

# **Young People, Postmaterialism and Online Political Activism: The Greek Case**

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Yannis Theocharis

PhD candidate

Department of Political Science, University College London

Email: [i.theocharis@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:i.theocharis@ucl.ac.uk)

## ABSTRACT

Research on political participation has suggested that young people in western countries have become gradually disengaged from conventional politics. While traditional repertoires of participation have been declining, recent research also found that young people are relatively active in civic arenas and have become more prone to engage in extra-institutional forms of political participation. One of the contributing factors to this change in political participation preferences is the rise of postmaterialist values. According to postmaterialist theory, young people brought up in periods of high economic and physical security, surrounded by better chances for education, are more likely to prioritise values such as freedom, self-expression and quality of life, rather than values related to physical sustenance and safety. Internet researchers have reported that Internet users are mainly young, well educated and affluent, thus denoting a similarity to the demographic characteristics of postmaterialists. This article presents evidence regarding the existence of postmaterialist values in the online realm attempting to contribute to the debate about how postmaterialism influences online and offline political activity. The author takes Greece as a case study, a European country with a rich partisan culture, compulsory voting, growing development and increasing rate of Internet penetration. The article also examines the relationship between offline and online extra-institutional activity and cultural values. It presents evidence showing that young people in Greece display a postmaterialist orientation and are keen in participating in extra-institutional types of political activity. The results also demonstrate that postmaterialism is positively related to both offline and online extra-institutional political participation.

## INTRODUCTION

The pervasive decline of voter turnout, party membership and social capital among contemporary youth has been at the front line of the discussion about political disengagement (Dalton, 1996; Franklin, 2004; Putnam, 2000). Yet a body of research can be critiqued on the grounds that it fails to consider a rise in alternative types of political engagement such as participation in social movements and civil society in general (Della Porta & Tarrow, 2005; Meyer & Tarrow, 1998; Zukin et al., 2006). The rise of “protest politics” is believed to be stimulated by a rise in young people’s value priorities from materialistic to postmaterialistic. Inglehart’s theory of postmaterialism argues that increasing security about survival needs caused a shift in people’s cultural values allowing them to have more energy to invest in quality of life concerns (Inglehart, 1990). Postmaterialistic issues are not limited to quality of life concerns and a growing interest in humanitarian, environmental, lesbian and gay rights issues have also been reported (Inglehart, 1990; Norris, 2002). Norris (2002) has presented evidence showing that protest is stronger in established democracies and affluent postindustrial societies rather than poorer nations. Research has also discovered that young, financially secure, and well educated people are keener to participate in protest activities (Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Dalton, 2007; Norris, 2002).

At the same time, the diffusion of the Internet has generated interest in its application to democratic politics, due to its potential to foster wider and more effective participation in public affairs. Political communication research has demonstrated the Internet’s potential to complement social capital (Klein, 1999; Shah, et al., 2001; Wellman et al., 2001), public engagement with the parliament (Coleman, 2004) and extra-institutional political participation

(Bennet, 2003; Chadwick, 2006; Norris, 2001). Although research has begun to understand the democratic capabilities of the Internet, few studies have considered the existence and possible impact of postmaterialist values on offline and online political participation. Norris (2001) suggested that if the Internet culture reflects postmaterialist values, this could provide a sympathetic environment for alternative social movements sympathetic to these values and potentially shape the values and behaviours of young people growing up surrounded by this technology. Research in the US has found that Internet users display some features of postmaterialism (Hill & Hughes, 1998; Norris, 2001). So far however, there has been no in-depth research on “online postmaterialism” in the US or in Europe.

This article contributes to the debate about young people’s disengagement and the rise of extra-institutional politics by presenting evidence from Greece, a fast developing European country that has been through vibrant social and political changes since 1974 (Stathakopoulos, 2001). Certain factors such as compulsory voting, intense infiltration of partisan culture in society (Mouzelis, 2008), and lack of a developed civil society (Mouzelis, 2008) make Greece an attractive case. The fact that young Greeks are growing up in a country with such a strong partisan culture and compulsory voting, makes the observation of the possible abandonment of traditional activism and the turn to protest activity more striking. Furthermore, observation of the process of avoiding traditional politics and adopting elite-challenging repertoires in a heavily partisan framework, can offer notable remarks about the future of party politics and democracy. Indeed the results show that young Greeks are more likely to participate in extra-institutional activities rather than traditional ones. In addition, according to a recent survey (Eurobarometer, 2008), Greeks have been reported to be particularly materialistic and moderately pleased with their quality of life. The observable existence of materialism in the Greek public makes the discovery of possible postmaterialistic trends among the young people attractive, as evidence pointing towards that direction would indicate that extra-institutional trends are not necessarily related to postmaterialism. Nonetheless, data gathered from dissemination of questionnaires to 477 young people in the two biggest urban centers of Greece, show that young people are more likely to display postmaterialistic values, and that postmaterialism maintains a modest positive relation to extra-institutional activity. Considering the difficulty of defining online political behaviour and the lack of longitudinal data about online postmaterialism, this article examines the presence of postmaterialism in the Greek online space. Furthermore, the possible relationship between postmaterialism and online extra-institutional participation is investigated too. The general conclusion of this research is that Greek online community leans weakly towards a postmaterialistic agenda which is positively related to online extra-institutional activity.

## **DEBATING THE DECLINE OF TRADITIONAL POLITICS AND THE RISE OF EXTRA-INSTITUTIONAL PARTICIPATION**

A sizeable body of research has suggested that in the late twentieth century, young people became particularly disillusioned with the major institutions of representative democracy, leaving them apathetic and alienated (Dalton, 1996; Franklin, 2004; Furnham & Gunter, 1987; Mardle & Taylor, 1987; Miller & Shanks, 1996; Park, 1995; Putnam, 2000). Debate on political disengagement largely revolves around three core issues: the decline of electoral turnout (Franklin, 2004), the decline of parties as membership organizations (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Lawson & Merkl, 1988) and the erosion of social capital (Putnam, 2000). Yet, all of these standpoints have been criticized on the ground that they adopt a demand-side perspective,

whereas actual problems also rest heavily on the politicians, and therefore the supply side (Hay, 2007). Stoker (2006) suggested that explanations for political disaffection should take into consideration a wide range of approaches ranging from those adopting a demand side perspective to those adopting a supply side and praise “critical citizens” (Norris, 2005). Globalisation and its importance to the changing environment for democratic politics should also be considered as a decisive factor (Giddens, 2002).

It is, however, unclear whether the trends considered above, give a complete description of young people’s political activity. Another wave of researchers suggest that while traditional political participation is in decline, there is an increase in extra-institutional forms of participation. Indeed, Inglehart and Welzel (2005) and Norris (2002) contended that bureaucratized and elite-directed forms of participation such as voting and political party membership have declined but “elite-challenging” forms of participation have risen. Topf (1995) also found that while electoral turnout had remained stable, with an exception of the fall in the younger part of citizens, forms of political participation beyond voting had been noticeably rising, especially among the younger generation of well educated citizens, a view also shared by Klingemann (1999). Tarrow (2000) found a radical increase in social movement participation and argued that volunteerism and networks of social activists have risen in modern societies, while Beck (1992) referred to this social movement activity as the emergence of “sub politics”, meaning politics that have migrated away from parliaments towards single-issue groups in the society. Furthermore, Rucht (1998) found that the volume of protests has been rising significantly since 1950, ranging from violent to conventional ones. Evidence about a significant increase in protest activity in Europe has also been discovered by Della Porta & Reiter (1998) and Van Aelst & Walgrave (2001), even though recent evidence suggest that collectivistic forms of participation (such as protest) have declined, and more individualistic forms (such as boycotting products) have come to the fore (Stoker, 2006).

A plausible explanation for this rise of extra-institutional politics comes from modernization theorists (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Inglehart and Welzel (2005) and Inglehart (1990) suggested that high economic security and higher chances for education contributed to young people’s increase of political skills making them more critical towards the political arena. Inglehart (1990) also suggested that conditions of economic security influenced young peoples’ core value priorities making them keen on giving heavier emphasis on self-expression, and quality of life issues, instead of giving top priority on physical sustenance and safety (Inglehart, 1971; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Furthermore, Barnes and Kaase (1979) found that elite-challenging forms of political action were strongly correlated to postmaterialist values. According to Inglehart (1990), postmaterialist values played a crucial role in the rise of the wave of the new social movements and extra-institutional activism, although the emergence of these values has not been the sole factor involved. This process also reflects the changing nature of social capital which, contrary to what Putnam supports, has not eroded but has taken a new form, leading to changing types of collective action (Norris 2002). While this view of “critical citizens”, has been heavily supported by empirical evidence, (WVS, 1990; WVS, 1995; WVS, 2000) it has nevertheless been criticized for adopting a demand side perspective (Hay, 2007).

This article further examines the development of cultural values, and the rise of protest politics and attempts to contribute to the debate. Postmaterialism has been considered to have influenced the rise of extra-institutional participation and therefore a possible relationship between the two will be examined. Integrating the above thinking, the article initially monitors

whether young Greeks are sympathetic towards postmaterialist values by examining the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: Young people are more likely to present a postmaterialist orientation rather than a materialist one.*

To examine the shift in young people's political participation preferences the article examines the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2: Extra-institutional activities are more popular among young people than conventional activities.*

To further examine the relationship between postmaterialism and extra-institutional activity this article puts into test the following third hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between postmaterialism and extra-institutional participation.*

### **INTERNET POLITICS, POSTMATERIALIST VALUES AND EXTRA-INSTITUTIONAL PARTICIPATION**

Since the Internet first became available in the early 1990s, a large literature on cyberculture and the Internet's potential on fostering political participation started to develop. Optimistic views, suggested that the Internet provides a distinctive structure of opportunities with the potential to revive civic engagement (Dertouzos, 1998; Negreponce, 1995; Rheingold, 1993) and possibly even mobilize those previously inactive (Krueger, 2002). Communication with a large number of people across time and geographic boundaries has been reported as one of the biggest benefits of the Internet (Castells, 2001). Additionally, surfing and searching through Web sites makes it easier for someone to identify other individuals with common political interests and create links with social networks online, increasing one's social capital (Lin, 2001; Shah et al., 2001; Wellman et al., 2001). More critical approaches, however, suggested that whilst more information is undeniably available, one has to be knowledgeable and politically motivated to find information online in the first place (Hill & Hughes, 1998; Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Prior, 2007), while others reported only weak evidence about the Internet's effect on civic engagement (Bimber, 2003; Hindman, 2009; Jennings & Zeitner, 2003).

The Internet constitutes a new social space that is filled by dynamic interaction between different groups and organizations as Eyerman and Jamison (1991) note. It can be seen as a foundational medium for civil society and the informal public sphere. In particular, the Internet, with its global reach, could be said to be of significance to social movement organizations to communicate, generate information, and distribute this information inexpensively and efficiently, allowing response and feedback (Norris, 2002; Salter, 2003). Since the 1990s, there has been growing discussion about Internet activism and how media have been used effectively by a variety of political and social movements (Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Pickerill, 2001; Pickerill 2004). Norris (2002) suggested that although protest movements have traditionally relied upon activities such as street theatre and public demonstrations, the Internet has changed this dynamic by digitally promoting the diffusion of protest ideas and tactics quickly and effectively across

national borders. The influence that Internet can have on the debate about the decline of traditional politics and the rise of extra-institutional activism, is explored throughout this article.

Internet studies in the US provide partial support for the claim that a more liberal culture can be found online. Research conducted during late nineties shows that the online US population tended to be slightly more liberal towards equal rights, less supportive of traditional lifestyles and families, more interested in government and public affairs and with stronger than average levels of political efficacy (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 167). Research also found that Internet political activists were significantly more liberal than the general public on issues such as censorship and homosexuality, as well as being slightly more antigovernment in orientation than the rest of society (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 32). Furthermore, results from the Eurobarometer (1999, 2007b), show that the online community in Europe does lean more strongly toward a more progressive agenda, reflecting the values of cosmopolitanism and participatory democracy. Finally, in a recent study, Hindman (2009, p. 25), found that the liberal -conservative gap is indeed a feature of contemporary online political landscape.

Extant research has not explored a possible positive relationship between online postmaterialist orientations and a well-educated, extra-institutionally oriented youth. Research on Internet demographics indicates that Internet users are considerably younger, wealthier and have a much higher level of education than the general public (Eurobarometer, 1999; Hill & Hughes, 1998; Hindman, 2009; Norris, 2001; Norris, 2002; Pew Report, 2001 as cited in Norris, 2001, p. 212; Ward et al., 2003). Norris suggested that this evidence indicate a population that fits the precise profile that should prove sympathetic to postmaterialist values (Norris, 2001, p. 200). Aiming to integrate this assertion to the study of postmaterialism, this article attempts to confirm that the online space under research is more likely to be populated by postmaterialists rather than materialists, by examining the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 4: Young Internet users are more likely to display a postmaterialist orientation rather than a materialist one.*

Extant research connects postmaterialism with, the more popular among the youth, extra-institutional participation and finds a positive relationship. Accordingly, to examine if these assertions also apply in the online space, this article tests the following two hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 5: Online extra-institutional activities are more popular among the youth than online conventional activities.*

*Hypothesis 6: There is a positive relationship between postmaterialism and online extra-institutional participation.*

Finally, the article presents evidence regarding the relationship between online and offline extra-institutional participation.

*Hypothesis 7: There is a positive relationship between extra-institutional participation and online extra institutional participation.*

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

### *Method and Sampling*

This study endeavoured to cover the general attitudes towards extra-institutional participation and postmaterialism and has to be considered as exploratory. The study used a non-probability sample<sup>1</sup> and any person was eligible to fill out the questionnaire as long as they had Greek nationality and belonged to the study's target population. The dissemination of questionnaires took place in the cities Athens and Thessaloniki from June to September of 2008. Questionnaires were disseminated to 500 individuals in various suburbs<sup>2</sup> in order to assure the highest diversity possible. The rejection rate was 4.6% and consequently 477 questionnaires were eventually accumulated. Having taken place in the two largest urban centres of Greece, one might think that bias may significantly influence the conclusions. The author, however, carried out the study in urban centres on purpose, as according to the National Statistical Service of Greece (ESYE, 2009) there is a significant digital divide<sup>3</sup> between central and peripheral areas of Greece and therefore studying peripheral areas would significantly diminish the online exploration of postmaterialism. Evidence presented on a recent study classifying 50.6% of the young people, residents in urban areas in Greece, as the most active Internet users, also contributed to this decision (Demertzis et al., 2008). Finally, based on the same study, patterns of Internet use among young people in urban and rural areas hardly present striking differences (Demertzis et al., 2008). Studying users living in major cities would therefore not considerably disfigure the observations.

This study chooses its target age group of young people<sup>45</sup> according to its relevance with the concepts under research. These are the examination of extra institutional activity, postmaterialist values and Internet usage. There is no recent evidence examining which political participation repertoires are more popular among young Greeks. With respect to the existence of cultural values, according to the Eurobarometer (2008), those who mostly fit in the mixed (postmaterialists and materialists combined) and postmaterialist categories are those who belong in the 15-24 category. Moreover, Demertzis et al., (2008), found that 50.6% of young people who live in urban areas are active Internet users, with the age group 15 – 29 being the most frequent computer and Internet users. As a consequence, the age group of 15 to 29 was selected as the target population of this study. Moreover, target population and the sample size (470 people) are analogous (and therefore can promote some level of comparability) to both WVS and ESS, conforming with Fowler's (2001) and Fink's (2006) recommendation that any study should explore thoroughly previous relevant case studies and survey designs and attempt to draw conclusions in samples with similar characteristics. The selection of the specific age group, allowed a flexible dichotomisation to smaller ones, encouraging comparability of assumptions with studies that make use of the more commonly researched 15-24 group (Bennet, 2007; Dalton, 2007; Iyengar & Jackman 2003; Loader, 2007).

### *Case Selection*

It is worth noting that in depth studies about online political participation and the existence of cultural values in Greece are absent, as Greece has not been included in the World Values Survey (WVS) since 1999 and in the European Social Survey (ESS) since 2004. Therefore, evidence is necessary in order to enrich the contemporary picture of this European country. Greece has experienced many institutional and vibrant socio-political changes since the fall of the junta regime in 1974 (Stathakopoulos, 2001). Since its integration to the European

Union, it has made important steps with regard to its development and it is considered one of the fastest developing countries in Europe with a 360,0 GDP per capita according to the World Bank (2008). In addition, it has an increasing (19% in 2006, 22% in 2007) amount of Internet users (Eurobarometer, 2007a), but these are still among the lowest in the European Union. In the 2008 Eurobarometer study, it was suggested that the economic crisis and concerns about the future have had an impact on the priorities of Europeans, who seem to be turning their attention to more material concerns. With respect to cultural values, Greece is reported to be among the countries with the highest number of people selecting materialist preferences as a top priority (Eurobarometer, 2008, p. 63). Inglehart once described Greece as “by far the poorest country among the eleven societies surveyed in 1979-1983” and the Greek public as having “by far the highest level of support for nationalization of industry, more government management of the economy and reducing income inequality” (Inglehart, 1990, p. 254). This quotation indicates that the materialistic trends recently observed by the Eurobarometer in Greece persist through time. Despite the domination of materialist beliefs however, the Eurobarometer study found that the younger the respondents are and the longer they have studied for, then the more likely is for them to be classified in the postmaterialist group.

Assertions about materialistic trends among Greeks make the in-depth examination of cultural values challenging. If young Greeks are found to be postmaterialists, then postmaterialism is more likely to be a life cycle phenomenon and not a generational, as examination through time (Inglehart, 1990; Eurobarometer, 2008) shows that materialistic trends in Greece clearly persist since the late seventies. Moreover, if postmaterialism amongst Greek youth does not suggest any relationship with extra-institutional activity, then one has to be sceptical about how influential a factor postmaterialism is for young peoples’ turn to extra-institutional politics. Finally, the absence of extensive Internet use in Greece may indicate that those who populate the online space of Greece are initially those who can afford it, which logically leads to those with wealthy and probably well educated profiles.

### ***Offline Political Participation Measurement***

This research is examining general trends in extra-institutional activism and postmaterialism and therefore research method other than questionnaire dissemination to large publics could hardly display the wide pool of attitudes desired. With respect to conventional repertoires of political engagement, much of the traditional literature on political participation has focused extensively upon the original typology developed by Verba and Nie (1972) in the early seventies, while the repertoires developed by Barnes and Kaase (1979) still consist of the main research tool for studying extra-institutional activism (ESS, 2002; ESS, 2004; WVS, 1990; WVS, 1995). This study uses the classic battery of questions developed by Verba and Nie (1972) and Barnes and Kaase (1979). Apart from the classic questionnaire items, a selection of Thomassen’s item suggestions for the second round of the ESS, has been added for the examination of extra-institutional activity (ESS, 2004). The ESS and WVS have studied cultural values in the past, and consist of a good source for the examination of secondary data. These two large scale studies, however, cannot provide a source of data collection for this study due to lack of recent evidence regarding Greece. Furthermore, with regard to political attitudes, contrary to the dataset used by this study, these studies do not employ a large, diverse and unambiguous<sup>6</sup> battery of questions raising therefore problems of validity, whilst repertoires of online traditional and online extra-institutional political participation are nearly absent. All twelve questions on extra-institutional activism used in this study, were recoded and merged into a twelve point variable with a variation



from those uninterested in participating in extra-institutional activities, to the extra-institutional activists. This variable will be referred to as the “political activism variable”.

### ***Online Political Participation Measurement***

Although research on online behaviour has long debated Internet’s potential in influencing political participation, few studies have simultaneously analysed online political participation repertoires. Question items for this study have, therefore, been created with initial reference to the offline political participation repertoires developed by Verba and Nie (1972). A limited number of questions capturing some dimension of online political activity can be detected in studies such as the US ‘Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy, Survey Project’ (2005) and the Eurobarometer (2007b) and therefore, the rest of the question items used in this article, were influenced or complemented by them.

With the exception of Vegh’s (2003) development of online political participation repertoires, online extra-institutional activities such as provoking political action through a discussion forum, have not received much attention. The most logical conversion of extra-institutional repertoires into the online realm would be a conversion of Barnes and Kaase’s items, when this is possible. This conversion, however, has not been yet implemented and as a result introduces a methodological problem that has to be addressed if Internet research is to continue exploring and comparing online non-conventional repertoires of political participation. As in the case of online conventional participation, this study develops question items with reference to the respective offline repertoires. Some of the question items were developed according to the repertoires developed by Barnes and Kaase (1979), while the rest of them according to the distinction of online extra-institutional political participation modes by Vegh (2003). All ten questions on online extra-institutional activism were recoded and merged into one ten point variable with variation from those who never pursue online extra-institutional activity to online extra-institutional activists. This variable will be referred to as the “online political activism” variable.

### ***Cultural Values Measurement***

“Cultural values” is an umbrella-term embracing materialist and postmaterialist values. Materialist values emphasise ‘conservative’ issues such as economic and physical security while postmaterialist values emphasise progressive issues such as self-expression, subjective well-being and the quality of life. To examine cultural values, the WVS developed a very large questionnaire<sup>7</sup>. Some of the questions used in the WVS have been adopted by the Eurobarometer either with the same or slightly different wording. The size of this study was much smaller than a WVS or a Eurobarometer one and adopting their full battery of questions on cultural values would significantly increase the size of the questionnaire. This was not desired as apart from cultural values, the questionnaire of this study questionnaire examined a vast selection of online and offline political participation repertoires too. However, for matters of consistency and comparability, the same wording has been used for the sixteen questions that were selected for this case. All questions have been merged and built up as a sixteen point variable with a variation from materialism to postmaterialism. This variable will be referred to as the “cultural values” variable.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Postmaterialism and Political Participation in the Offline Realm*

The most commonly used measure of the postmaterialism concept is based upon a choice among four goals developed by Inglehart (1990, p. 74). These are: maintain order in the nation, give people more say, fight rising prices and protect freedom of speech. This basic battery has been used in more than 40 countries since 1970 showing a gradual increase in postmaterialist values based on time-series evidence (Abramson & Inglehart, 1995). Despite being simple, Inglehart found that the measurement of values through these four goals is valid. (Abramson & Inglehart, 1995, p. 10). Inglehart (1990) and Abramson and Inglehart (1995) frequently use a three point scale to position publics according to their cultural values. This three point scale divides people in materialists, mixed, and postmaterialists. In this article, the materialist/postmaterialist dimension is presented in a five point scale aiming to “discharge” the mixed category. By employing this analytic approach, this study also gains insight in the existing trends towards materialism and postmaterialism. As a result, the five point scale was comprised of materialists, those leaning towards materialism, mixed, those leaning towards Postmaterialism and postmaterialists. The results are presented in table 1 (please consult the Tables section).

According to these findings, young Greeks display neither an extreme materialist nor an extreme postmaterialist orientation. There are no pure materialists, while those leaning towards materialism consist of a marginal 2.6% of the sample. Pure postmaterialists hold a minimal position too, being only 25 (5.5%). The mixed category predominates with 48.9%, and it is only when looking at the 43% of those leaning towards postmaterialism that one can validate the trend towards postmaterialism. The trend observed here confirms the first hypothesis that suggests that young people are more likely to display a postmaterialist orientation rather than a materialist one. Female postmaterialists were slightly more than male and postmaterialism was found to have a weak but statistically significant relationship with educational attainment. Income did not display any significant correlation with postmaterialism. These findings contradict Eurobarometer’s (2008) findings regarding the materialist priorities of the Greeks. According to the Eurobarometer, the Greek public is deeply concerned and disappointed with unemployment, the economy, the cost of living, energy prices and quality of life, hence displaying highly materialistic values. Nevertheless, in contrast to the general sample of the Eurobarometer, the sample here consists only of young people and the latter are expected to be more postmaterialistic even if the phenomenon of postmaterialism is explained as a life-cycle and not as a generational one (Abramson & Inglehart, 1995). In addition, this sample consisted of young citizens of the two major urban centers of Greece, a fact that renders them more likely to have received higher education than the average in the country (Demertzis et al., 2008). Finally, conceptually, the notion of postmaterialism was not examined only by the four question items developed by Inglehart, as in the Eurobarometer. Although the four items were also included, the battery of questions used in this questionnaire was a full sixteen questions battery covering many different cultural issues, and consequently capturing postmaterialism in a different and multidimensional way.

In this analysis, traditional political participation is explored in contrast to extra-institutional. Popularity of both types of political participation is represented in table 2 (please consult the tables section). The questionnaire employed seven traditional repertoires, and twelve extra-institutional ones developed according to the classic batteries initiated by Verba and Nie (1972) and Barnes and Kaase (1979) respectively. By comparing the means of both categories,

one finds that on average, traditional political repertoires are pursued by 33.5% of the sample while the respective extra-institutional ones are pursued by 41%. Moreover, if the act of voting is to be excluded due to its compulsory nature in Greece, the average participation in traditional repertoires drops to 16.44%, displaying a remarkable difference in comparison to the popularity of the extra-institutional ones. The trend is evident by looking the frequency by which acts such as demonstrating (50.7%), boycotting (59%), financially sponsoring ethical organization (51.1%), working for a political action group (23.2%) and challenging a politician (8.4%) are pursued, outmatching in popularity traditional activities such as contacting a politician (4.2%), sponsoring (6.3%) and working voluntarily for a political party (18.1%). Females were in general more likely to engage in both traditional and extra-institutional repertoires than males. There was no statistically significant relationship between gender and traditional political activity, but gender presented a weak statistically significant correlation with extra-institutional repertoires (Spearman's  $R = 0.134$ ,  $p < 0.0004$ ). Educational attainment<sup>8</sup> was positively associated with traditional and extra-institutional participation, substantiating a sizeable body of research that has highlighted the important relationship between educational attainment and political participation (Almond & Verba, 1963; Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Franklin, 2004; Parry et al., 1992). Income level<sup>9</sup>, presented a weak negative correlation with both traditional and extra-institutional activity, possibly because the majority of the sample were young people that either have not entered the job market or perhaps only worked part time. Either by considering the act of voting or not, the results show that extra-institutional repertoires are on average pursued more often, thus confirming the second hypothesis. Worth noting is that activities of collective character and high transaction costs such as demonstrating or occupying a building, are pursued by less people than activities such as signing petitions or boycotting products. This finding highlights Stoker's point according to which individualistic extra-institutional repertoires are becoming more popular (Stoker, 2006).

The results of young people's political participation trends show that they are more likely to participate in extra-institutional activities, while at the same time tend to be more postmaterialists rather than materialists. This asserts that postmaterialism possibly maintains a close relationship to the rising popularity of extra-institutional activity (Inglehart, 1990; Norris, 2001). The third hypothesis examines exactly this relationship between postmaterialism and extra-institutional participation. The materialist/postmaterialist scale was correlated with the political activism scale, and the two were found to have a positive moderately statistically significant correlation (Pearson's  $r = 0.303$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), thus confirming the third hypothesis. Based on this evidence extra-institutional activity is positively correlated with postmaterialism.

### ***Postmaterialism and Political Participation in the Online Realm***

The suspicion that the online community is likely to display an ideological orientation sympathetic to postmaterialist values was originally expressed by Norris, (2001). Norris approached the issue, warning about the methodological peculiarities of researching cultural values on the Internet and urging that future studies should look into the existence of postmaterialism in more depth. Research has not yet expanded to the online space. This article explored the possible existence of a postmaterialist culture online. The profile of Internet user was defined by those who have used the Internet for the last few years, at a minimum of once per week and who stay online for a minimum of thirty minutes<sup>10</sup>. By employing this profile, 85.7% (407 respondents) of the sample were characterized as Internet users. Female Internet users were more than male (218, in contrast to 189) and in their majority, Internet users had high school or

higher education degrees. Education was weakly, yet statistically significantly correlated with the Internet user profile (Pearson's  $r = 0.160$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Finally, income presented a negative statistically significant correlation with Internet use. This, again, is not to suggest that the Internet users under research had underprivileged backgrounds; rather the majority of the sample was too young to have entered the job market.

Furthermore, the Internet user scale was correlated with the materialist/postmaterialist one. The two variables were found to have a weak but statistically significant correlation (Spearman's  $r = 0.111$ ,  $p < 0.020$ ), confirming the fourth hypothesis which suggests that young Internet users are more likely to display a postmaterialist orientation rather than a materialist one. The relationship observed here, even though it is weak, perhaps indicates that postmaterialist values among young people are starting to make their presence observable in the online space too. A future exploration of the issue in larger samples and different national frameworks could perhaps eventually suggest that if a postmaterialist culture predominates in the offline space, then it possibly predominates in the online space too.

The fifth hypothesis assumes that young peoples' trend to participate in extra-institutional activities in the offline realm can also be identified online. Popularity of online traditional and extra-institutional activities is presented in table 3 (please consult the tables section). A comparison of the means of the two categories shown in table 3 indicates that online traditional activities are pursued on average by 10% of the Internet users. Moreover, online extra-institutional activities attract on average 36.3% of this category. This confirms the fifth hypothesis which assumes that online extra-institutional activities are more popular than the online traditional ones. Activities such as registering a preference in a political party's/ MP's online poll, doing online work for a party and registering with a politician's Web site accumulated very low percentages (17.6%, 2.9% and 4.1% respectively). On the contrary, online extra-institutional activities such as discussing challenging issues online, checking for posted information about protest and submitting news to independent news Web sites accumulated higher percentages (71.9%, 55.2% and 39.3% respectively). The results confirm the trend that portrays young people as unimpressed by governmental or political party Web sites (Bessant, 2004; Gerodimos, 2008; Segall, 2005; Smith et al., 2005), while at the same time being much more attracted by issue oriented ones (Gerodimos, 2008; Jackson, 2003; Pickerill, 2001).

Subsequent to the findings on online political attitudes presented above, this article examined whether postmaterialism is also correlated with online extra-institutional activism, possibly continuing the offline trend. If postmaterialism maintains a close relationship to the online aspect of extra-institutional activity too, the argument that presents postmaterialism as an essential quality of extra-institutional activism becomes even more persuasive. The relationship between postmaterialism and both offline and online extra-institutional activity, could strengthen the argument that presents postmaterialism as a contributing factor to the rising popularity of extra-institutional activity. This study examined extra-institutional activity in the online realm and found that postmaterialism maintained a positive relationship with online extra-institutional activity. The two variables displayed a moderate statistically significant correlation (Pearson's  $R = 0.316$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), a finding that confirms the sixth hypothesis.

Several Internet studies have reported that those who mostly make political use of the Internet are those who already have an interest in politics (Gerodimos, 2008; Hill & Hughes, 1998; Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Prior, 2007). This study suggests that there are many aspects and repertoires of online political involvement that still require clear conceptualization. It is not within this article's scope to discuss about whether intense extra-

institutional political engagement is a predictor of online extra-institutional political activity. Nevertheless, this article examines whether any relationship between the offline and online aspect of extra-institutional activity exists. To further examine this relationship, extra-institutional participation was correlated with its online dimension. The two were found to be positively correlated, indicating a strong, statistically significant relationship (Pearson's  $r = 0.540$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Worth noting is that offline traditional participation was also found to be positively correlated and moderately statistically significant with its online dimension (Pearson's  $r = 0.323$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Even though, based on these results, one cannot in any case reach into causal conclusions, it is visible that political activity in general, maintains a strong link with its online political aspect.

## DISCUSSION

This article explored the development of postmaterialism in the offline and online space of Greece and presented a fresh insight about the relationship of postmaterialism with the rising popularity in extra-institutional repertoires and the abandonment of traditional ones. This is a political action study that employs new and old political participation repertoires, aiming to capture the largest dimension of political participation possible, and deeply understand its significance and extensive use by the Greek youth. Based on the evidence presented in this article, there is a trend by young people to display a postmaterialist orientation, accompanied by a large disinterest in traditional forms of political participation (excluding the voting act which is compulsory) and a distinctive preference towards extra-institutional ones. These findings strengthen the argument presented by a substantial body of literature which, contrary to those who regard young people as apathetic viewers of contemporary politics, presents young people as having changed their political participation preferences towards an extra-institutional direction (Dalton, 2007; Inglehart, 1990; Norris, 2002; Zukin et al., 2006). Moreover, postmaterialism was found to be positively correlated with Internet use and both extra-institutional activity and its online dimension. This finding reinforces the arguments about the existence of a more liberal (Hindman, 2009) and postmaterialist (Norris, 2001) culture in the online space.

Based on these results, the article suggests that there are trails of a distinctive postmaterialist culture online that matches the characteristics of the respective offline one. If research on online postmaterialism confirms these trends in countries with higher Internet penetration, then this might suggest that young people are likely to be more influenced by a postmaterialist culture, especially as the Internet becomes an inextricable part of their everyday life. The article argues that postmaterialism is a contributing factor to Greek young peoples' choice to participate more in extra-institutional activities rather than traditional ones. The fact that a relationship between postmaterialism and extra-institutional activism continues to exist when one moves into the online realm, strengthens the argument that postmaterialism is indeed a contributing factor in the rise of extra-institutional activity.

Postmaterialism is only one of the contributing factors towards a rise in protest politics. In the case of Greece, other decisive factors such as the lack of a developed civil society that could function as a vehicle for communication with the government invite young people to the protest politics arena too (Mouzelis, 2008). As Mouzelis (2008) supports, the trend of political parties to invade in every institution of the country (from professional unions and sport clubs to universities), undermining their autonomous logic and values, has eroded all the intermediary mechanisms between citizens and the government, leaving no other option to young people than

fight their way through the extra-institutional arena. There is, therefore, no unequivocal indication about how small or large a role postmaterialism plays in the practice of offline and online extra-institutional activity and discovering the causal relation between the two is a question that needs further research. Furthermore, the evidence of an online postmaterialist culture remain limited in Europe and consequently further research in online political attitudes has to be pursued, especially because, as it has been supported, some gaps between the “haves” and the “have nots” have narrowed (Dijk, 2005; Katz, et al, 2001). Future research should trace the development of online postmaterialism and its relationship to political participation with various methodologies. Value change through time which can be observed only by time series data and consists of a foundational concept in postmaterialist theory has to be incorporated as well as in-depth interviews about how young people’s offline and online political activities are influenced by postmaterialist beliefs.

Although this study used a different scale to measure postmaterialism as well as only young people to draw assumptions, hence differentiating itself from the scope and population of the Eurobarometer, one has to interpret the findings carefully. 18 years ago, Inglehart stated that Greece was by far the poorest and one of the most materialist countries of a study that started in 1979. 29 years have passed since the beginning of that study and the Greek population is still reported to be among the most materialist in the European Union. Greece has made important developing steps since then and in large scale studies such as the Eurobarometer (2008), one would have expected to find, at least, an increased amount of postmaterialists. Abramson and Inglehart (2005, p. 101) warned that in periods of economic crisis, economic insecurity and high inflation rates, postmaterialistic values are less likely to flourish. It might therefore be the case that Greece has not yet moved to a period in which postmaterialist values will make their appearance as a generational effect. Consequently, young peoples’ postmaterialist attitudes reported in this study might also possibly be explained as pointing towards a life cycle effect rather than a generational.

## TABLES

*Table 1: Materialist/Postmaterialist Values among Greek Young People*

Materialist/Postmaterialist dimension	Frequency	Percent
Materialists	0	0
Leaning towards materialism	12	2,6
Mixed	223	48,9
Leaning towards postmaterialism	196	43
Postmaterialists	25	5,5

Source: Online and offline political activism in Greece, 2008

*Table 2: Popularity of Traditional and Extra-institutional Repertoires among 15-29 Years Old Greeks*

Traditional repertoires	Frequency	Percent	Extra-institutional repertoires	Frequency	Percent
Votes in general elections	400	84,4	Wore a badge to support challenging issue or		
Votes in local elections	388	82,2	cause	268	56,4
Tried to tell others how to vote	93	19,7	Joined in boycott	279	59
Worked voluntarily for a party	86	18,1	Signed a petition	266	55,9
Attended big or small political			Worked for political action group	110	23,2
meetings	160	33,9	Attended demonstrations	241	50,7
Financially sponsored political party	30	6,3	Financially sponsored ethical organization	243	51,1
Conventionally contacted politician	20	4,2	Contacted politician in a challenging way	40	8,4
			Contacted an NGO	141	29,6
			Systematically bought a product for ethical		
			reasons	348	73,1
			Accumulated money for a cause	152	32
			Participated in building occupation	176	37,1
			Participated in illegal protest activity	72	15,2

Source: Online and offline political activism in Greece, 2008



*Table 3 Popularity of Online Traditional and Online Extra-institutional Repertoires among 15 – 29 Years Old Greeks*

Online traditional repertoires	Frequency	Percent	Online extra-institutional repertoires	Frequency	Percent
Registered a preference in a party's/ government's/ PM's poll	72	17,6	Registered with an NGO's/ cause's website	70	17,1
Tried to influence the opinion of others using internet activities such as blogging, chatting, discussing on political forums	98	24	Occasionally or systematically visited blogs, chatrooms or forums to discuss about challenging issues (such as poverty, humanitarian, environmental)	293	71,9
Did online work for a political party (such as forwarding emails)	12	2,9	Participated in online discussions about challenging issues	93	22,8
Conventionally contacted online a PM/ Government official for information or policy suggestions	32	7,8	Occasionally or systematically visited websites related to challenging issues	330	81
Registered with a political party's/ MP's website	17	4,1	Occasionally or systematically checked for posted information about potential protests	225	55,2
Tried to recruit supporters for a political party through blogging, chatting or discussing in political forums.	17	4,1	Tried to call for offline action in support of a challenging issue using email, blog, forum or chatroom.	76	18,6
			Tried to call for online action (such as massive spamming) in support of a challenging issue using email, blog, forum or chatroom	129	31,6
			Tried to raise funds online for an organization or a cause	27	6,6
			Circulated online petition in support of challenging issues or causes	77	18,9
			Circulated online petition	77	18,9
			Occasionally or systematically submitted information to independent news websites such as indymedia.	160	39,3

Source: Online and offline political activism in Greece, 2008

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The author used non-probability sample because it was the only sampling method available to him.

<sup>2</sup> Areas of dissemination included cafeterias, train and coach stations, sports centres, shopping malls, universities, bookshops and parks.

<sup>3</sup> For an extensive discussion about the digital divide see Norris (2001).

<sup>4</sup> “Young people” is a term that introduces a conceptual problem as different studies consider different age groups as young people. One cannot decide whether youth is an objective measurable category or a subjective attribute related to the sense of belonging to a particular group of people, because there is no year, month or day that youth starts or ends. Oxford Dictionary refers to young as “having lived or existed for a short time and not old” while adult is considered “a person fully grown and developed”, two definitions hardly helpful for accurately describing young people with regard to age.

<sup>5</sup> Descriptive statistics of this study can be found in the Appendix.

<sup>6</sup> Research on political behaviour has extensively used the ESS as a source for studying political attitudes (for a recent example see Van Der Meer & Van Ingen, 2009). When it comes to questions about participation in traditional or extra-institutional activities however, questionnaire items used by the ESS raise significant problems of validity. For example, the ESS questionnaire (can be found at

[http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=63&Itemid=98](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=63&Itemid=98))

used in the fourth round, in order to identify political attitudes, asked: “There are different ways to improve things in [country] or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months have you done any of the following?

**Question B14:**...worked in a political party or action group?

**Question B16:**...worn or displayed a campaign badge or sticker?”

Both questions present problems of validity when it comes to distinguish between the types of action pursued.

Working for a political party is a political activity related to electoral and party politics and therefore a traditional one. Working for a political action group is an extra-institutional activity which is very often directed even against electoral and party politics. Wearing or displaying a sticker can also serve two completely different purposes. One can wear a sticker or a badge to support an electoral campaign, pursuing therefore a clearly traditional activity.

However, someone else can wear it in a campaign (or protest) against the government’s policies about immigrants, clearly pursuing an extra-institutional activity. In those cases, therefore, there is no clear indication about the nature of political activity pursued and making assumptions based on these measures may lead to significant misinterpretation of political behavior.

This paper attempts to cure this ambiguous approach to the examination of political activity by stating clearly the purpose of each action (for example by breaking the question item in two: have you ever worked for a political party? Have you ever worked for a political action organization?)

<sup>7</sup> The WVS questionnaire was divided in eight categories. These were: perceptions of life, environment, work, family, politics and society, religion and morale, national identity and demographics. Questionnaire items used in this study followed the example of WVS in order to cover all the issues referred above.

<sup>8</sup> For an explanation about the educational system in Greece please consult the appendix.

<sup>9</sup> For an explanation about income level ranking use, please consult the appendix.

<sup>10</sup> Employing different user profiles according to their frequency of use and time spend online would also provide interesting insights about the relationship between postmaterialism and intensity of Internet use, but significantly increase the size and exploratory scope of this paper.

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## APPENDIX: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

### *Level of education*

Degrees awarded correspond to	Educational level entered		Highest Qualification obtained	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Primary school degrees	0	0	0	0
Secondary school degrees	3 (0,6%)	2 (0,4%)	3 (0,6%)	2 (0,4%)
High school degrees	25 (5,3%)	43 (9,1%)	87 (18,3%)	109 (23%)
Private and Public Post-secondary education degrees	6 (1,3%)	15 (3,2%)	7 (1,4%)	15 (3,2%)
Higher education degrees	129 (27,3%)	146 (31%)	75 (15,9%)	90 (19%)
Highest education degrees	40 (8,4%)	49 (10,3%)	33 (7%)	41 (8,6%)
Other	7 (1,4%)	7 (1,4%)	5 (1%)	5 (1%)
I don't know	1 (0,2%)		1 (0,2%)	
Total	211 (44,6%)	262 (55,4%)	211 (44,6%)	262 (55,4%)
	473 (100%)		473(100%)	

*Annual income level*

Income level	Sample Percentage
Less than 5.000 euros	106 (23,2%)
Up to 10.000 euros	84 (18,4%)
From 10.000 to 15.000 euros	83 (18,2)
From 15.000 to 20.000 euros	37 (8,1%)
From 20.000 to 25.000 euros	19 (4,2%)
From 25.000 to 30.000 euros	12 (2,6%)
More than 30.000 euros	13 (2,8%)
Don't know	103 (22,5%)
Total	457 (100%)

*Age Groups*

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
15-20	61	13,1%
21-25	234	50,4%
26-30	169	36,4%
Missing	13	
Total	477	100%