other ‘antifeminist aliens’ ([Farris 2017](#)), but the Greek far right also denounces gender equality and rights in favor of conventional motherhood roles.

The more traditional antifeminist forces have been supplemented in recent years by an emergent Greek alt-right situated both within and on the fringes of the governing right-wing New Democracy party, as well as in new pressure groups such as the ‘Active Dads’ formation, where partisans seek to champion ‘men’s rights’ against feminist conquests. These novel alt-right actors converge with aspects of the international alt-right and MRMs in their discourse and their methods. They speak in the name of equal rights to contest feminist positions and rights and reverse the relationship between dominant and dominated by positioning men as threatened and abused by women and their allies. To illustrate, mediatic figures such as Kostas Bogdanos, coming, and later expelled, from New Democracy, has assailed on TV ‘vegan lesbian anarchist witches; Satanist troublemakers’ who allegedly seek to impose themselves violently.¹

Alt-right YouTubers have taken aim at abortion, feminism, and homosexuality, proclaiming that genders have a natural identity and claiming that legal equality has been achieved. They denounce the ‘myth of toxic masculinity and white privilege’ and portray the left as ‘unclean’ (Afouxenidis and Petridis 2021, 11–12). Moreover, contemporary reactionaries have adopted the standard far- and alt-right practice of instrumentalizing women’s and LGBTQIA+ rights to take on mainly Muslim migrants and refugees, along with their leftist allies (Afouxenidis and Petridis 2021, 12; Anastasiadou and Samara 2022, 11; Vasilaki and Souvlis 2023, 458–460).

The antifeminist radical right parades in an unstable ecosystem of far-right media outlets, several of which emerged under the conditions of the poly-crises. Diverse right-wing journals (e.g., ‘Makeleio,’ ‘Eleftheri Ora,’ etc.), blogs and social media posts, news websites (e.g., pronews.gr, energoimpampades.gr), and radio stations (such as ‘Focus FM’ belonging to the nationalist right-wing party ‘Hellenic Solution’) disseminate antifeminist discourse. Men are portrayed as victims of women-spiders who deceive, manipulate, and exploit their partners to attain their goals. Prominent women are denigrated as ‘whores’ who ‘suck’ their way up the social ladder. By contrast, the female ideal is that of a mother who does not provoke through her sexuality, does not engage with public affairs, and is dependent on her husband (Siapera and Papadopoulou 2023, 83–87).

At the same time, the incumbent New Democracy government of the dominant right-wing party, which has governed for almost half of the post-dictatorship period and was re-elected in 2023 for four years, has taken on board items of identity politics while pursuing antifeminist policies (Koulouris 2018; Vasilaki and Souvlis 2023). Hence, on the one hand, the New Democracy government promoted the election of the first female President of the Greek Republic in 2020, and it eventually legislated same-sex marriage in February 2024 with the votes of the opposition. On the other hand, in 2021, it passed the ‘mandatory joint custody’ law for the children of divorced couples, coalescing with the new ‘Active Dads’ lobby to enact demands at the forefront of the global patriarchal reaction. Furthermore, in a gesture that speaks volumes for its regressive agenda, in 2023, it subsumed the ‘General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights’ under the newly founded ‘Ministry for Social Cohesion and Family.’

The new stage of the patriarchal counter-offensive is partly mirrored in the composition of the parliament after the June 25, 2023, national elections, which marked a historic throwback for democratic pro-equality forces. New Democracy was reinstated in government, gaining 40.56% of the vote. Three more parties on the right

1 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v0dzhf7ggqM>, accessed 13 February 2024.

of New Democracy—the *Spartans*, an offshoot of the outlawed Golden Dawn; *Elliniki Lysi* ('Greek Solution'); and *Niki* ('Victory'), with 4.68%, 4.44% and 3.70% of the vote, respectively—were also elected, with the *Spartans* and *Niki* being new formations. Their political discourse and positions are more vocally traditionalist, nationalist, anti-immigrant, antifeminist, and anti-LGBTQIA+ (Asimakopoulos and Fouskas 2023; Mylonas 2024; Nezi and Lefkofridi 2025) than New Democracy's. They thus expand the front of antiegalitarian forces in parliament without necessarily reflecting a society-wide regress given that voter turnout reached only 53.74%, a historic low for national elections.

In sum, the traditional far right has rehearsed its old agenda but has also incorporated elements of femonationalism by casting gender violence as a racial matter. Furthermore, novel antifeminist strategies of the contemporary far right have arisen in the last decade. The conservative government and new men's groups deploy more stealthy strategies to subvert women's rights and advance an antifeminist hegemonic intervention in popular culture (Afouxenidis and Petridis 2021, 8; Anastasiadou and Samara 2022; Vasilaki and Souvlis 2023, 461–463).

Finally, it is worth pointing out that traditional leftist 'communist' parties such as KKE (the Communist Party of Greece) are skeptical or even dismissive when it comes to LGBTQIA+ rights and politics. Feminism and LGBTQIA+ activism are regarded as antagonistic to their cause—addressing the working class' struggle, which would presumably resolve all other inequalities by itself (Gaitanou 2017; Athanasiou 2018). Hence, KKE voted against extending to same-sex couples the right to form civil partnerships and against same-sex marriage in general in February 2024 (Kosyfologou 2018, 46).

FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL: ANTIFEMINIST ACTIVISM AND THE MEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The first instance of recent antifeminist regress that we will take up is novel and notable in that it effectively diffused in contemporary Greece the activism of the international MRM and FRM, disclosing the connections of antifeminist politics in Greece with transnational ideological formations and movements (Hodapp 2017). While they stem from a complex interplay of historical, political, and cultural factors, the strategies employed by the local antifeminist movement in the case of the 4800/2021 law on 'mandatory joint child custody' follow a familiar transnational repertoire: the reversal of relations of power and vulnerability, the inversion of feminist discourse, self-victimization, and claims to defend the 'oppressed' (Grammatikopoulou 2022; Kuhar 2023).

Men's rights groups and movements have been a core component of the antifeminist Internationale. They encompass a diverse range of groups and individuals who claim that the rights and dignity of men are threatened or diminished (de Coning 2020; Coston and Kimmel 2013). Initially, MRMs had a complex relationship with the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. In the USA, they were ultimately dominated in the early 1980s by angry, white, straight men. 'Men's rights' discourse as known today was consolidated, positing that women had achieved socio-political and economic power, while men are now the true victims of gender oppression, exclusion, discrimination, and violence (de Coning 2020, 2; Coston and Kimmel 2013). Spreading to Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and other countries over

time ([Dragiewicz 2008](#)), the standard strategy of MRMs has become the inversion of feminist discourse and demands, and their main objective has been to assail and annul feminist inroads in any field.

Currently, the main concerns of MRMs include sexual and domestic violence against men and boys, false rape allegations, pathologization and vilification of men, discrimination against men, fathers' rights, and perceived discriminations in family law against men in cases of child or spousal support. A considerable number of men's rights groups focus on legal reforms, mainly combatting what they perceive as laws and procedures biased in women's favor. Legislation that settles custody and alimony and laws that position women as victims of domestic violence or sexual assault occupy center stage in their campaigns ([de Coning 2020, 4](#); [Dragiewicz 2008](#); [Rafail and Freitas 2019](#)).

Women [are] complaining about sexual harassment? Actually, it's *men* who are the victims of harassment... In 2000, 18 men sued the State of Minnesota's commissioners...to end the granting of state money to shelters for battered women. Their lawsuit, *Booth v. Hvass*, argues that these shelters 'publish fanatical, irrational, hysterical, sexist literature which maliciously and falsely defames and seeks to generate social and political hatred against men in general...' ([Coston and Kimmel 2013, 380–381](#)).

Contemporary MRMs exist across the globe. They share key texts, discourses, and repertoires of action, building communities via forums and in-person meetings ([de Coning 2020, 5–7](#)). The actual arguments and strategies of this backlash against feminist conquests are diverse, ranging from blatant reassertions of patriarchy as natural, or culturally superior to subtler efforts that appropriate liberal formal equality discourse, occluding established hierarchies of power. Since the 2000s, the internet has become a key site for their mobilization, coordination, and campaigning ([Dragiewicz 2008](#)). Social media platforms, online communities, and digital networks have been instrumental in the considerable international rise of MRMs ([Rafail and Freitas 2019](#)). On websites and social media and in blogs, contemporary group chats, and podcasts, this 'manosphere' has taken many forms: incels, pick-up artists, cryptobros, life coaches, wellness gurus, influencers, and trolls—all connected by their shared adherence to strong antifeminist beliefs ([Ribeiro et al. 2021](#)).

As an integral part of MRMs, FRMs have taken aim, more specifically, at progressive pro-equality reforms in law, targeting particularly family law. Making *presumptive joint custody* the preferred option in divorce settlements has been a major objective and one of the most successful outgrowths of fathers' advocacy in the USA ([Adams 2006, 322–323](#); [Dragiewicz 2008, 137](#)). FRMs have notably employed a liberal feminist rhetoric in their campaign to this effect. The master discursive frame of liberal feminism in the 1960s and 1970s was 'equal rights/gender neutrality,' demanding mainly formal legal equality on the basis of a gender-neutral individualism. The FRMs co-opted and reiterated this rhetoric of equal rights, gender-neutrality, and victimization/discrimination to advance their cause ([Adams 2006](#); [Hodapp 2017](#); [Williams and Williams 2017](#)).

The *central theme* in FRM rhetoric is the claim that men are victims of systemic discrimination in family law and the courts. 'Men are saddled with alimony and child support payments, and there is a maternal preference in custody decisions regarding children' ([Williams and Williams 2017, 196](#)).

FRMs argue that men are thus victims of discrimination and that courts violate men's equal rights and gender neutrality, which must be restored (Williams and Williams 2017). In legal disputes, fathers' rights groups have made intensive use of the 'Parental Alienation Syndrome' (PAS), which was introduced in the mid-1980s by child psychiatrist Richard Gardner to reverse allegations of child abuse made by mothers. The argument they promoted was that such allegations were false and served to alienate the child from their father. PAS entered public usage and was widely diffused, aided by the gender stereotype of the 'scorned' vengeful woman, the archetypal Medea, which enhanced its credibility (Adams 2006, 323–327). The pseudoscience of the ultimately discredited PAS has produced several later spin-offs, such as the 'malicious mother syndrome' introduced by Ira Turkat in 1995 and 'parentectomy' theorized by Frank S. Williams, which are equally unfounded but nevertheless widely adopted by FRMs, including the Greek one (Adams 2006, 331; Vilalta and Winberg Nodal 2017).

The case of the Greek fathers' groups that mobilized in 2020–2021 for the reform of the Greek Family Law and the joint custody of children of divorced parents represents a full iteration of the strategies, objectives, and discourses of the international MRM and its distinctive antifeminism, as will be shown below. This is a new development in Greek antifeminist politics, being the first sizeable and effective intervention of the MRM in present-day Greece.

MANDATORY JOINT CUSTODY

THE LAW AND NEW ANTIFEMINIST ACTORS

The antifeminist initiative around the new 4800/2021 law on 'mandatory joint child custody' is unique in several respects. Law professor Fountedaki (2024) singled it out as 'a paradigmatic example of successful lobbying in Greece, which should be taught in schools of political science.' In an unprecedented manner for contemporary Greece, actors mobilized discourses and practices of the international MRM, disguising their misogyny and their attempts at reinvigorating patriarchal power in the garb of equal rights, pseudoscience, children's rights, and feminist frames of argument, which they twisted in favor of men's rights. They launched a multi-layered and multimodal campaign, drawing on ample financial resources, engaging in systematic digital battles, and lobbying with the government (Interview 2023). They also organized meetings with parliamentary parties, seeking individual allies regardless of whether the party's official stance aligned with their cause. As a result, they achieved significant political momentum during a time when successive pandemic-related shutdowns had curtailed political expression in public spaces. Eventually, the antifeminist actors attained their objective, leading to reforms in custody legislation that erode gender equality and amplify gender violence.

The former 1983 family law stipulated that parents' decisions and courts' judgment on the parental custody of children in separated families would be guided by children's interests. It provided for joint custody only if both parents agreed. By contrast, according to the new 4800/2021 act, in the case of divorce or the dissolution of a civil partnership, both parents maintain together and equally their parental custody, unless they consensually and mutually agree to make a different arrangement (AFEM 2023, 14–15; Papanagiotou 2021, 131).

In effect, joint custody entails an ongoing common decision-making about children's everyday life that presupposes collaboration and equal power. As the default option

in a field riddled with gendered, class, and other social differences, this arrangement often exposes women to gender violence and harassment by their former partners (Papanagiotou 2021, 133). Abusive fathers can remain present in the lives of their children and former partner until the final ruling of the court indicting them for abusive behavior (AFEM 2023, 14–15)—a legal limbo which, given the notoriously slow pace of the Greek court system, can persist for years.

The bill passed into law in the Greek Parliament on May 20, 2021, with the votes only of the MPs of the ruling party (156/300 MPs) minus two female MPs of New Democracy. Feminist opposition to the law started in September 2020, but mainly arose from November 2020 onward. Non-governmental organizations and feminist collectives, supported by a broader cohort of human rights groups, academics, scientists, and lawyers, formed a loose but extensive front against the bill (AFEM 2023, 13; Committee for Family Law 2021).

Although an MRM had existed in Greece for more than 20 years, it was rather marginal. The bill boosted its expansion through the creation of active and well-networked groups such as the ‘Active Dads’ (*Energoi Mpampades*). These advocates for ‘men’s rights’ do not only demand joint custody; they also make a case for the existence of gender-based violence against men, claiming that it is allegedly more common in Greece than violence affecting women (Energoi Mpampades 2022a). They still call for the inclusion of the infamous PAS in the law against domestic violence (Energoi Mpampades 2022b), flooding public consultation pages with numerous copy-paste comments in support of their cause.² The ‘Active Dads’ group, along with the cognate ‘Joint Custody Association’ (*Syllogos Synepimeleia*) are newer antifeminist actors linked up with international agencies, such as the ‘International Council of Joint Parenting,’ and have not been yet been researched from this perspective. Both groups have positioned themselves as official ‘non-profit civil organizations.’

‘NEW’ ANTIFEMINIST PRACTICES AND DISCOURSES

The mobilization of male groups occasioned by the new law marked a turn in patriarchal reactionary politics, displaying notable new features in the Greek context. Walking in the footsteps of the international MRM, Greek men’s groups set up a propaganda machine that has ‘bombarded’ society using every means available to them, funded by ample financial resources from wealthy men (Elliniko Diktyo gia ti Feministiki Aperia 8 March 2021; Interview 2023). By such means, the male actors have pursued well-organized campaigns and lobbying efforts, during which they appropriated and distorted gender equality discourses and struggles, deploying them against women. The male groups have presented themselves as progressive, advocating for the rule of law and children’s rights, and even appealed to science, drawing on the pseudoscientific constructs engineered by the international MRM.

The ‘Active Dads’ group has been particularly busy, undertaking diverse online and offline campaigns funded by the ‘kind offers of sympathizers and sensitive people.’ They avow that they were consulted by the Greek Parliament on the new bill on joint custody and were *the main lobby* in favor of it. After the enactment of the new legislation, they expressed their commitment to continuing the fight until the law is fully implemented (Energoi Mpampades n.d.1).

2 See public consultation page <http://www.opengov.gr/ministryofjustice/?p=17063&cpage=1>.

Their ongoing advocacy was realized through lobbying with politicians, mainly the right-wing government; ‘social actions’; and the construction of a propaganda machine enlisting diverse means of communication, including their website, press releases, TV and radio spots, social media (Facebook, Instagram), a YouTube channel, posters on public transport boards, and online public opinion surveys (Energoy Mpampades n.d.2; Interview 2023). Their extensive networking linked up with the government and the Minister of Justice at the time, along with mass media, the police, and the justice system and even the ‘Greek Mafia’ network (Interview 2023; Triantis 2024).

A considerable number of feminist groups have argued that men’s lobbies were the real initiators of the legislative reform. By contrast, women’s organizations were systematically excluded from consultation with the Ministry of Justice, the government, and the parliament (To Mov and Elliniko Diktyo 2021; Ten Women’s Organizations and Collectives 2020).

REVERSING FEMINISM

The first remarkable ‘innovation’ of this antifeminist offensive lies in the way it replicates and twists feminist, egalitarian, and progressive democratic arguments in the typical manner of the international MRM which often employs an abstract egalitarianism frame (Palmer and Subramaniam 2017), aligning the ideology with notions of formal equality and universal human rights.

To begin with, many of the texts and interviews we analyzed deliberately use the term ‘parent,’ rather than ‘father’ or ‘mother,’ to highlight the idea that the roles of oppressor and oppressed are determined randomly, by individual character, not by gender or structural inequality (Alienated Grandfathers 2021; Kaperoni 2020). This framing serves two purposes. First, it positions their claims within a universalist discourse of equality, and, second, it enables them to attack feminism and LGBTQIA+ movements on the pretext that they failed to deliver true equality (Palmer and Subramaniam 2017), securing instead privileges for women or LGBTQIA+ individuals (Odem 2021; Natsios 2024).

‘Active Dads’ thus vindicate men’s rights in the name of gender equality, denouncing biases, stereotypes, and ‘gender-based violence against men.’ The arguments used often reflect feminist discourse, highlighting, for example, how mothers and fathers participate equally in the workforce and the upbringing of children (Spitalas 2021). Hence, they protest ‘gender-based discriminations’ from the standpoint of gender equality, criticizing even local authorities when they provide benefits, such as free vacation accommodations, only for mothers who are single parents, excluding men. Such policies are said to offend our country as ‘the birthplace of democracy and equality of all human beings regardless of gender, color, nationality, religion, etc.’ (Energoy Mpampades 2022c). Similarly, the feminist opposition to joint custody is questioned on the grounds that it contradicts ‘[the] fundamental human rights, equal rights, and responsibilities of both parents vindicated by the feminist movement’ (Kaperoni 2021).

During direct interactions with Active Dads, they described themselves as feeling like an ‘ATM machine,’ a phrase directly taken from the global MRM discourse (Hodapp 2017). They also argued that men are abused during and after marriage, being forced to work exhaustively to support their families while they are excluded from their children’s

daily lives, which are dominated by the alienating mother. This demonstrates how MRM narratives of male victimization, developed in different international contexts, found fertile ground in post-crisis Greek society. Divorced fathers, facing increased financial pressure due to their low income and the rising costs of raising a family, redirected their frustrations toward their often equally impoverished former spouses, rather than addressing the deeper roots of financial exploitation.

Their strategic move of reversing feminist arguments becomes tellingly apparent in the supposed evidence MRMs provide for men's oppression in fatherhood contexts, which involves 'disparities in reproductive choices between men and women, economic demands placed on fathers, unjust custody and alimony payments in divorce, and the negative impact these factors have on children' (Hodapp 2017).

The most frequent ideas found in the Greek MRM texts and discourses analyzed can be traced back to international sources like the blog *A Voice for Men*. This blog largely made popular the ideological construct of *gynocentrism*, a reversal of the idea of patriarchy, which MRMs see as 'a remarkable tool in denying men their rights, including their most basic human rights to dignity and bodily integrity, on the pretense that all men are oppressors' (Kostakis 2011). According to this concept, men have ceded their power over to women, due to chivalry, self-sacrifice, and commitment to their roles as protectors. As a result, men are currently oppressed, allegedly being the primary victims of rape and gender-based violence. Within this *gynocentric* and *misandrist* society, men face injustice during custody decisions, due to a deeply prejudiced juridical system, and they are even being denied their basic reproductive rights since women can unilaterally decide on abortion or may even deceive men into paying alimony for children who are not biologically theirs. The same terms and arguments are being reproduced verbatim by Greek men's rights bloggers (ODEM 2021).

Likewise, Greek supporters of the shared custody law describe Greek society as a 'matriarchy' (Spitalas 2021), where fathers are 'the parents of a lesser God,' a 'minority without rights,' who need to initiate a 'fathers' lives matter' social movement (Tzimeros 2020). They contend that there is growing corporal violence against men, providing evidence that calls upon European and national research, as well as on videos reporting '24 incidents of corporal violence and homicide by women, which took place in Greece' (Energoi Mpampades 2022a).

To make their case practically 'irrefutable,' they stress several factors that supposedly contribute to suppressing the phenomenon of female abuse. 'Taboos' and 'stereotypes' affecting men, who are portrayed as strong and invulnerable, become grounds of discrimination against male victims. Further factors mentioned are that incidents of female violence against men are scantily reported because of male egoism, fear of losing contact with children, and the funding provided to women urging them to report domestic violence. They have called for an end to institutional indifference imposed by some 'fanatic and activist female groups' (Energoi Mpampades 2022a).

The rehearsal and reversal of feminist discourses reaches a point of culmination in the counsel they offer to address 'domestic violence against men' by copy-pasting feminist texts while modifying only the gender. They lay out a series of indicators to help male victims identify domestic violence: the use of abusive speech, the exercise of control over how men spend their money or dress, possessiveness and jealousy, and the description of violence as reciprocal and consensual. They raise the 'big burning questions': 'Why is there no shelter to protect men or fathers who are victims?' 'Why does the state fund only female organizations?' (Charbea 2023).

Concern about children's rights and well-being is also central to their frames of reasoning. Their starting point is that the 'harmonious psychosomatic and emotional growth of children' calls for the presence of both parents ([Energoi Mpampades n.d.2](#)). Allegedly, until 2021, courts did not enforce the law regarding the communication of children with the parent who has not been awarded custody, therefore failing to protect children's rights ([Energoi Mpampades 2020](#)). Hence, they advocate for the rights of children, claiming that joint custody, equal time between parents, and alternating residency is the sole way of protecting children's rights and their normal development ([Energoi Mpampades n.d.3](#)).

In a blunt antifeminist vein, they report statistical findings based on the national help line for child abuse and the work of the non-governmental organization 'Child's Smile,' according to whom the perpetrators of violence against children are overwhelmingly women and the incidents of female violence against children have risen dramatically in recent years ([Energoi Mpampades 2021](#)). The same statistics are repeated again and again, with their validity unquestioned. However, if we look closer at their sources, they are based on a single report by the aforementioned non-governmental organization that lacks context and transparency regarding its methodology. Research on the topic shows that a large number of child abuse cases typically involve single-mother families where fathers were absent ([Antoniadou 2017](#)). Even in this context where fathers are largely absent, the mothers were still not the majority of the abusers, as cited repeatedly ([Alienated Grandfathers 2021](#)).

Evoking children's welfare is a standard-bearing strategy of contemporary antifeminism and anti-gender movements across the globe ([Graff and Korolczuk 2022, 114–136](#)). Its reiteration by the 'Active Dads' pressure group in this particular campaign speaks volumes for their international networks and bearings. In Butler's (2024, 249) words,

There is hardly an instance of the anti-gender movement that does not claim to be saving the children from harm. The movement finds, stokes, and organizes that fear wherever it can. The tactic is clever and effective, for few things could be more personal and singular.

PSEUDOSCIENCE

The production of 'evidence' for domestic violence against men as described above indicates how Greek fathers' groups have engaged in the systematic construction of 'fake news' and pseudoscientific truth in ways that resist empirical and logical refutation.

The paradigmatic pseudoscience of the international FRM—PAS—has been central also to Greek fathers' cases for joint custody. This discursive motif highlights the pseudoscientific and seemingly 'objective' mantle of this antifeminist intervention, as well as its connection with the English-speaking international MRM. They explicitly reference international sources, even introducing invented terms like 'parentectomy' into the Greek context ([Andrikopoulos 2022](#)).

To illustrate the main points, in a re-post of an article by Bill Eddy, they elaborate on parental alienation. This is defined as the resistance of a child to be with one ('rejected') parent and their strong preference for the other parent in the context of

highly intense divorces or separation when the rejected parent ‘has done nothing to generate this rejection.’ The parent who generates parental alienation is conflictual, narcissistic, antisocial, and bent on accusing the other parent. This accounts for the highly dismissive attitudes of children aged 9–13 years (Energoi Mpampades 2023).

The acrimonious antifeminism infusing this discourse is brought into focus through its explicit articulation with the ‘malicious mother.’ The pseudoscientific concept of ‘parental alienation,’ introduced by Richard Gardner in 1985 (Clemente and Padilla-Racero 2016; Pepiton et al. 2012), is associated with the ‘divorce-related malicious mother syndrome’ defined by the psychologist Ira Turkat in 1995 (Alsalem 2023). In a long, apparently ‘clinical’ account of this ‘syndrome,’ its multiple adverse effects are laid out: Malicious mothers poison children’s souls, ‘campaigning’ to demean the other parent and turn their children against him as a way of punishing him. Such women are manipulative, unable to love anyone, and harshly and systematically abuse their children (Energoi Mpampades 2022d).

The ‘Active Dads’ group consistently sides with alleged male abusers, asserting that children are being manipulated into making accusations against their fathers (Kaperoni 2020). Their texts perpetuate misogynist stereotypes, portraying women as manipulative, money-hungry child abusers (Andrikopoulos 2022; Association Shared Custody 2020; Spitalas 2021). In extreme cases, they frame femicides as acts of ‘desperate fathers’ driven to use violence out of frustration at being denied access to their children (Association Shared Custody 2020). These narratives do not only victim-blame murdered women but also attempt to normalize such violence.

Appealing to science more broadly is salient in the discursive repertoire of Greek fathers’ groups. The Greek Council on Joint Parenting highlights its putative scientific, professional, ‘state-of-the-art’ approach to mandatory joint custody. In this vein, in May 2023, it hosted the sixth International ‘Councel’ [sic] on Joint Parenting, in Athens, which was aimed at

the promotion of scientific knowledge regarding the needs and the best interest[s] of children [...] It has gathered a big database on new research [...] and seeks to incorporate this scientific knowledge in scientific knowledge and professional practice (Synepimelia 2023).

This approach often overlooks how scientific research can perpetuate existing inequalities and reinforce power structures. More critically, men’s rights groups frequently disregard scientific methods, cherry-picking and decontextualizing data while relying on dubious statistics and outdated studies to support their arguments.³ Their strategy focuses on dominating public discourse and marginalizing feminist perspectives, a tactic that becomes evident in the repetitive and formulaic nature of their claims, replicated verbatim across parliamentary speeches, blogs, and social media comments.

A striking feature of their rhetoric is the juxtaposition of an appeal to logic and science with emotionally charged expressions of anger and distrust toward what they

³ For instance, they claim that mothers are granted custody in 90% of cases, a fact that is often repeated by Men’s Rights Activists (Odysseia Society). These statistics are based on a single survey carried out in 2007 by Gon.Is., one of the associations that lobbied for the shared custody law. Even this lobby-mandated research showed that men simply do not ask for custody after divorce (<http://www.acrobase.gr/showthread.php?p=428765>).

perceive as an unjust system. This duality is evident in their social media comments that start as rational discussions invoking ‘scientific’ claims about parental alienation but at times evolve into expressions of personal resentment and hostility, particularly toward former spouses. Their written materials mirror these contradictions, ranging from ostensibly objective analyses of parental alienation’s societal impact (Kairidis 2021; Spitalas 2021) to an alarmist rhetoric framing it as a crisis that threatens the nation’s future (Association Shared Custody 2020; Association ‘A child needs two parents’ 2023).

What is most disquieting is the endorsement of these ideas within mainstream politics. New Democracy MP Giannis Loverdos, for example, infamously claimed that a man who abuses his partner can still be a ‘good father’ and deserves access to his children, exemplifying the cynical extremes of this discourse (Loverdos 2021).

To conclude, the antifeminist campaign in Greece was carried out by well-organized male lobbies and vested economic interests. It deployed the artful communicative strategies of the international MRM, which appropriates the discourse of rights and equality, framing its interventions with seemingly neutral or progressive, legalistic, and pseudoscientific appearances. In addition to this misleading frame, the legislative initiative was rather technical and specialized in ways that may hardly trigger the critical reflexes of existing political culture and public opinion. Crucially, it relied upon the institutional power of a resolute and stable conservative government. All these tactical and structural components make up an effective strategy for the new Greek antifeminist politics of regress, which should be grasped thoroughly as such.

ANTI-ABORTION CAMPAIGNS

The other primary set of antifeminist incursions since 2019 that have sought to repeal established women’s rights are anti-abortion campaigns. These have been led by a dedicated anti-abortion organization (www.afistemenaziso.gr), the Greek Orthodox Church, civil society, and political actors. The ‘1st Panhellenic Conference of Fertility and Reproductive Autonomy’ marked a point of culmination for both the anti-abortion front and the feminist resistance.

The first related incident occurred in 2019, when the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church introduced the ‘Unborn Child Day,’ celebrated initially on the first Sunday after Christmas. According to sources connected with the Church, it was the aforementioned anti-abortion network, called ‘Let Me Live’ in Greek and composed of 19 Greek Orthodox unions in Athens and the Greek Union of Multi-Child Families, that requested of the Church to establish this celebration. The organization states that they are faithful to the Gospel and that unborn children are human beings ‘in the image of God’ who deserve unconditional protection beginning at their conception (Lakasas 2019; Orthodoxia News Agency 2020).

In 2022, the Church moved the ‘Unborn Child Day’ to September 8th, when the birth of the Virgin Mary is celebrated. On that occasion, feminist collectives staged a protest in front of the Athens Cathedral (Vovou 2022).

In January 2020, the foregoing anti-abortion organization undersigned posters put up on notice boards at several stations of the Athens Underground Train. They featured a fetus and read ‘Did you know that since the 18th day its heart beats? [...] Choose life’ in Greek (Orthodoxia News Agency 2020). An avalanche of spontaneous

immediate responses on social media followed suit, posting pictures of the poster and commenting on ‘social regress’ ([Spyropoulou 2020](#)). Feminist organizations put up online posters affirming that abortion is an entrenched right and using mottoes such as ‘My mind, my body, my choice [...] Movement of born women’ ([To Mov 2020](#)).

Offline, newspaper articles publicized the massive reactions against the event, and members of the center-left PASOK and the left-leaning SYRIZA party voiced their opposition, upholding women’s right to free choice, which was enacted in Greece in 1986. As an almost-instant effect of this battery of scattered but massive reactions, the Minister of Transport and Infrastructure denied any responsibility and forced the company managing the Underground to remove the anti-abortion posters immediately ([Spyropoulou 2020](#)).

THE FIRST ‘FERTILITY CONFERENCE’

In the sequence of these late anti-abortion campaigns, the event that generated the most heated debate was the organization of the ‘1st Panhellenic Conference of Fertility and Reproductive Autonomy’ that would be held in the city of Ioannina in northwestern Greece. It was launched at the initiative of a group of male gynecologists at Greek universities, along with the ‘Greek Association of Reproductive Medicine of Athens’. The conference took place on July 2–4, 2021, with the participation of university professors and representatives of the Orthodox Church. Its aims were to foreground the issue of low fertility, to propose remedies and to help restore the model of the nuclear family.

Indeed, in the preliminary program, the organizing committee construed ‘low fertility’ as a ‘plague’ that ‘threatens to eliminate our nation.’ Broaching women’s reproductive rights as a mere ‘demographic concern’ reflects an international right-wing ideological framework, which suggests that abortion and immigration contribute to the decline and the marginalization of dominant demographic groups ([Brysk and Yang 2023](#); [Ophir et al. 2022](#)). It was suggested that the state and its agencies disseminate the message that giving birth to children and creating a family is the ‘joy of life’ and that the ‘financial security of a state with prospects which does not decay but flourishes, [...] a state which must [...] focus on the central pillar, the couples at an age of reproduction,’ is the ideal objective. The conference was placed under the auspices of state institutions, including the President of the Republic, ERT (the public broadcaster), the Region of Epirus, and the General Secretariat of Family Policy and Gender Equality ([Iatrikos Syllogos Ioanninon 2021](#)).

The publicity campaign for the event included a video in which a woman apologized for opting for university studies and a career rather than children. Women appeared as integral to a process of reproduction bearing on public finance. This sparked massive opposition and expressions of revulsion on mass media. The digital sphere was again the space where public uproar erupted and spread, engendering political effects that reached the offline public realm and warded off the antifeminist initiative. Public figures sponsoring the conference or participating in it voiced their discontent, taking issue particularly with the sexist content of the video, which portrayed women as reproductive machines, and withdrew from the conference ([CNN Greece 2021](#)).

As a result of the fierce and rapid reactions from feminist groups and the opposition, state support was withheld, and the conference was cancelled. The organizing committee announced in a Facebook post that the conference would not take

place ‘on account of the negative reaction of social media’ to a video that was ‘misunderstood.’ Under the video, tens of social media users uttered their intense discontent, characterizing it as ‘incriminating, racist, stereotypical, and regressive’ (Kathimerini 2021).

To date, the group of actors brought together around this event remains operative, and a ‘second,’ downsized version of the conference was eventually held online in November 2021, sponsored only by the ‘Parents’ School’ and the ‘Open University of Katerini’ (Galanopoulou 2021). In September 2024, another conference on ‘Demographic Challenges’ was held in Volos, with the participation of Sophia Zacharaki, the Minister for Social Cohesion and Family (Raftopoulou 2024), a newly established position that signals the government’s endorsement of prevailing ‘demographic concerns.’ In the same month, a conference on fertility was organized in Larissa. Both events were met with staunch opposition by local feminist groups and fierce crackdown by police forces (Medouses 2024).

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The antifeminist and anti-gender reactions in Greece in 2010–2023 unfurled under the dire circumstances of the socio-economic downturn and the political crisis that beset the country from 2010 onward. Local notions of masculinity were largely shaped by the traditional roles of men within the family—as male providers—along with those within the nation and religion, where their authority over partners and children was further legitimized. However, insecurity caused by unemployment and poverty has challenged established masculinities constructed around work. Over time, the general social dislocation under the austerity regime gave rise to a broader ‘gender trouble.’ This spurred gender violence as a performance of masculinity in an endangered patriarchal context, which has also been experienced as a lethal threat to the ‘nation.’ Subsequently, the reaffirmation of nationalism occurred through the reaffirmation of male power, the traditional family structure, and the Greek Orthodox Church—the historical pillars of Greek patriarchal nationalism (Kosyfologou 2018, 40–42). The crisis of established masculinity brought about a rigidification of gender hierarchies, deeper conservatism, and a further normalization of sexism, which was amplified by the rise of the far right and the alt-right (Karamesini 2015, 239–278; Vaiou 2021, 185–187). In other words, efforts to reclaim positions of power have focused on the three pillars of fatherland, religion, and family, starting with the latter. Through FRMs, male groups sought to reassert paternal authority over children and spouses, while the challenging of reproductive rights served to reaffirm control over women’s bodies.

In addition to gender equality and LGBTQIA+ advances that garnered conservative reactions, a number of distinct events have constituted the focus of antifeminist action and discourse, such as the 2021 law on ‘mandatory joint custody’ and campaigns against legal abortion from 2019 onward. The latter can be situated in the politics of the conservative shift seeking to legitimize neoliberal austerity and the shrinking of the welfare state by rendering women responsible for the development and care of the ‘nation.’ In effect, women were expected to assume the burdens of social welfare by reassuming their traditional roles of child-bearers and caregivers for children and the elderly. Hence, strategic attacks on the right to abortion are integral to a nationalist conservatism aimed at confining women and nurturing in them feelings of responsibility and guilt for the welfare of the nation (Interview 2024).

Traditional agents of antifeminism—the conservative Right and the Greek Orthodox Church—have been reinforced by newcomers, including first the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn and, from 2015 onward, old- and alt-right politicians and media personalities propagating antifeminist discourse, the ‘male movement’ for joint custody, and the ‘Let me live’ campaign. These represent a diverse chorus that coalesced around the ‘1st Panhellenic Conference of Fertility,’ right-wing journals, blogs, news websites, newspapers, and radio stations, along with non-organized groups and individuals in civil society.

The repertoire of action of the aforementioned players has evinced multi-layered patterns of political campaigning encompassing the following: physical and verbal assaults, press releases, radio and TV shows, the pulpit, advertisements in public transport, online campaigns and—more broadly—the systematic use of social media (Facebook, Twitter/X, websites), lobbying with right-wing politicians, and the organization of conferences.

Antifeminist politics and discourse in 2010–2022 called for further rigorous exploration as existing research is poor and fragmentary. The overview of the antifeminist regress offered in this analysis and the deeper ‘dive’ into two critical battlegrounds in recent years may warrant a number of initial claims on antifeminist and feminist politics over the last decade or so.

First, this period witnessed not only the persistence of patriarchal biases and violence, along with the antifeminist and anti-LGBTQIA+ reactions to initiatives for further egalitarian progress but also mobilizations aimed at institutional regress and the subversion of established women’s rights. This is a new, alarming development of recent years in Greece. Here, we highlighted the two main instances of such regressive politics, the ‘fathers’ groups’ campaign for mandatory joint custody and the anti-abortion and ‘fertility’ campaigns.

Second, patriarchal regress has formed part of a broader conservative turn in Greek society since 2015. In addition to the multiple public manifestations of traditionalist sexist politics, the conservative shift is evident in the two consecutive victories of the right-wing New Democracy in national elections since 2019. New Democracy currently promotes key planks of the antifeminist agenda, conflating womanhood with motherhood and replacing ‘gender equality’ policies with ‘family support’ measures (Lampridi 2023). Moreover, three nationalist and antifeminist parties entered the parliament in 2023, advancing agendas that foreground religious and nationalist perspectives. The left-leaning SYRIZA party, which held office in 2015–2019, has suffered repeated electoral defeats, while the broader left and center-left have been paralyzingly fragmented since 2019. Progressive social movements have likewise recessed.

Third, the complex interplay between antifeminist actions and feminist resistance in Greece is shaped by broader political and economic crises, but the recent antifeminist politics in the country also aligns with the global rise of an authoritarian, xenophobic, anti-immigrant, and anti-gender right, appearing in both older and alt-right variants. This has spread from Javier Milei’s Argentina and Donald Trump’s USA to Vladimir Putin’s Russia, Viktor Orbán’s Hungary, and Marine Le Pen’s France, to name a few (see Crouch 2020; Graff and Korolczuk 2022; Norris and Inglehart 2019; Shaw 2018).

Finally, the politics of gender equality in Greece and beyond should effectively grasp and systematically combat the distinctive strategies of communication and

campaigning developed by contemporary antifeminist and anti-gender movements. In the contemporary Greek context, we have drawn particular attention to the pseudoscience deployed by the new Greek chapter of the international MRM, which enhances the credibility of its arguments in civil society and institutional settings, exonerating or even supporting abusive behavior.

The PAS and the ‘malicious parent syndrome’ are the most characteristic in this respect. They have been widely critiqued as a pseudoscientific concept lacking empirical validity but are still being used to discredit victims of gender-based and sexual violence and to maintain control over estranged partners and children. Among others, Clemente and Padilla-Racero (2016) make the case that clinical studies purporting to support the diagnosis of PAS rely on observation and ideology rather than empirical data or peer-reviewed research, interpreting children’s recollections of abuse as lies. Douglas and Fell (2020), drawing on an extensive literature review and qualitative interviews with affected women, further demonstrate that child-protection workers frequently minimize allegations of gender-based violence, driven by the prejudice that such claims are fabricated to alienate fathers. Similarly, Casas Vila (2019) shows how PAS is being deployed to discredit denunciations of gender violence by assuming children are manipulated or lying.

Although discredited by psychologists and psychiatrists, PAS continues to inform the assessments of judges, the police, social workers, and mediators who prioritize the preservation of parental ties regardless of context (Casas Vila 2019). These dynamics do not only trivialize gender-based violence but also actively enable it by providing abusers with continued access to their victims and by undermining the implementation of protective laws. In some cases, the courts themselves have imposed coercive measures to re-establish contact with the alienated parent, detaining the accused parent or even the resistant child and thus transforming the court record ‘almost [into] a clinical record’ (Clemente and Padilla-Racero 2016).

These findings are echoed across different national contexts. Research from Australia suggests that false reports are frequently weaponized against mothers as a form of coercive control and abuse (Douglas and Fell 2020). These patterns are also evident in the Greek context, where the discourse of Parental Alienation has gained traction in both media narratives and courtroom proceedings, particularly in cases involving allegations of gender-based violence. Interviews with feminist stakeholders and textual analysis reveal that courts are invoking notions of coercive control to justify the enforcement of contact between children and estranged parents, often disregarding the expressed wishes of the child. Moreover, the data indicate that false allegations are also strategically employed, primarily by former partners, as a means of exerting control and subjecting women to prolonged emotional and financial exhaustion (Louloudi, Morfonios and Zafeiropoulos 2023). Within this breeding ground for conflict and abuse, the ‘Active Dads’ have tellingly sided with abusers, even in cases involving child victims of abuse (Alevizopoulou and Zenakos 2023), revealing thus that their main allegiance is not to gender equality, as they claim, but to the perpetuation of male dominance over their partner and children.

Further understanding and strategically combating the cunning strategies of contemporary antifeminist and anti-gender actors is thus a necessary step toward building stronger coalitions for gender equality today in Greece and across the world.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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