

**Political Sophistication in Greece: Explaining the Paradox of a Politically
Knowledgeable Electorate**

Pavlos Vasilopoulos,

PhD Candidate,

Department of Communication and Media Studies,

University of Athens

pavlosvass@yahoo.gr

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*******DRAFT version*******

Abstract:

This paper presents the results of an analytical quantitative survey on levels of political sophistication in Greece measured by a twenty four item knowledge scale. Results suggest that the Greek public appears to be relatively well informed over political affairs. I argue that the explanation behind this ‘paradoxical’ pattern, which comes in contrast to the assumptions of rational choice theory and the frequently cited empirical findings in the United States, lies in the existence of strong clientelistic networks in Greece that increase the expected utility for acquiring political information. Still, even though political sophistication in Greece is generally high, there appears to be significant individual-level variation with regard to socioeconomic status, gender and age cohort.

Introduction

Political sophistication, defined as the ‘quantity and organization of a person’s political cognitions’ (Luskin 1987), is a fundamental concept for the understanding of citizens’ political decision-making processes¹. Systematic research over the impact of political sophistication on the quality of political decisions has demonstrated that political experts have the cognitive capacity to form meaningful political attitudes based on their deeper held political predispositions (Zaller 1992) and make informed vote choices adjusting their vote to match candidates’ platforms (Lau and Redlawsk 1997, 2001). What is more, they are more likely to participate in elections and other political activities and are less susceptible to political propaganda (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).

At the same time, research over the levels of political sophistication in the mass publics, carried out almost exclusively in the United States, has repeatedly found that the general public remains largely unsophisticated. Large segments of the U.S. electorate appear uninformed over political affairs, falling short of answering knowledge questions even over rudimentary political facts (Bennett 1988, Converse 1964, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). This finding has cultivated the belief that aggregate political knowledge will not differ much in other national contexts (e.g. Luskin 1987, Converse 1990). The assumption of the universality of the unsophisticated public is in alignment with the premises of rational choice theory, according to which it is irrational for citizens to acquire much political information as its cost is high, while the utility of political information is low to most members of the public. This is because the cost in terms of time and effort of casting an informed vote exceeds the negligible influence of a single vote in the electoral outcome (Downs 1957). At the same time however, the assumption over the universality of the unsophisticated voter has not been empirically evaluated, as thorough measurements on levels of political knowledge outside the United States are scarce (but see Oscarsson 2007; Luskin, Cautrés and Lowrance 2009).

This paper challenges the idea of the universality of the politically unsophisticated voter. It uses Greece as a case study to argue that the pattern of political ignorance that has been repeatedly demonstrated for the case of the United States does not fit all mass publics. I draw

¹Delli Carpini and Keeter define political knowledge as ‘the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory’ (1996, p. 10). According to Krosnick, political experts are those who ‘find themselves thinking often and deeply about politics and knowing a lot about political history and current affairs’ (1990, p.4). In practice, the concepts of political sophistication, knowledge and expertise are so closely related that they can be treated as identical (Luskin and Bullock 2005). Throughout the paper, I use the terms political knowledge, political sophistication and political expertise interchangeably.

on an extensive quantitative survey on levels of political sophistication to demonstrate that the Greek public appears relatively knowledgeable over political affairs. As I argue below, the key behind the explanation of the paradoxical pattern of a politically knowledgeable public is the existence of clientelistic networks that affect the returns for investing in the acquisition of political knowledge. Since the causal mechanism that connects macrohistorical phenomena with aspects of social behaviour cannot be directly observed with statistical methods, I rely on a theoretical argument on the link between clientelism and sophistication.

The rest of the paper goes as follows: In the next section I discuss the literature that covers the macrohistorical aspects of the Greek political culture and analyze their connection to political sophistication. Next, I present empirical results of an analytical political sophistication survey that show an atypical distribution of political sophistication in the Greek public. In the third section I move on to demonstrate the existence of knowledge gaps in the Greek electorate and explore the individual-level determinants of political sophistication in the Greek context. Finally I make some remarks over the applicability potential of these findings in other national contexts.

1. Macrohistorical Characteristics of the Greek Political Culture

The Greek case gives a good example of incongruence between political culture and the political and economic system. Even though political scientists often categorize Greece as a ‘new democracy’ because of the seven year dictatorship between 1967 and 1974, Greece is one of the oldest democracies in Europe. As early as 1843 the Greek male population over 25 years of age was given the right to elect officials in the national assembly and parliament. (Charalambis 1989, Papakostas 2002, Tsoukalas 1980). The constitution of 1864 consolidated constitutional monarchy, while the Greek parliamentary system was introduced in 1875 with universal male suffrage and a clause that obliged the King to appoint the government that enjoyed the declared support of the majority in parliament (*dedilomeni*).

These democratic reforms were of milestone importance and it has been argued that they consolidated a parliamentary political culture even though not a deep democratic one (Mouzelis 1986). Yet, they developed in a *sui generis* fashion that deviates significantly from the respective developments in the rest of the advanced European nations. There is broad consensus among students of Greek political culture and historians that the initiation of democratic institutions and procedures in Greece did not stem from a widening proliferation of individual rights values nor came as the product of robust revolutionary movements.

Instead, the transition to a universal suffrage came, by and large, as a compromise between local elites and the central authority, resolving the tensions over political power that had characterized the newborn Greek state during the first decades after independence. In essence early democratic institutions in Greece reproduced and extended the Ottoman-inherited clientelistic system in a nationwide scale, being formalistic in nature and discrepant from the dominant mass political culture (Charalambis and Demertzis 1993; Mouzelis 1986). While early modern Greece maintained a democratic institutional structure similar to the rest of major European countries, legitimacy did not stem from a social contract between the rulers and the ruled in the context of a neutral state but was located outside the formal institutional structure, grounded on personal ties between local patrons and clients (Charalambis 1989, Clogg 1987). This formalistic democratic system was legitimized through an extensive mechanism of clientelistic networks and patronage (Charalambis 1989, Papakostas 2002). Political parties in the first Greek Republic, and especially until the 1880s, were loose organizations without ideological or class references that were organized around the personal ties of the local candidate with his clientele (Charalambis 1989, Clogg 1987, Meynaud 1965, Papakostas 2002, Tsoukalas 1980/1999).

Another central aspect of early modern Greece was the overinflated state that crosscut every aspect of production. As was the case with the early democratic reforms that were formalistic in nature and divergent from the dominant 'pre-democratic' social structure, the early Greek state was formed under the prototype of the Western industrial state. This happened despite the fact that the Greek economic and social structure was excessively pre-industrial and the absence of a private economic sphere made a striking contrast to the equivalent Western European state models (Tsoukalas 1978, 1981). A tangible consequence of this contradiction was that the state became the dominant mechanism for the allocation of resources, leading to a disproportionately high percentage of public spending and employment that was maintained for the decades to come (Tsoukalas 1981).

The too-close entwinement between a 'hypertrophic' state and the local nobility (based on a clientelistic distribution of public resources) is one of the most persistent particularities of the Greek political culture. It has been maintained throughout the 20th century and has stayed almost intact despite the country's rapid economic development, urbanization and the europeanization processes after Greece's entrance to the European family and the Eurozone. The political structure based on a patron-client relationship as well as on the personalization of political institutions and state mechanisms was by and large maintained after urbanization

in the 1940s and 1950s (Mouzelis 1986). The so-called ‘cities of peasants’ (Papakostas 2002) phenomenon rested on the continuation of the personal character of politics after the mass migration to the urban centers from the rural areas. Clientelism was further maintained after the restoration of democracy in 1974, although in a novel form. The traditional clientelistic networks of the past were replaced by what has been called ‘bureaucratic clientelism’ (Lyrintzis 1984, Mavrogordatos 1997), namely, the close entwinement of organized party mechanisms with the state apparatus, creating an extensive allocation of privileges and resources (such as jobs in the public sector) to the clientele through the state (Lyrintzis 1984).

How do these structural characteristics of the modern Greek national identity influence aggregate levels of political sophistication? A common line of explanation for the low political information of the broad electorate in the United States is that citizens acquire and hold in memory the sort of political information that is useful to them in their daily life (Popkin 1991, p. 24). Consequently, the majority of US citizens falls short of answering political knowledge questionnaires because such knowledge is ‘irrelevant to the political activities of average citizens’ (Graber 2001, p. 45). Yet, the clientelistic system and the ‘hypertrophic’ state that have been generally ever-present in Greek political life have forged an atypical context and meaning of political participation. For the Western European or American citizen, choosing among different parties and candidates is ultimately a choice based on group interest. On the contrary, the electoral behavior for a significant portion of the population in Greece translates into private interest, with tangible material consequences such as employment. As the English historian William Miller vividly wrote more than a century ago: ‘It is impossible to write about Greek life, whether in town or country without saying something on the subject of politics; for they affect every profession, every trade and almost every family to a degree unknown to other lands’ (Miller 1905: 21, cited in Papakostas 2002, p. 42). Political parties are ever-present in the Greek public sphere, crosscutting all facets of public life. In this sense, politics is not a remote and unprofitable activity to the mass publics but work as an extension of one’s private interests². As Demertzis puts it: ‘[In Greece] politics is understood as a ‘private’ issue rather than a public one; the statist and clientelistic mode of domination fosters an essentially pre-modern atomistic and/or domestic conception

²In this context the overlap with Putnam’s distinction between the civic and uncivic Italian communities is apparent (1993). However, an important difference between the Greek and the Italian case is the mass and organized form of clientelism in Greece after the restoration of democracy where clientelism benefits the whole party instead of individual candidates (Mavrogordatos 1997).

of politics that collides with the modern democratic understanding of it' (1994, see also 1997).

The material dimension of the vote is highlighted by the longstanding unusually high participation in national elections that have traditionally exceeded the respective means for the European countries: Turnout in the early elections, between 1844 and 1885, reached in some cases an impressive 90 percent of the total adult male population while respective percentages in Western Europe ranged from 15 to 70 percent (Tsoukalas 1980/1999, p. 311-312). Same is the case in the Greek 3rd Republic, where the average electoral turnout in Greece is higher than the respective percentage of other democracies (Blais 2008)³. The impressive participation in elections compared to the rest of European democracies is 'rationally' justified if we take into account the high value of the vote choice in a culture where parties penetrate the whole of public life and the vote is widely seen by some social layers as the mean to pursue private interests. Similarly, the increased expected utility gained by participating in politics affects the motivation of obtaining political information. Thus, from a rational-choice perspective, it could be argued that macro-historical structural and cultural aspects of a political system may potentially affect the cost / benefit calculus to become politically sophisticated. In the case of Greece, the widespread party clientelism (stemming from cultural tradition and historical particularities) increases the potential benefits of acquiring information over political affairs, leading us to anticipate relatively high political knowledge among the mass public.

2. Measuring Political Knowledge

Scholars have come up with different assessments on what citizens should know over politics. Berelson et al. (1954) argued that the politically informed citizen is the one who is aware of 'what the issues are, what their history is, what the relevant facts are, what alternatives are proposed, what the party stands for, what the consequences are' (1954, p. 308). Barber argued that the informed citizen should be knowledgeable over aspects of organization and actions of the government or over 'what the government is and does' (1973, p. 44). Neuman emphasized the importance of knowledge about political figures and parties that constitute 'the basic medium of political currency' (1986, p. 16, see also Milner 2003). Furthermore, Simonds (1982) argued that knowledge of political history serves an additional

³ It should be noted that although Greece has employed a compulsory voting act in its constitution, abstainers have almost never received sanctions. After 2001 there is no interpretive act and the compulsory voting law has become merely symbolic (Mathiopoulou 2007)

important function in the comprehension of politics, because by being knowledgeable on political history, an individual is able to make reasonably justified deductions over the potentials of political outcomes. Finally, Luskin (1987) and Zaller (1992) propose items that ask respondents to place political actors and parties across a left-right continuum.

The data used in this study come from a face-to-face survey conducted by the VPRC polling institute that was carried out in November 2008 in a nationwide representative sample (N=1199). The purpose of the survey was to assess levels of political knowledge in Greece. I constructed a political knowledge scale that integrated the various views mentioned above (see Table A.1 in the Appendix for a summary of items, format and coding method). A total of thirteen items tested knowledge over historical and contemporary political actors:

- Seven items asking respondents to identify the office held by various contemporary and historical political actors either Greek or international (namely Jose Baroso, Yasser Arafat, Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, Gordon Brown, Yiannis Panagopoulos⁴ and Yiannis Ragousis⁵).
- Three items asking participants to name the party that Barrack Obama, Evangelos Venizelos⁶ and Evangelos Averof⁷ belong to.
- Two items asking respondents to name the Greek finance minister⁸ and the Greek EU Commissioner.
- One item asking respondents to state the reasons behind the recent resignation of Vasilios Magginas, minister for employment⁹.

A total of ten items tapped respondents' knowledge over institutions, political history and the ideological positions of parties and actors:

- An item asking respondents to name the five parties in the Greek parliament.
- An item asking respondents to name the maximum length of a government term in Greece.

⁴ Leader of GSEE (Geniki Synomospondia Ergaton Ellados -General Federation of the Workers of Greece) the largest trade union coalition in Greece, representing more than two million employees.

⁵ At the time Ragousis was the general secretary of PASOK.

⁶ Leading political figure of the dominant center-left party PASOK.

⁷ Historical leader of the Greek conservative party New Democracy.

⁸ At the time, the office was held by Georgios Alogoskoufis who had already completed four years in office.

⁹ Vasilios Magginas was an elected MP in the Greek parliament from 1993 to 2007 and the Minister of Employment from 2004 to 2007. He was forced to resign after he was accused for employing illegal and uninsured immigrants on his unauthorized summer house in Greece.

- An item asking respondents over the minimum number of MPs needed for the formation of government in Greece¹⁰.
- An item asking respondents to name the year that democracy was restored in Greece after the Junta.
- An item asking respondents to place four political actors in the left-right scale beginning from the most left to the most right¹¹.
- An item asking respondents to describe what the term ‘neoliberalism’ means.
- An item asking respondents to describe what the term ‘mixed name’ means in regard with the conflict over the name of the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia.
- Finally, three items asking respondents to assess whether New Democracy, the Communist party and the left coalition SYRIZA were more in favor of state intervention in the economy or were supporting the idea that private enterprises should have a leading role¹².

3. Results

3.1 Aggregate Levels of Political knowledge in Greece

Table 1 reports the percent of correct responses in every knowledge item. Results show an unusually high level of political knowledge in most items: 96.4 percent of the Greek population could correctly identify that the maximum length of a government’s term between two elections is four years, where in the same item in a true/false form in the British Election Study of 2001 had only 61 percent correct responses (Heath et al. 2002). Moreover, three out of four respondents could correctly identify that Barrack Obama’s party is the Democratic Party, 82.8 percent could name all five parties in the parliament, more than 80 percent of the sample could accurately recall the offices held by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, one in two respondents accurately placed four major Greek party leaders in the left-right axis and around a third of respondents could correctly describe what the term ‘neoliberalism’ means.

¹⁰ It should be noted that at the time of the survey the 2007 conservative government had managed to elect only 152 MPs and the prospect of the collapse of the government was overplayed by the media.

¹¹ Namely Tsipras (SYRIZA), Papandreou (PASOK), Karamanlis (New Democracy), Karatzaferis (LAOS).

¹² SYRIZA (initials for the Coalition of the Radical Left) and the Greek Communist Party (KKE) traditionally reject the role of private enterprises in the economy. New Democracy’s manifesto at its time as government advocated extended privatizations.

These scores become particularly notable if we take into account the open format of the questions. On the other hand, respondents fell relatively short to identify who the Greek Commissioner was at the time and found it difficult to name the exact position that Jose Barroso holds.

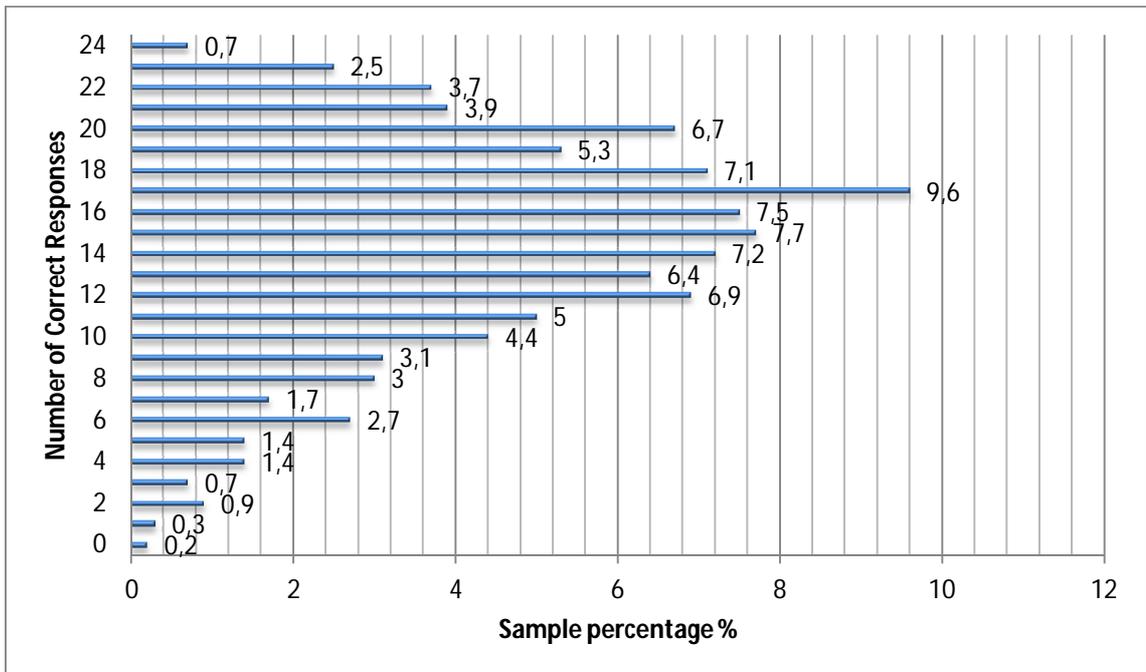
Table 1: Percentage of Correct Responses per Knowledge Item

Item	Percent Correct	Wrong Answer	DK
<i>Evangelos Venizelos party</i>	97.2	2.2	0.7
<i>Maximum length of government term between elections</i>	96.4	2.7	0.9
<i>Name Greek minister of finance</i>	89.2	6	4.8
<i>Name the parties currently in parliament</i>	82.8	15.9	1.4
<i>Evangelos Averof party</i>	82.4	11.3	6.2
<i>Office held by Ronald Reagan</i>	82.2	12.1	5.6
<i>Office held by Margaret Thatcher</i>	80.5	14.5	5.1
<i>Minimum number of MPs required to form a government</i>	79.8	18.1	2.1
<i>Barrack Obama's party</i>	76.5	20.9	3.7
<i>Office held by Yaseer Arafat</i>	69.2	22.4	8.3
<i>Year of the Greek 3rd Republic</i>	67.4	26.1	6.5
<i>Know what 'mixed name' is on the issue of Macedonia</i>	63.5	31.1	5.3
<i>'New Democracy' is more in favor of free-trade economy</i>	62.5	18.1	19.4
<i>Communists are more in favor of state intervention</i>	59.8	18.7	21.5
<i>Why did Greek minister Magginas resign</i>	56.9	26.2	17
<i>Office held by Yannis Ragoussis</i>	52.1	40	7.8
<i>Place four political leaders from Left to Right</i>	50.0	40.6	9.4
<i>Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) is more in favor of state intervention in the economy</i>	48.7	28.9	22.4
<i>Office held by Gordon Brown</i>	36.4	56.1	7.4
<i>Office held by Jose Barroso</i>	31.9	60.8	7.3
<i>Can describe what the term 'neoliberalism' means in the economy</i>	26.4 + 6.9	60.1	5.8

<i>Can name Greek EU commissioner</i>	22.2	59	18.8
<i>Office held by Yannis Panagopoulos</i>	19.3	72	8.7

Figure 1 reports the distribution of political sophistication in the sample. Results suggest that the median respondent could answer correctly 15 out of 24 questions (or 62.5 percent of the questionnaire, see Appendix Table A.2. for summary statistics). Overall, nearly 75 percent of respondents answered more than half of the political knowledge questions correctly. Finally, it is worth noting that the ‘know-nothings’ (defined as those who respond correctly less than 20 percent of items – see Bennett 1988) represented only 5.7 percent of the sample, while respondents who could answer more than 80 percent of the questionnaire made up 22.8 percent of the sample. These findings show that contrary to the often observed political ignorance, the Greek public appears to be relatively sophisticated over politics. A question that arises concerns the social and behavioral determinants of political knowledge: Does the unusual distribution of political sophistication in Greece translate into an atypical relationship between political knowledge and individual-level social and behavioral characteristics? I explore this question in the next section.

Figure 1. Distribution of Political Sophistication in Greece



3.2. The Distribution of Political Sophistication across Social Groups

Past literature has highlighted a number of ‘usual suspects’ (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, p. 179) in regard to the variation in political knowledge in the United States and elsewhere. A large number of surveys have found significant intergroup differences in levels of political knowledge in the United States and elsewhere. In particular, age has been found to exert a positive influence in political knowledge due to a) differences stemming from generational characteristics (e.g. Jennings 1996) and b) life-cycle effects (Luskin 1990, McAllister 1998).

Generational differences in political behavior reflect distinct conditions of political socialization during early adulthood for different age cohorts. Several surveys have demonstrated crystallized trends in various aspects of political participation that persist through the life cycle, such as turnout in elections (e.g. Blais et al. 2004, Clarke et al. 2004, Wass 2007) and political interest (Prior 2010). As for levels of political knowledge, Jennings showed that factual knowledge ‘follows well-established patterns of solidification and crystallization in young adulthood’ (1996, p. 250) with respect to the social events during early life stages. In the case of Greece, it has been shown that the generations of voters that had their formative years during the ideologically polarized post-civil war political environment as well as during the years after the restoration of democracy, appear more interested in politics compared to younger generations who came of age during the 1990s and 2000s, the era of consensual politics (Nicolacopoulos 2005, Vernardakis 2011, Vasilopoulos 2012).

According to the life-cycle hypothesis, citizens accumulate political information with time. Being older means more exposure from the media, remembering historical events (see Jennings 1996), more political discussions and more chances of becoming informed over politics through everyday professional and community activities. It should be noted that the data do not allow for an independent assessment between cohort and life cycle effects in levels of political sophistication. Alternatively, I seek to assess the extent to which political sophistication varies along with the age group a respondent belongs to.

Moreover, political sophistication has been found to be associated with and influenced by levels of income (Neuman 1986, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Hendriks-Vettehen et al. 2004). Several researchers have argued that the wealthier members of the public are more likely to receive higher returns for political information, because income is associated with holding a politically impinged job (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Hendriks-Vettehen et al.

2004). Thus, according to this line of explanation, it is self interest that raises motivation to gather political information and yields a significant influence on political sophistication. As Neuman asserts: ‘higher status individuals are likely to be more involved in and tied to the functioning of the economic system, to be more alert to government regulation of business and the stock market, and to have more to lose if tax regulations are changed’ (1986, p. 116).

As to the distribution of political knowledge with regard to gender, men have been repeatedly found to be more politically informed compared to women in the United States and elsewhere, ever since the first measurements of political sophistication were conducted (Campbell et al. 1960, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Frazer and Macdonald 2003, Mondak and Anderson 2004, Dow 2009, Lizotte and Sidman 2009, Dolan 2011). Interestingly, this finding has been found to persist even after controlling for intergender differences in socioeconomic status. More recently, several scholars have developed surrogate explanations for the intergender differences in political knowledge: Mondak and Anderson (2004) argued that gender differences in closed item knowledge tests stem from men’s increased propensity to guess and avoid giving a ‘don’t know’ answer. According to Dow (2009), the driving force between the observed gender-based differences in political knowledge are the differential returns of education for men and women, a result she attributes to unequal socialization. Finally, Dolan (2011) demonstrated that the gender gap between men and women appears to diminish when respondents were asked questions over the state of women in American politics. She attributed women’s low political knowledge scores on the underrepresentation of women candidates and representatives in American politics.

Table 5 reports the distribution of political knowledge between different gender, age and income groups. The results highlight some substantial knowledge gaps for all examined social categories. Men appear more politically knowledgeable than women, respondents from higher income classes know more about politics compared to those from low income classes and younger citizens are found to be less knowledgeable than older citizens, although differences in political sophistication scores reduce for those who are over 65 years of age.

Table 5: Distribution of Political Knowledge in Basic Social Groups in Greece

Group	Percent of Correct Responses (N)
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	67.6 (566)

Female	54.4 (586)
<i>Age Cohort</i>	
18-24	48.8 (118)
25-34	58.2 (191)
35-44	63.3 (220)
45-54	66.9 (221)
55-64	65.0 (188)
65 plus	57.7 (210)
<i>Income Classes</i>	
Low (up to 500 €)	52.8 (259)
Medium (501-2000 €)	63.5 (371)
High (2001 or higher €)	69.2 (170)

Table entries are percentages of correct responses in the political knowledge scale with the number of respondents in each group in parentheses.

In order to assess the independent influence of each variable in political sophistication separately I employ OLS regression analysis. I constructed two models in order to estimate the impact of sociodemographic and behavioral characteristics separately. Model A includes the social and demographic characteristics discussed above (namely gender, income and age cohort) plus urbanity and education. Education (and especially tertiary education attendance) is considered one of the strongest predictors of political knowledge in various national contexts (Neuman 1986, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Hendriks-Vettehen et al. 2004). However, there is scholarly disagreement on whether it is education *per se* that enhances political learning processes (as Neuman 1986 and Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996 suggest) or the variable is as a proxy for differences prior to education such as intelligence (Luskin 1990) or pre-adulthood socialization (Highton 2009). On the other hand, controlling for level of urbanity will allow to assess whether urban integration in Greece has an influence on political knowledge.

In Model B, political interest¹³ and party identification¹⁴ are added to the initial model. The influence of political interest in levels of sophistication is straightforward: being interested in politics offers as a strong incentive for becoming politically sophisticated (Converse 1990, Luskin 1990, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). As for party identification, according to the much discussed ‘cognitive mobilization’ hypothesis (Dalton 1984, 2007), we would expect to find a negative association between partisanship and political expertise as

¹³ The item asks: ‘Generally speaking would you say that you are a lot/enough/not so much or not at all interested in politics?’. It was then recoded as a dummy variable.

¹⁴ The item asks: ‘May people feel close to a party even if they do not always vote for it. Do you personally feel closer to a party than the others?’.

the main function that party identification serves is to navigate the politically unsophisticated segments of the electorate in the complex political landscape. Yet, according to the theoretical framework discussed in Section 1, party identification may exert a counter influence on political sophistication in the Greek context: As party identification in Greece has a self-interest dimension and is associated with privileges in the allocation of resources by the state (the ‘bureaucratic clientelism’ thesis), it may in fact positively influence political learning processes, as the expected utility of political information will be higher to those who receive clientelistic benefits, namely the party members and activists. Table 6 reports the results of the two regression analyses.

Table 6: The Determinants of Political Sophistication in Greece

	Model A		Model B	
	b (s.e.)	Beta	b (s.e.)	Beta
Constant	10.85*** (0.87)		6.18*** (0.98)	
Age Cohort: 25-34 ^A	0.41 (0.70)	0.03	0.67 (0.67)	0.05
Age Cohort: 35-44 ^A	1.71** (0.69)	0.14	1.54** (0.66)	0.13
Age Cohort: 45-54 ^A	2.70*** (0.70)	0.21	2.39*** (0.67)	0.19
Age Cohort: 55-64 ^A	2.10** (0.71)	0.16	1.59** (0.68)	0.12
Age Cohort: 65 plus ^A	1.44* (0.70)	0.12	0.68 (0.67)	0.06
Female	-3.16*** (0.31)	-0.32	-2.50*** (0.31)	-0.25
College attendance	2.92*** (0.50)	0.19	2.42*** (0.48)	0.16
Lives in urban area ^B	0.18 (0.37)	0.02	0.16 (0.35)	0.02
Lives in semi-urban area ^B	-0.51 (0.50)	-0.04	-0.45 (0.47)	-0.03
Income Quartile	0.82*** (0.13)	0.22	0.69*** (0.13)	0.19
Interest in Politics			1.41*** (0.18)	0.26
Party identification			0.63* (0.33)	0.06
Adj. R ²	0.25		0.32	
N		777		

*Entries in the first column of each model are unstandardized linear regression coefficients with their standard error in parentheses. Entries in the second column are standardized Betas. Income quartile is an interval variable ranging from 1 to 8. A: Reference group is age cohort 15-24. B: Reference group is living in a rural area: ***: $p < 0.001$, **: $p < 0.05$, *: $p < 0.1$.*

The regression analysis suggests that levels of political sophistication in Greece are positively influenced by the level of income and education, as is the case in other countries. Moreover, being a woman is negatively associated with political knowledge even after controlling for a number of socioeconomic variables. As was the case with the descriptive analysis, older age cohorts appear significantly more sophisticated compared to the younger generations with the exception of those who are over 65 years old¹⁵. As we mentioned earlier this finding could be attributed to generational characteristics as people who had their impressionable years during the politically stimulating periods of 1960s, 1970s and 1980s appear more knowledgeable than younger voters. Still, this needs to be further assessed with time-series data as the current analysis cannot take into account changes in political knowledge due to life-cycle effects. Finally, urbanity is not a significant predictor of political knowledge. In Model B, political interest and party identification are added to the initial model. Results show a positive influence of political interest in levels of sophistication, a finding that has been highlighted in previous surveys (Luskin 1990, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Identifying with a political party is positively associated with political sophistication, even though the coefficient is significant at the 0.1 level and the effect should be treated with some caution. Still this finding signifies a paradoxical association between party identification and political knowledge, which is against the premises of the cognitive mobilization hypothesis and should be attributed to the clientelistic nature of party identification in Greece.

Conclusion

One of the most common findings across the Atlantic is that the broad public does not hold much information over political affairs. In this paper, I argued that the pattern of minimal knowledge that has been systematically reported in the case of the United States cannot be considered as an inherent or rational consequence of democracy regardless of national characteristics. I drew on an analytical political sophistication questionnaire to demonstrate that contrary to the ideal type of the rationally ignorant voter, the Greek public appears relatively informed over political affairs. I argued that the main explanation behind this paradoxical pattern lies in the macrohistorical and persistent clientelistic character of the Greek political system that increases the expected utility for acquiring political information.

¹⁵ When age is entered as a continuous variable in the model it yields a positive and significant coefficient ($b = 0.03$, $p < 0.05$) with no noteworthy changes in the effects of the other variables.

In the case of Greece, where political involvement is associated with a narrower sense of private interest compared to the rest of Western European democracies, the value of political information increases. This argument was strengthened by the fact that political identification has a positive influence on levels of political sophistication. Nonetheless, the overall trend of a politically sophisticated public in Greece masks significant individual-level variation. The knowledge gaps between different segments of the population are theoretically predictable, resembling the equivalent gaps found in the United States and elsewhere. Consequently, even though in Greece the general political knowledge average is high, political knowledge appears significantly higher among men, people from higher socioeconomic classes and the middle aged.

The finding that the Greek public appears relatively well-informed over politics challenges the assumption over the universality of the ignorant voter that has been repeatedly observed in the United States. Is however Greece merely a unique exception? Based on the findings of this research we could hypothesize that political systems based on clientelism (although may be associated with factors that hinder the acquisition of political knowledge such as low educational enrollment) increases the expected utility of political information that in turn leads to increased levels of political expertise among the mass electorate. At a more general level, this survey points to the conclusion that macrohistorical characteristics of political culture condition the aggregate distribution of political sophistication. The macro-level characteristics that bear an impact of political culture may reflect mentalities, nation-building ideological accounts, religious outlooks, worldviews, social values, kinship relations or particular forms of social organization, which contribute to the formation of longstanding linkages between the citizenry and politicians. In their classic study ‘The Civic Culture’ (1963), Almond and Verba investigate the influence of the national historical experience and social structure on a wide series of attitudes related to the quality of a democratic system. Among other attitudes, the authors linked considerable variation in political cognition¹⁶ among different nations to their distinct historical experience (p. 45-62). Future research could extend to an assessment of differences in levels of political sophistication along with a typology of historical experience. In any case, exploring the impact of macrohistorical effects in aggregate levels of political knowledge would add to our understanding of the concept of political sophistication as well as the dynamics of mass publics’ political behavior.

¹⁶ Political cognition was measured by items asking respondents to identify national party leaders and cabinet offices.

APPENDIX

Table A.1: Content and format of the Political Knowledge Scale

Item number	Item Content	political actors	Ideology and understanding	political history	institutional processes	open-ended	location item	Multiple Choice
a_1	Office held by Yiannis Panagopoulos	✓				✓		
a_2	Office Held by Yiannis Ragousis	✓				✓		
a_3	Office Held by Jose Baroso	✓				✓		
a_4	Office Held by Jaser Arafat	✓		✓		✓		
a_5	Office Held by Margaret Thatcher	✓		✓		✓		
a_6	Office Held by Ronald Reagan	✓		✓		✓		
a_7	Office Held by Gordon Brown	✓				✓		
a_8	Barrack Obama party ID	✓				✓		
a_9	Evangelos Venizelos party ID	✓				✓		
a_{10}	Evangelos Averof party ID	✓		✓		✓		
a_{11}	Name Greek EU Commissioner	✓				✓		
a_{12}	Name Greek Finance Minister	✓				✓		
a_{13}	Why did Magginas resign	✓				✓		
a_{14}	Name parties in parliament				✓	✓		

a_{15}	Specify length of government term				✓	✓		
a_{16}	Minimum number of MPs for formation of government				✓	✓		
a_{17}	Name year democracy was restored in Greece			✓		✓		
a_{18}	Place four political actors from left to right		✓				✓	
a_{19}	Describe what 'neo-liberalism' means		✓			✓		
a_{20}	Describe what 'mixed name' is		✓			✓		
a_{21}	Communists are more in favor of state intervention		✓					✓
a_{22}	Coalition of the Left are more in favor of state intervention		✓					✓
a_{23}	'New Democracy' are more in favor of free-trade economy		✓					✓

Note: For the item a_{18} I considered responses with the order 'Tsipras (SYRIZA), Papandreou (PASOK), Karamanlis (New Democracy), Karatzaferis (LAOS)' as correct, in alignment with Zaller's suggestions over the measurement of placement of actors and parties (1992, p. 338). Luskin and Bullock (2005) suggest that the most efficient way is to judge by the absolute placement of political actors and parties. Contrary to Luskin and Bullock I consider a response that, for example, places these respondents in positions 1,2,3,4 on the left right scale respectively as correct. The reason for following the relative rather than the absolute placement is the objective difficulty of placing the socialist party PASOK (and hence George Papandreou) which has a recent radical socialist past and the then conservative prime minister Kostas Karamanlis who systematically tried during his campaign to denounce his party's right wing past and appear as a middle of the road political leader (see Vasilopoulos and Vernardakis 2011).

Coding of the dependent variable: Respondents received one point for answering correctly and 0 when giving a false or 'don't know' answer. An exception was made for item a_{19} where

respondents were coded ‘0’ in the cases where they gave false or incoherent answers and ‘1’ in the cases where participants realized that ‘neo-liberalism’ is a sort of policy but were unable to give any further description. Finally, respondents were coded ‘2’ if their answer showed an understanding of the term i.e. in the cases where participants recognized neoliberalism being a political platform stressing the superiority of free markets over any form of political control and sees markets as deliverers of fairness and economic justice (see Haywood 2007, p. 52). In the few cases (N=12) where respondents gave evaluative answers political sophistication levels were not calculated.

Coding and summary statistics of the political knowledge scale: The total political knowledge score was calculated by adding up all items. Table A.2 presents the summary statistics.

Table A.2.: Summary Statistics of the Political Knowledge Scale

N	Valid	1151
	Missing	48
Mean		14,62
Median		15,00
Std. Deviation		4,92
Variance		24,20
Range		24,00

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