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Greek politics and culture: Identifying the key patterns of political perceptions and cultural practices

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Abstract

The starting point of this paper is the hypothesis that culture and politics are related to the point that individuals who adopt a particular set of political perceptions also adopt corresponding sets of cultural practices. Moreover, it is shown that the relationship between politics and culture is intimate to the point that distinct subcultures that draw from both political and cultural practices can be identified.

The main hypothesis is examined using factor analysis on data from two quantitative studies. Thus, seven patterns of cultural practices emerge, which for the purposes of this study are entitled 'mainstream', 'alternative', 'Greek', 'traditional male', 'traditional female', 'cultivated', and 'withdrawn'. Further analysis reveals that each one is associated with particular age groups and/or gender, and they are all characterised by distinct political practices and social values. Therefore, the paper argues that these are the key Greek (political) subcultures illustrating the main trends within Greek society.

The main features and some key observations on these subcultures are presented. In addition, the subcultures are classified based on Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Diamantouros' concept of cultural dualism, depending on whether they are traditional or modernist, and hegemonic or anti-hegemonic.

Keywords: *cultural practices, political perceptions, post-materialism, quantitative methods, social values, subculture*

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An earlier version of this paper was presented at the *6th Biennial Hellenic Observatory PhD Symposium on Contemporary Greece and Cyprus*, which is based on the author's PhD thesis (see Diakoumakos 2010). An extended 20-page summary in English is available online at www.academia.edu/2090083

Aim, context and research hypotheses

In the social sciences, there's a tendency to study each social field in isolation, often without considering how these fields can be related. This is to be expected. Each social science and each discipline adopts and develops research methods that are best suited for its specific fields of study; in addition, research is usually based on a particular scientific paradigm (Kuhn 1970). However, this does not mean that the various social fields are unrelated. It has been argued that the attitudes of individuals are formed as a whole, based on the same socialising experiences (Metaxas 1976). That is, individuals do not live in distinct social fields and don't experience each field as if it were the only thing that matters. On the contrary, all social fields – be it politics, culture, or anything else – are part of their lives. Thus, one can argue that there must be an internal coherence among the attitudes and practices of individuals in all social fields, even if this cannot be identified immediately.

In particular, I am interested in the relation between the political perceptions and the cultural practices of individuals. The central hypothesis is that they are closely related- i.e. that each set of political perceptions has a corresponding set of cultural practices and vice versa. Proving the truth of this hypothesis will illustrate that politics and culture are intertwined to the point that we cannot study one without taking the other into consideration. Moreover, I argue that the relation between politics and culture is so intimate that it should be possible to discover distinct subcultures that draw from both political and cultural practices – and in this study, the term 'subculture' (Cohen 1980, Almond & Verba 1989, Eagleton 2000) refers to large social categories that can be distinguished from each other and from society as a whole by certain unique features.

Therefore, the objectives of this study are twofold. The first is to confirm the main hypothesis. The second is to identify the patterns in which specific sets of political perceptions meet their equivalent cultural practices and to study their features. An underlining objective is to improve the understanding of Greek society as a whole and suggest an appropriate theoretical framework.

The raw data of two quantitative studies were used in order to achieve these goals. The first of them is the *Gender differences in patterns of political behaviour* study, which was conducted between 2005 and 2007 under the auspices of the Department of Political Science and Public Administration (University of Athens), by a research team which included myself and was supervised by Professor Maro Pantelidou Maloutas. This research was based on a representative sample of 1,600 Greeks, and it included four open ended questions about the preferences of the responders on music, radio stations, films, and books, which were correlated with its ample data on political and social attitudes.

The second study from which data were drawn is the *Second panhellenic research of reading behaviour* which was conducted in 2003 and 2004 by the National Book Centre of Greece on a representative sample of 2,511 people. In contrast to the first research, the emphasis of the *research of reading behaviour* lay on cultural practices.

Key patterns of cultural practices

In order to test the main hypothesis, the data of both surveys were studied according to the following procedure. First, the data concerning cultural practices were analysed using factor analysis. This way, factors that describe the main patterns of cultural practices and taste in

Greece arose. Afterwards, each respondent was categorised in a pattern according to k-means cluster analysis using predefined centres, which were based on the factor scores.

By following this procedure in both surveys and by comparing the output of the factor analyses[1] seven key patterns of cultural practices emerged. These were named 'mainstream', 'alternative', 'Greek', 'cultivated', 'traditional male', 'traditional female' and 'withdrawn', each pattern characterised by distinct cultural practices and taste.[2]

In particular, the 'mainstream' pattern features a high level of cultural participation and 'mainstream' tastes, such as a preference for pop music and Hollywood blockbusters. The 'alternative' pattern is characterised by an equally high level of cultural participation, which is expressed through 'alternative' preferences, including rock music, art and independent cinema, and reading books. The 'Greek' pattern is named thus because it is expressed solely through Greek forms of cultural practices, like 'rebetiki'[3] and 'laiki'[4] music and old Greek cinema. The 'cultivated' pattern is characterised by a preference for the so called 'high' culture. The 'traditional male' pattern involves stereotypical 'male' activities, such as attending sporting events, hunting, and tinkering with equipment. The 'traditional female' pattern is similarly characterised by stereotypical 'female' practices, like knitting, cooking, and shopping. Finally, the 'withdrawn' pattern is characterised by the near total absence from all forms of cultural participation. The main features of each subculture are given in more detail in the appendix.

Afterwards, the demographics and political perceptions associated with each of these patterns were examined. As expected according to the main hypothesis, each pattern is characterised by particular political and demographic features which clearly set them apart. Thus, it is evident the cultural patterns outlined are not mere patterns, but rather distinct subcultures. It's important to stress that categories formed according to cultural practices alone using statistical methods were found to be distinguished by particular non-cultural features. Therefore, the fact that each pattern of cultural practices is dominated by specific political perceptions provides strong support for the central hypothesis.

In order to provide a theoretical framework to study the seven subcultures identified, I used Gramsci's concept of hegemony and the concept of cultural dualism in Greece, suggested by Nikiforos Diamantouros (Diamantouros 1994), which was modified based on the works of Roland Inglehart (Inglehart 1977), Raymond Williams (Williams 1980), and Konstantinos Tsoukalas (Tsoukalas 1981). In particular, I argue that the cleavage defined by cultural dualism is the form that the post-materialist cleavage takes in the case of the Greek

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[1] In the PhD thesis the patterns discovered in each research are explained in detail (Diakoumakos 2010). These are different to an extent, because of the different nature of close and open-ended questions, and of the specific forms of cultural practices measured in each research. However, carefully studying the demographic and cultural features of each pattern made possible the discovery of the main cultural patterns in a way that combines the strengths of both studies.

[2] It is important to note that these are only the main cultural patterns and that the boundaries between them are not clear. They are not well-defined groupings, but rather a way to describe and understand the main trends of the Greek society. Thus, their names are always written in quotation marks in order to be reminded of their nature.

[3] 'Rebetiki' music (ρεμπέτικη μουσική) is a kind of urban Greek folk music which was developed in cities and ports during the early 20th century, and grew to become popular among the Greek working class of the time. A number of Greek social scientists have studied rebetiki music, e.g. Damianakos 2001, Kotaridis 1996. Note that the versions of laiki and entekhni music preferred in the 'Greek' pattern are those that are more closely related to rebetiki music.

[4] Literally meaning 'music of the people', laiki music (λαϊκή μουσική) is a form of Greek popular music which is widely covered by the Greek media. Its roots lie on 'rebetiko' and on Middle Eastern folk music, but it is often mixed with elements of western dance music, a 'modern' version of laiki music which is popular among the 'mainstream' pattern.

society; Diamantouros' modernist/'reformist' culture is closely related to post-material values while his traditional/'underdog' culture is related to pre-industrial values. In addition, there are many similarities between what Williams calls 'emergent' and 'residual' culture, and the modernist/'reformist' and traditional/'underdog' culture respectively. Thus, it seems that these three theoretical frameworks describe different aspects of the same cleavage of the Greek society. It's not possible to go into the details of this framework within the scope of a paper, but it should be mentioned that a fourfold classification of the main Greek subcultures was suggested, depending on whether a subculture is modernist or traditional, and hegemonic or anti-hegemonic.

Table 1: Typology of the Greek subcultures

	Modernist subcultures	*Traditional subcultures*
Hegemonic subcultures	**Hegemonic modernist subcultures:** - *'Mainstream' subculture*	**Hegemonic traditional subcultures:** - *'Traditional male' subculture* - *'Traditional female' subculture* - *'Withdrawn' subculture*
Anti-hegemonic subcultures	**Anti-hegemonic modernist subcultures:** - *'Alternative' subculture*	**Anti-hegemonic traditional subcultures:** - *'Greek' subculture*

The main observations on each subculture can be summarised as follows.

The *'mainstream' subculture* involves almost exclusively young, educated people, most of them younger than 30. It's a hegemonic modernist subculture as we can understand from features such as its support to the dominant political forces and cultural practices, the prevailing 'individualistic' system of values, or its favourable view of the European Union and the civil society and unfavourable view of the church. This subculture includes individuals who were (politically) socialised during the 1980s or later, which may indicate that the Greek hegemonic culture is changing. One key feature of this subculture is that it is both conformist and individualistic, a finding reinforced by some anthropological studies (e.g. Ioannou 2001). Individuals of the 'mainstream' subculture seem to accept the dominant cultural practices and political forces, but they experience them in a unique, individualised way, which indicates that they are not followers, but rather those who have the potential to define what is dominant.

The *'alternative' subculture* also includes mostly young people, the vast majority being younger than 45 and highly educated. That's an anti-hegemonic modernist subculture, indicated by features like a high level of political participation, left political orientation, adoption of values which emphasise the importance of individuals, or a favourable view of the civil society and an unfavourable view of the institutions of the state. It is also remarkable that, at the time, half of the voters of SYRIZA were drawn from this subculture. Individuals of this subculture often view their 'alternative' cultural practices as a form of

resistance to the status quo (Souliotis 2001); however, it is also believed that these practices might be cultural investments, which grand them a peculiar feeling of distinction (Bourdieu 1984, Thornton 1995).

It also seems that the 'mainstream' and 'alternative' subcultures are the carriers of post-materialist values and modernist culture in Greece. The fact that these subcultures include two thirds of the individuals socialised since the middle 80s, as seen in **Table 1**, is an indication that Greece is in the process of adopting post-materialist values and convert from traditional to modernist culture. However, one should keep in mind that the data were collected between 2003 and 2005, long before the onset of the economic crisis, which means that this process might have been halted or even reversed, as the relative economic affluence required for the expression of post-materialist values cannot be taken for granted any more.

Table 2: Subcultures in the *Gender differences in patterns of political behaviour* research and time period in which the responders lived their early adolescence (12-15 years old, %)

	1993-03	1986-95	1979-88	1968-81	1961-70	1952-63	1931-54
Sum of 'mainstream' & 'alternative' subcultures	**62,5**	**66,3**	33,9	24,8	12,3	12,2	8,1
Sum of all traditional subcultures	37,5	33,7	**66,1**	**75,2**	**87,7**	**87,8**	**91,9**
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The *'Greek' subculture* consists of predominately middle aged people of average educational level. It is an anti-hegemonic traditional subculture, demonstrated by characteristics such as a high level of political interest, centre-left ideology, adoption of parochial values, preference to the institutions of the state or a hostile view towards the western world. In addition, it is impressive that half of the voters of the Communist Party (KKE) belong in this subculture. Like the 'alternative' subculture, the 'Greek' subculture resists the status quo; unlike the 'alternative' subculture, this is a form of resistance which is rooted in the past. Because of this, it is a contradictory subculture which combines attitudes not usually found together, such as being xenophobic and centre-left at the same time. This is to be expected from an anti-hegemonic traditional subculture: on the one hand, being against the hegemonic culture makes it radical, and on the other hand, being attached to tradition and values of the past makes it conservative.

The *'traditional male'*, *'traditional female'* and *'withdrawn'* subcultures are hegemonic traditional subcultures, characterised by their support to the dominant political forces, and their strong feelings of parochialism, sectionalism and religiousness. The first two are important in that they reveal other things that matter in the study of the Greek society; namely, gender. It is quite impressive that inequalities between men and women are important to the point that they were found to form distinct subcultures, which, taken together, express one fourth of the Greek population.[5] As for the 'withdrawn' subculture, it includes mostly old people who, becoming socially isolated because of their age, gradually retire from nearly all forms of political and cultural activity. When they were younger they

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[5] This is further analysed in Diakoumakos 2013.

probably belonged to other hegemonic traditional subcultures, possibly the 'traditional male' or 'traditional female' subcultures.

Finally, there is reason to believe that the *'cultivated' subculture* is the expression of the cultural goodwill (Bourdieu 1984) of some middle-class strata which improved their class position during the last few decades. In particular, no more than one fifth of the individuals of this subculture actually visit museums or galleries often; the rest usually reply that they visit them 'rarely', instead of 'never', which is the case for all the other subcultures. Thus, the actual importance of the 'cultivated' subculture is marginal.

I should point out that the seven subcultures described are only the most populous, and it's very likely that there are other, smaller but equally important, subcultures to be discovered. Moreover, one should not think of these subcultures as clear-cut groups, but rather as ideal types which illustrate the main trends of the Greek society.

Concluding reflections

A number of interesting observations can be drawn from the study of these subcultures, which are not possible to mention within the scope of this paper. However, considering how the Greek economy and politics have changed since the data were collected, there is a key point worth noting. Earlier it was mentioned that, according to the data, it seems that Greece is in the process of turning post-materialist, eventually reaching a value system similar to those of Northern European countries. However, as Inglehart has pointed out, post-materialism results from the economic affluence and physical security achieved in post-war Europe (Inglehart 1977). Greece did enjoy these benefits since the fall of the military junta in 1974, but the devastating effects of the economic crisis[6] have changed this.

What can happen in a country in which the youngest generations have learned to take survival for granted and turn to post-materialist pursuits, when the requirements of post-materialism are not in place anymore? The events of December 2008, the movement of *aganaktismenoi* (indignant) Greeks in 2011, or the collapse of the Greek party system in 2012 might be only the most visible effects of a quite complicated process of changes, which is partly grounded on the contradiction between the values of young Greeks and the reality of the economy.

In summary, this study showed that culture and politics are related to the point that we can identify distinct subcultures, which draw from both politics and culture; in addition, the main (political) subcultures of Greece were identified, and their study improves the understanding of the Greek society as a whole. It would be worthwhile to repeat this study at the time of the crisis, in order to understand the impact of the economic crisis on the subcultures and how they react to the crisis in turn. Finally, note that this approach does not have to be limited to Greece, but is rather a way to suggest that we can open a new field of interdisciplinary research which will allow us to better understand contemporary societies in their entirety.

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[6] According to the World Bank, the Greek GDP has shrunk by 27% between 2008 and 2012, while the unemployment rate has reached 26.8% in March 2014 and youth unemployment 57.7% according to Eurostat.

APPENDIX

Table A: Overview of the main cultural features of each subculture

'Mainstream' subculture
Greek pop (0.572) and western pop radio stations (0.513*), Greek pop music (0.474*), blockbuster Hollywood movies (0.556*), visiting cafés (0.675^), dance clubs (0.651^) and folk clubs (0.636^)*

'Alternative' subculture
Western rock (0.551) and 'entekhni' music radio stations (0.533*), western rock music (0.567*), independent and art cinema (0.670*), reading books (0.590*)*

'Greek' subculture
News radio stations (0.552), 'laiki' music (0.581*), 'entekhni' music (0.460^), 'rebetiki' music (0.378^), old Greek cinema (0,301*)*

'Cultivated' subculture
Visiting museums & galleries (0.683^), archaeological sites (0.654^), theatres (0.555^), opera & classical music concerts (0.560^), painting & photo exhibitions (0.573^), reading books (0.494^)

'Traditional male' subculture
Visiting traditional cafés (0.663^), attending sporting events (0.605^), hunting/fishing (0.443^), repairing/tinkering with cars and other equipment (0.443^), reading sports magazines (0.436^)

'Traditional female' subculture
Shopping (0.429^), knitting (0.397^), cooking (0.332^), reading women's magazines (0.323^), watching variety shows on the TV (0.371^)

'Withdrawn' subculture
Do not watch movies (0.689), don't listen to music (0.671*), don't read books (0.664*), don't listen to the radio (0.482*)*

* Factor loadings according to the data of the *Gender differences in patterns of political behaviour* study.
^ Factor loadings according to the data of the *Second panhellenic research of reading behaviour*.

Table B: Political, social and demographic features of the 'mainstream' subculture[7]

Age	**Young:** 18-29 years old 61%*/55%^
Gender	**More women:** 60%*/66%^
Education	**High:** higher education 30%*/23%^, university students 28%*/21%^
Class position	**On the high side:** higher and middle class occupations 47%*, farmers & workers 10%*
Political interest	**Low:** hardly or not at all interested in politics 76%*/54%^
Sense of political competence	**High**: do not believe that politics are so complicated that they cannot understand them 59%*
Ideology	**Centre-right:** left-right scale positions 5-10 81%*/76%^
Party identification	**New Democracy (conservative) & PASOK (social-democratic):** 77%*
Value system	**Individualistic:** the first thing that identifies them is their occupation, gender, or sexual orientation 45%*
Civic society vs state institutions	**Trust in the civil society:** sympathetic to environmental organisations 52%* and to feminist organisations 34%*
Religiosity	**Low:** sympathetic to the church 26%*
Sectionalism and nationalism	**Relatively weak:** hardly or not at all attached to their local area 30%*
Attitude towards the West	**Relatively favourable:** sympathetic to the European Union 41%*

* According to the data of the *Gender differences in patterns of political behaviour* study.
^ According to the data of the *Second panhellenic research of reading behaviour*.

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[7] The variables given in tables 2-8 are indicative and, in many cases, there are two or more variables illustrating these features.

Table C: Political, social and demographic features of the 'alternative' subculture

Age	**Relatively young:** 18-45 years old 74%*
Gender	**More men:** 57%*
Education	**High:** higher education 42%*, elementary education 4%*
Class position	**On the high side:** higher and middle class occupations 61%*, farmers & workers 16%*
Political interest	**Relatively high:** very and quite interested in politics 45%*
Sense of political competence	**Very high**: do not believe that politics are so complicated that they cannot understand them 89%*
Ideology	**Left-wing:** left-right scale positions 1-4 56%*
Party identification	**Communist Party & SYRIZA (radical left):** 42%*
Value system	**Individualistic:** the first thing that identifies them is their occupation, gender, or sexual orientation 45%*
Civic society vs state institutions	**Trust in the civil society:** sympathetic to environmental organisations 53%* and to feminist organisations 31%*
Religiosity	**Low:** sympathetic to the church 16%*
Sectionalism and nationalism	**Relatively weak:** hardly or not at all attached to their local area 36%*

* According to the data of the *Gender differences in patterns of political behaviour* study.

Table D: Political, social and demographic features of the 'Greek' subculture

Age	**Middle aged and old:** 30-59 years old 66%*/55%^, 60 or older 28%*/33%^
Education	**Average:** higher education 24%*/22%^, secondary education 54%*/56%^, elementary education 22%*/22%^
Political interest	**Relatively high:** very and quite interested in politics 49%*/52%^
Sense of political competence	**Relatively low**: viewing politics as a spectacle 0,47* in the 'Greek' factor
Ideology	**Centre-left:** left-right scale positions 1-5 70%*/66%^
Party identification	**PASOK & Communist Party:** 65%*
Value system	**Parochial:** the first thing that identifies them is their family role, religion, place of residence or origin 41%*
Civic society vs state institutions	**Trust in the state institutions:** sympathetic to the police 36%* and to the army 60%*
Religiosity	**Rather high:** sympathetic to the church 48%*
Sectionalism and nationalism	**Strong:** very or quite attached to their local area 76%*
Attitude towards the West	**Unfavourable:** England and/or USA is responsible for the Greek civil war of 1946-49 70%*
Attitude towards immigrants	**Xenophobia:** immigrants changed Greece for the worst 68%*

* According to the data of the *Gender differences in patterns of political behaviour* study.
^ According to the data of the *Second panhellenic research of reading behaviour*.

Table E: Political, social and demographic features of the 'traditional male' subculture

Age	**Middle aged and old:** 45 or older 63%^
Gender	**Mostly men:** 97%^
Education	**On the low side:** higher education 18%^, secondary education 53%^, elementary 29%^
Political interest	**Relatively high:** very and quite interested in politics 63%^
Value system	**Parochial** (according to the 'without particular preference' pattern)
Religiosity	**Average:** going to church regularly 26%^
Sectionalism and nationalism	**Strong** (according to the 'without particular preference' pattern)
Attitude towards the West	**Unfavourable** (according to the 'without particular preference' pattern)
Attitude towards immigrants	**Xenophobia** (according to the 'without particular preference' pattern)

^ According to the data of the *Second panhellenic research of reading behaviour*.

Table F: Political, social and demographic features of the 'traditional female' subculture

Age	**Middle aged and old:** 45 or older 61%^
Gender	**Mostly women**: 84%^
Education	**Low:** higher education 9%^, elementary education 51%^
Political interest	**Low:** very interested in politics 4%^, hardly or not at all interested 50%^
Value system	**Parochial** (according to the 'without particular preference' pattern)
Religiosity	**High:** going to church regularly 55%^
Sectionalism and nationalism	**Strong** (according to the 'without particular preference' pattern)
Attitude towards the West	**Unfavourable** (according to the 'without particular preference' pattern)
Attitude towards immigrants	**Xenophobia** (according to the 'without particular preference' pattern)

^ According to the data of the *Second panhellenic research of reading behaviour*.

Table G: Political, social and demographic features of the 'withdrawn' subculture

Age	**Old:** 60 or older 50%*/55%^
Education	**Low:** higher education 14%*/9%^, elementary education 41%*/50%^
Political interest	**Low:** rarely or never talk about politics 64%*
Sense of political competence	**Low**: 'accidental' interest in politics 0,79* in the 'indifferent' (+) vs 'without preferences' (-) factor
Ideology	**Centre-right:** left-right scale positions 5-10 76%*/76%^
Party identification	**New Democracy & PASOK:** 80%*
Value system	**Parochial:** the first thing that identifies them is their family role, religion, place of residence or origin 57%*
Civic society vs state institutions	**Trust in the state institutions:** sympathetic to the police 46%* and to the army 70%*
Religiosity	**High:** sympathetic to the church 52%*
Sectionalism and nationalism	**Strong:** very or quite attached to their local area 80%*
Attitude towards immigrants	**Xenophobia:** Immigrants changed Greece for the worst 53%*

* According to the data of the *Gender differences in patterns of political behaviour* study.
^ According to the data of the *Second panhellenic research of reading behaviour*.

Table H: Political, social and demographic features of the 'cultivated' subculture

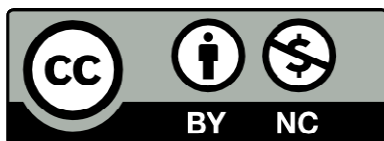|	
Age	**Young and middle aged:** 18-44 years old 59%^
Education	**High:** higher education 47%^, elementary education 6%^
Class origin	**On the low side:** higher education (father) 15%^, elementary education (father) 50%^
Political interest	**Relatively high:** very and quite interested in politics 60%^
Sense of political competence	**Low**: 'accidental' interest in politics 0,79* in the 'indifferent' (+) vs 'without preferences' (-) factor
Religiosity	**Average:** going to church regularly 25%^

^ According to the data of the *Second panhellenic research of reading behaviour*.

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