The paper asks why right-wing extremist parties are able to grow organizational roots in some settings but fail in others. Analyzing the distinct trajectories local branches of the extreme right ‘Golden Dawn’ party in Greece, the paper systematically traces the factors affecting local party development and examines the internal mechanics of right-wing extremist parties. It shows that in some local settings the ‘Golden Dawn’ was able to establish local organizational strongholds, with active local branches and militants. In others the party tried but failed to grow roots in local societies. The paper attributes party developmental outcomes to two distinct and understudied factors: the responses of state authorities and civil society to the organizational efforts of right-wing extremist parties.

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