

Political Sophistication: Theoretical, Methodological and Empirical Perspectives

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is concerned with the concept of political sophistication, referring to the extent and organization of a person's stored political cognition (Luskin 1987). Available empirical evidence on the levels of political sophistication in mass publics comes almost exclusively from the United States and point to two broad conclusions:

First, systematic empirical research has demonstrated that political information in the mass public is particularly low (Converse 1964, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Citizens lack basic knowledge over political affairs. Time and again empirical studies have systematically showed that citizens in the United States and elsewhere fall short of passing even the most rudimentary political knowledge tests. This finding that was first illustrated by the Michigan school in the early 1960s (Campbell et al. 1960) resulted in a wide pessimism over the meaning of public opinion and even of representative democracy (Inglehart 1985).

The second broad conclusion is that the politically sophisticated and unsophisticated differ: Political sophisticates have the cognitive capacity to translate their deeper held political values and predispositions into consistent political attitudes (Zaller 1992). They are able to use their political knowledge in order to make informed vote choices in the sense that they accurately adjust their political positions to the parties' platforms (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Lau and Redlawsk 1997, 2006). 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). However the idea that political sophistication matters for the quality of the public's political decision-

making has met strong theoretical and methodological criticism by the ‘low information rationality’ perspective (Popkin 1991, Lupia 1994, Graber 2001). This group of theories argues that politically inattentive citizens can form their political judgment on the basis of heuristics that allow them to make reasonable choices reflecting their predispositions and interests even though they lack political knowledge.

The principal aims of this thesis are:

a) to compare different measurement perspectives on political sophistication and assess their methodological potential especially in regard with comparative research on political knowledge

b) to explore the extent to which the pattern of ignorance that has been repeatedly highlighted in the American literature is an internal characteristic of political behavior stemming from the low expected utility of acquiring political information or it is subject to particular cultural and systemic characteristics. To this direction I use Greece as a case study by undertaking an analytical survey of political sophistication, one of the very few that have been conducted across the Atlantic.

c) The third aim is to investigate the determinants of political sophistication and especially the potential of the mass media in political learning and in the context of the Greek political and media system.

d) Finally this thesis addresses the unresolved question concerning the differences in quality of political decisions between the political sophisticated and unsophisticated layers of the public by evaluating the explanatory potential of two

competing theories (political sophistication v. low information rationality) in the multi-party political environment of Greece.

Thesis Overview

The dissertation is divided in three main sections: Literature background (Chapters 1 and 2), methodological and theoretical proposals (Chapters 3 and 4) and empirical evidence (Chapters 5 and 6). In the first chapter I discuss the evolution of the concept of political sophistication from Lippmann's skepticism over the competence of the general public in understanding political affairs and the Michigan 'levels of conceptualization index', to schema theories, sophistication as expertise and the equalization of political sophistication with political knowledge during the 1990s and 2000s. The second chapter of literature reviews the state of the art on collective rationality, on-line models of decision making, cognitive heuristics and low information rationality. The purpose of these two chapters is to describe the theoretical framework that I use as a basis for the theoretical, methodological and empirical advancements of the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the methodology of measurement of political knowledge. More than forty years of research of the mass public's levels of political knowledge, carried out mostly in the United States, have repeatedly described an ignorant and inattentive public that lacks even the most basic political information. These surveys have cultivated the belief that this pattern of ignorance will appear in all western democracies regardless of the characteristics of each political system and culture. In turn,

researchers of political sophistication often choose knowledge questionnaire items according to their degree of difficulty and differentiation, adjusting the distribution of item responses so as to fit the minimal knowledge hypothesis. This chapter argues that this method attaches little importance on the theoretical considerations on what the public should know. By drawing on Barber's (1973) proposed criteria (what the government is and does – see also, Simonds 1982, Neuman 1986 and Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996) to measure political knowledge, and without presupposing a particular knowledge distribution, I present empirical evidence that show that the minimal knowledge hypothesis does not fit all Western political cultures. In specific, the Greek public appears to be well informed over heterogeneous dimensions of politics and deviates from the pattern of political ignorance. Based on these findings I argue for a reconsideration of data driven selection of political knowledge items in settings where the concept is measured for the first time. On the second part of Chapter 3 I analyze the advantages and disadvantages of specific methodological suggestions and justify my methodological choice in the wording and coding of political knowledge questions.

In Chapter 4 I build a theoretical framework around the determinants of political sophistication at the aggregate level. Past research has revealed considerable variation in levels of political knowledge along with voters' *opportunity*, *ability* and *motivation* to obtain political information. The main argument of this chapter is that this framework can be conceptualized at the aggregate level in the following scheme. Opportunity translates into flows of information by the media. It is subject a) to the level of press freedom and b) to the technological advancements that facilitate the supply of media resources. Ability refers, by and large, to intellectual competence (Luskin 1990). Consequently, if we are to

find variation in aggregate levels of political sophistication it is most likely to be due to different levels of motivation in political learning. How could we conceptualize the motivation to become politically informed at the aggregate level? As I argue in Chapter 4, motivation at the aggregate level is subject to characteristics of the macro, meso and micro time level, which are entwined with each other and are defined as following:

a) The macro time level refers to the persistent and enduring elements of a political culture that extend beyond living memory and may be a product of historical circumstance or rooted in longstanding cultural norms. My focus is on the macrohistorical development of institutions and cultural traditions stemming from particular religious values, kinship relations or distinct social organization.

b) The meso level refers to the diffusion of enduring political orientations cultivated by the historical developments that shape the environment for the political socialization of different generations.

c) The micro level refers to temporal and ephemeral changes in motivation to follow political affairs (e.g. anxiety during periods of political turmoil)

The rest of the chapter applies the above-described theoretical framework in the case of Greece where I bring empirical evidence that demonstrate the existence of a politically sophisticated public contrary to the assumption that all publics are similarly unsophisticated (e.g. Luskin 1987, Converse 1990, Elff 2009). I argue that the reasons behind this unusual pattern are a) the existence of strong clientelistic networks in Greece that increase expected utility for acquiring information over political actors (macro) and b) the civil war and post-civil war ideologically polarized environment that cultivated increased political interest for some generations of voters (meso).

In Chapter 5, I investigate the distribution and the determinants of political sophistication at the individual level. In the first part I explore the distribution of political sophistication in particular social groups with the aim of investigating the magnitude and consequences of 'knowledge gaps'. In the second part I explore the determinants of political sophistication in the Greek public. First I construct a simple path model with the purpose of highlighting the complicated relations between demographic, structural and motivation factors that bear an influence to overall levels of political sophistication. In the second part I employ a two-stage multivariate regression to investigate the determinants of political sophistication at the individual level based on demographic, motivational and behavioural factors with a particular focus on media choice and political learning.

Chapter 6 touches on the core of the political sophistication debate: Does political information make a difference in the quality of public decision-making or do people act as if they are informed by relying on heuristics? The aim of this chapter is to explore the impact of sophistication on citizens' decision-making processes. To this direction I extend Zaller's (1992, 1996) hypotheses over the intervening effects of political sophistication on the value-attitude cohesion in a European multi-party political system. What is more, by employing binomial logit regression, I evaluate the decision-making criteria by the sophisticated and unsophisticated layers of the Greek electorate on a 'hard' issue (see Carmines & Stimson 1980). The issue concerns attitudes toward the amendment of Greek constitution article 16 to allow the foundation of private universities in Greece. Results suggest that political sophistication exerts a significant influence in the employment of citizens' decision making criteria. In particular my results point to the

conclusion that the unsophisticated voters form their judgments on the basis of the heuristic of political leaders while it is only among the politically sophisticated that ideological and value predispositions actually play a role in decision-making processes.

Finally in Chapter 7 I recapitulate the main findings of the survey and discuss their implications for future research.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION

The idea that citizens differ in levels of political knowledge and ability to make use of ideological concepts had been articulated before the beginning of systematic, quantitative research on political behavior. Walter Lippman (1922) was suspicious that, given the complexity of foreign and military policy during the First World War, the public's understanding of politics was too poor to provide meaningful inputs to political elites. In 1947, Hyman and Sheatsley were the first to measure factual knowledge over five major political facts regarding foreign affairs, coming up with the conclusion that levels of political information in the American public were disappointingly low. In their classic study *Voting* (1954), Berelson and his colleagues concluded that there appear some important deviances between the ideal type of the democratic citizen, supposedly strongly motivated to participate in politics, and the American common man:

The democratic citizen is expected to be well informed about political affairs. He is supposed to know what the issues are, what their history is, what the relevant facts are, what alternatives are proposed, what the party stands for, what the likely consequences are. By such standards the voter falls short. Even when he has the motivation, he finds it difficult to make decisions on the basis of full information when the subject is relatively simple and approximate; How can he do so when it is complex and remote? (308).

In the seminal contribution *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), Downs theoretically justifies the discrepancy between the ideal type of the informed voter and the actual level of knowledge by arguing that it is unrealistic to expect that citizens will hold extensive information over politics. This is due to a rational calculation over the increased costs and the minimal benefits of political information: Political information has high cognitive costs as people need to spend time and effort to seek out and comprehend political information that will be used in order to exert an almost negligible influence in the outcome of an election.

Ever since the deductions of the Columbia and Downs studies, the concept of the public's ability to form a coherent picture on political affairs has become one of the most discussed issues in political science. In this chapter we will attempt to recount the history and evolution of the concepts of political sophistication, awareness, expertise and political knowledge – all of which, as we discuss below, essentially tap the electorate's ability to hold and organize political information in order to understand the complexity of political affairs¹.

1.1 The Michigan Studies: Levels of Conceptualization, Constraint and the Public's Mass Ignorance of Political Affairs

The first organized attempt to shed light on the cognitive gaps among the electorate as well as their implications in attitude formation took place in the late 1950s. The authors of *The American Voter* (1960) criticized the political analysts' consensus of the time that attributed electoral outcomes as products of change of the electorate's

¹ For a similar, although less detailed review, on the concept of political sophistication see Lawrence 2003.

ideological preferences or parties' movement on a left-right continuum. Such views implied that large segments of voters had clear and coherent policy preferences precisely placed on the left right scale, while on the other hand that the electorate was aware of party movements on the same left right continuum. In the 1952 and 1956 National Election Studies Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes tested these hypotheses by investigating the electorate's 'conceptual sophistication', that is the ability of respondents to think over the political parties and candidates in abstract ideological terms, the differentiation of the respondent's 'political world' (p. 222) as well as the 'degree of "correctness" between the elements that are successfully discriminated'. (p.222). Their method was to ask respondents what they liked and disliked about each party and candidate using a set of eight free answer questions which were later categorized by Campbell and his associates in four "levels of conceptualization".

Level A included the segments of respondents' whose evaluations of the parties and candidates implied that the interviewed was conceptualizing politics in abstract ideological terms. As Campbell et al. put it: "...persons placed here talked in terms of the liberal-conservative continuum, or one of the narrower domains of abstract content involved in current ideological controversy" (1960, p. 223). The second level (level B) consisted of respondents who used 'ideology by proxy', that is people who aligned themselves with the ideological position of their groups (i.e. business men, trade unions) without however fully understanding the meaning of the terms liberal and conservative, nor being aware on the parties' positions on the scale. In Level C Campbell et al. categorized respondents who made simple associations between the 'goodness or badness of the times' (with regards to events such as war, recession etc.) and associated it with the

party in power. Finally, the lowest level included the members of the sample who evaluated parties and candidates without any reference to issues that could be associated with the political debate of the time. These respondents could not discriminate the parties and their evaluations were based on ‘moralistic terms’ and the personal characteristics of the candidates.

Table 1.1 reports the summary of their findings. Their results showed that only 11.5 percent of the sample was classified in the first group of ‘ideologues or near ideologues’. The vast majority of respondents did not evaluate parties and candidates based on ideological orientations. Instead they formed political evaluations on the basis of group benefits (Level B- 42 percent), used ‘nature of the times’ as a proxy (24 percent) or did not decide on the basis of any political issue (Level D- 22.5 percent).

Table 1-1: The Levels of Conceptualization in the Michigan Study (Campbell et al. 1960, p. 249)

Level	Description	Percent (%)
A	Ideologues / Near Ideologues	11.5
B	Ideology by Proxy	42
C	Nature of the Times	24
D	No Political Content	22.5

Converse (1964) extended Campbell's et al. deductions by proposing the concept of the *belief system*, defined as 'a configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional dependence' (p. 207). Constraint, as Converse puts it, refers to an objectively logical or 'psycho- logical' (Oskamp and Schultz 2005) meaningful pattern of opinion. With a methodology similar to that of the American Voter, Converse developed five levels of conceptualization by keeping Campbell's et al. categorization and splitting Level A into 'ideologues' and 'near ideologues'. Ideologues were those respondents who "relied in some active way on a relatively abstract and far-reaching conceptual dimension as a yardstick against which political objects and their shifting policy significance over time were evaluated" (p.14). Under the term 'near ideologues' Converse grouped respondents who referred to the ideology dimension in a rather 'peripheral way' and did not rely upon it, or in cases where the interviewer had doubts over their understanding of the issues. In addition to this measurement Converse introduced a test for the investigation of the public's "political sophistication" by asking respondents if they found one party to be more conservative or more liberal than the other and then asking respondents to justify their choice. Accordingly, he divided respondents in five stratum in the way summarized in Table 1. He correlated the two items (levels of conceptualization and stratum of ideological dimensions) and found a high and positive relation.

Table 1-2: Converse's (1964, p. 224) five stratum in recognizing key ideological dimensions

Stratum	Description	Percent (%)
1	understanding that capture much of the liberal conservative	17

	distinction breadth	
2	Terms rather under control, although there exists a limited set of connotations	46
3	Uncertainty / guesswork	
4 &		37
5	Entirely vague meaning	

Converse extended the finding of Campbell et al. (1960) over the political ignorance of the American mass public, by investigating whether the public shared common beliefs with the political elites. By correlating sets of political attitudes, he found that while political elites seem to hold a constrained set of attitudes, this was not the case with the broad public whose set of beliefs seem to follow a random pattern. His argument is strengthened by a panel survey measuring the public's attitude consistency over time and finds that 'only about 13 people out of 20 manage to locate themselves even on the same *side* of the controversy in successive interrogations, when 10 out of 20 could have done so by chance alone' (p. 239). His conclusion is one of the most discussed findings in the history of the discipline of political science: 'large portions of an electorate do not have meaningful beliefs even on issues that have formed the basis for intense political controversy among elites for substantial periods of time' (p.245).

A final contribution of the 'Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics' is the finding that, apart from the overall levels of political sophistication, there appears to be a number of 'issue publics' for distinct political matters. This means that each important issue in the political agenda carries its own section of interested citizens, which in some cases is unique but in others it overlaps with other issue publics. These issue publics tend to show a large degree of attitude stability when their attitudes on their particular political

subject are measured. A small segment of the electorate was found to be members of all issue publics that Converse studied although the majority of respondents appeared to lack knowledge about any of the topics.

Converse's theory over the public's ignorance on political issues and the lack of attitude cohesion among mass publics paved the way for the foundation of a new field in political behavior research and set the frame of a constructive academic dialogue that went on decades after the 'Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics' was published. Consequently it has attracted a fair degree of criticism from different theoretical standpoints (e.g. Sartori 1969, Achen 1975, Inglehart 1985). With regards to the aims of this dissertation it is important to distinguish two important elements in Converse's work that will often reappear in the theoretical and empirical sections of this dissertation.

The first concerns Converse's major thesis, stating that public attitudes for the majority of respondents are random rather than structured or based on ideological reasoning. In a book published a few years earlier, Lane (1962) had used in depth interviews based on psychoanalytical tools in order to investigate the qualities and origins of ideological attachments of 15 men in the small working-class town of Newport. He argued that common men and women although they cannot articulate as good as political elites in fact do carry a *latent* political ideology that is transformed into meaningful attitudes and opinions:

Of course there is a difference between the articulated, differentiated, well developed political arguments put forward by informed and conscious Marxists or Fascists or liberal democrats on the one hand and on the loosely structured, unreflective statements of the common men of Eastport... Occasionally it is useful to distinguish between the "forensic" ideologies of the conscious ideologist and the "latent" ideologies of the common man. (1962, p.16)

It is important to note that Converse has taken such an argument into consideration, asserting that the concept of constraint is central in a belief system because constraint in Converse's sense is synonymous to organization:

When it comes down to specific attitudes and behaviors, the organization is there nonetheless, and it is this organization that matters, not the capacity for discourse in sophisticated language. If it were true that such organization does exist for most people, apart from their capacities to be articulate about it, we would agree out of hand that the question of articulation is quite trivial. As a cold empirical matter, however, this claim does not seem to be valid. Indeed, it is for this reason that we have cast the argument in terms of constraint, for constraint and organization are very nearly the same thing. Therefore when we hypothesize that constraint among political idea-elements begins to lose its range very rapidly once we move from the most sophisticated few toward the "grass roots," we are contending that the organization of more specific attitudes into wide-ranging belief systems is absent as well (p. 30)

A second important point in Converse's essay is that the author makes no effort to define the concept of political sophistication. However, he approaches political sophistication through three distinct yet reconcilable dimensions: *Levels of Conceptualization, Factual Knowledge and Constraint*. The level of constraint in a political belief system is dependent upon the level of a) the factual knowledge that the individual possesses and b) the 'contextual knowledge' or the ability to recognize basic relationships between these parts. All three elements are important indicators of political sophistication and subsequent works have developed each one from different theoretical and methodological standpoints.

1.2 Subsequent Research Based on Levels of Conceptualization

After the publication of Campbell's et al. and Converse's seminal works, several surveys in the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s attempted to theoretically and methodologically refine the newly introduced concept of levels of conceptualization. They all reported a rise in ideological reasoning in the electorate throughout these two decades: Field and Anderson (1969) investigated the impact of the 1960s ideologically stimulating political environment on the levels of conceptualization and the vote². They demonstrated that the number of voters making ideological evaluations of the parties and presidential candidates seems to diverge from one election to another and that, at least in 1964, the increase in ideological reasoning was related to the sharp ideological cleavage of that particular campaign. Nonetheless, they remained skeptical on whether this fluctuation reflected voters' concern for 'substantial ideological problems' (p.388) or was based on a superficial reflection of the elite's use of ideological discourse.

With a similar hypothesis to Field and Anderson, Pierce (1970, 1975) replicated the levels of conceptualization to conclude that there is a positive relation between the number of ideologues in each party's electorate and the existence of an ideological candidate. He hypothesized that the fact that the number of ideologues is higher within the electoral basis of the Republican party provides a basis for the promotion of ideological candidates who in turn increase the salience of ideological concerns among the whole electorate. However, he shares Field and Anderson's doubts on whether this finding was a product of a substantial increase in the mass public's levels of political

² They used a three category instrument that divided respondents into explicit ideologues (who use explicit liberal – conservative terminology), implicit ideologues (who stress implicitly several ideological themes without using ideological terms) and non-ideologues (people who show no ideological awareness).

sophistication or a mere reflection of the period's polarized political rhetoric without genuine political substance.

Miller and Miller (1976) measured again the levels of conceptualization in the 1972 election and reported a genuine and 'unmistakably higher level of ideology in 1972 than in the two previous elections' (p. 844) which was again a result of the clearly articulated candidate differences that in turn produced a vote unusually relied on ideology and policy concerns. Stimson (1975) similarly argues that a genuine change had taken place in American politics since the 1960s and suggests that the previous presidential elections which were the focus of Converse's research were 'vastly less ideological in the minds of voters than all those which have occurred since then' (p. 415). Finally, Nie et al. (1979) assessed voters' levels of conceptualization for the 1972 election. They used a more complex instrument that categorizes respondents into seven groups³ and confirmed previous findings that the levels of conceptualization are subject to the ideological tone of the time period under examination.

The categorization of respondents along with 'levels of conceptualization' has received a fair amount of criticism. One dimension of criticism refers to the categorization criteria and to the little differentiation found, especially in the middle levels (Pierce and Hagner 1982, Luskin 1987). Knight (1985) assessed the impact of the original levels of conceptualization on the voters decision-making criteria for the 1980 election and concludes that while there are significant differences between the highest

³ These groups were: ideologues (who make at least one implicit and explicit ideological mention and also make some reference to issues and group benefits); near ideologues (offer at least one explicit or implicit ideological mention but fail to give any issue responses or group benefit responses); Group benefits and issues (evaluation of the parties or candidates involves references to both group benefits and issues), issue references (makes reference to particular issues); group benefit responses (focuses on benefits or disadvantages to particular social groups); party responses (abstract reference to political parties) and apolitical or nature of the times responses (various non political responses).

and lowest categories in the expected direction, the differences between the middle categories ('group benefits' and 'nature of the times') in ideological sophistication is negligible. Moreover, Luskin argued that the categorization is too generous and overestimates the number of ideologues and near ideologues (1987).

The most strident critique comes from Smith (1980) who dismisses the hypothesis over the increase of ideological awareness between 1956 and subsequent elections and moves on to question the general validity of the levels of conceptualization. Smith's criticism focuses on the low levels of reliability of the scales. His main argument is that the criteria employed by voters to evaluate parties and candidates should remain relatively stable over time, a prerequisite that was mentioned as well by the authors of the *American Voter*. After performing test – retest correlations on the data used by Field and Anderson (1969) and Nie et al. (1979) he found a very weak reliability index from one election to another and concludes that 'instead of reflecting conceptual sophistication the measure are reflecting short-term forces unrelated to conceptual sophistication' which are rather 'the product of a brief memory search over a memory filled with recent events'⁴ (p.694).

Smith's conclusions were vigorously challenged: Pierce and Hagner (1982) used the original measure of the levels of conceptualization to investigate whether the correlative characteristics of each level have remained stable over the period from 1956 to 1976 and showed that different levels of conceptualization exhibit certain and theoretically predictable regularities in important attitudinal and behavioral characteristics such as political involvement and participation. Furthermore, Cassell

⁴ Smith's argument is similar with the conclusions drawn by Zaller's Receive-Accept-Sample Model (1992). However, Smith only assumes over the role of memory while Zaller presents strong empirical evidence to demonstrate the hypothesis.

(1984) argued that the levels of conceptualization methodology is no more unreliable than other attitude measures used in political research. Finally, Jacoby (1986, 1988) analyzed differences in cognitive structures across the levels of conceptualization by using a nearly identical measurement of levels of conceptualization to that employed by Nie, Verba and Petrocik. He arrived at the conclusion that there is systematic variation in the ways that respondents at different conceptual levels form their opinions on presidential candidates: In contrast with people from lower conceptual levels, ideologues and near ideologues rely more on the liberal conservative continuum and their perceptions are coherent and well structured even after the control for factors such as interest, education and political participation (Jacoby 1988).

The debate over the levels of conceptualization and their use as an instrument measuring political sophistication declined during the late 1980s and 1990s as the weight of research shifted toward schematic approaches and normative facets of the concept of political sophistication. These issues are discussed in the next section.

1.3 The Concept of Political Sophistication as Attitude Constraint: Schematic Approaches

Apart from the levels of conceptualization, several scholars theorized political sophistication on the basis of Converse's concept of attitude constraint. A first extension of ideological constraint theoretical and methodological assumptions was conceptualized by Jackson and Marcus (1975). They expanded Converse's definition by studying ideological constraint along with several different ideological dimensions rather than

relying only on the liberal-conservative continuum as a reference standpoint. Their main idea was that different voters may make use of different ideological dimensions for deciding on the same issues. Without knowledge on the general principles followed by a voter for the formation of his or her political opinions, the researcher cannot reliably classify respondents into high or low constraint categories based merely on responses on particular issues because it is possible that respondents may ‘demonstrate constraint behaviorally’ (p. 95) by relating specific political issues to the general ideological dimensions that vary between individuals. Consequently, constraint can have various ideological connotations rather than being only tied to the liberal-conservative continuum.

Fiske and Kinder (1981) bridged the theoretical fields of social and political cognition by highlighting the conceptual link between Converse’s hypotheses on ideological constraint and the cognitive psychology concept of the schema. Schemata are ‘organized packets of information about the world, events or people, stored in long-term memory’ (Eysenck and Keane 2005, p. 534) that guide the processing of new information and the retrieval of information stored in long-term memory (Fiske and Linville 1980, Conover and Feldman 1984, Hamill et al. 1985). Fiske and Kinder argued that the politically inexpert layers of the public do not have appropriate schemata available; novices possess only particular versions of consensual schemata and use them in simple forms, while experts hold abstract schemata that they use in sophisticated ways. Hence, they conclude that the availability of schemata used by citizens depends largely on individual differences such as expertise and involvement. Consequently, Fiske and Kinder argue, that findings by Converse (1964) over the limited attitude constraint in the

mass public could be a product of different schemata available to experts and non-experts.

Conover and Feldman (1984) extend this view. They suggest that schema theory can be useful in 'bridging the gaps' among various approaches in the nature and structure of mass belief systems and expand research beyond traditional methodological tools. In alignment with Fiske and Kinder (1981) they argue that a schema 'in and of itself constitutes a "constrained" or organized set of information. Thus even when people's schemas are isolated from one another they can be said to have organized, albeit "atomized" ways of looking at the political world" (p. 98-99). Moreover, Conover and Feldman share Jackson and Marcus's (1975) view that there are several independent schemata that cannot be accurately tapped via the liberal-conservative continuum and argue that most citizens do have distinct and identifiable ways of organizing political information in abstract and as well as concrete levels. However, not all citizens employ schemata in the same way: by employing factor analysis Conover and Feldman demonstrate that some layers of the public appear to link their schemata in meaningful and hierarchical ways while for others they are separate and independent. The final contribution by the authors is tracing a link between schemata and specific attitudes, demonstrating that political schemata are related to positions that respondents take on specific issues. In sum, the schematic approach on political sophistication as articulated by Fiske and Kinder and Conover and Feldman criticizes Converse's 'ideological constraint' approach as being too narrow to grasp the complexity of methods that the public employs to decide on political issues.

An alternative perspective on the role of schemata in the organization of political beliefs is offered by Hamill et al. (1985). According to the authors, schemata are indissolubly linked with domain-specific factual information and supportive associational knowledge that turns otherwise dispersed information into a coherent and meaningful pattern of thought. They built a series of knowledge tests asking respondents to place the Republican and Democratic parties (partisan schema)⁵, liberals and conservatives (ideological schema) and rich people and poor people (class schema) on 14 seven point issue scales that were taken from the NES questionnaires. Their results indicated that each of the three political schemata played a key role in the structure of political information according to the respondents' levels of political interest, education, media exposure, income and cognitive ability. In specific, there appears to be a hierarchical structure of schemata: politically novices rely mostly on class, politically sophisticates rely mostly on the ideology, while the partisan schema is predominantly used by the middle group.

Finally, Graber (1982) studied the impact of schemata on citizens' news processing patterns arguing over a distinction between simple and complex schematic structures in mass publics. Graber conducted in depth interviews with a small panel of people in order to investigate the public's differential methods of processing news information. She concluded that the types of schemas employed by respondents to interpret and recall news stories are quite limited, yet adequate to understand at least the majority of domestic news items. According to her findings, all respondents had the basic schemata and processing skills to integrate complex current news into their thinking,

⁵ The partisan schema is further analyzed in Lodge and Hamill 1986.

however the ability to process news and retrieve it was subject to the 'richness of the schemas on which each respondent could draw' (p.19).

Overall, schematic theories argue that people draw on conceptual and interconnected chunks of knowledge stored in long term memory in order to interpret political issues, absorb new political information and evaluate parties and candidates. Most theoretical schematic approaches agree that the majority of the public uses simple and sometimes isolated schemata, while only a small minority draws on wide ranging and interconnected schemata. The latter, according to a number of scholars such as Fiske and Kinder, Converse and Feldman and Hamill et al. are the politically sophisticated with regards to the ideological constraint they exhibit. In this sense, schema theory does not offer an original explanation on how the public comes across political issues but repeats Converse's ideological constraint approach in a novel conceptual form. This has been a point of criticism, as the term is too undistinguished from other measures of the structure of attitudes. Kuklinski and his colleagues (1991) demonstrate that in many cases, the concept of the schema overlaps with similar concepts in social psychology such as the cognitive components of attitudes and the determinants of attitude structures.

Kuklinski et al's criticism contributed to the elucidation of the role of schemata, long term memory, affect and sophistication in attitude formation. Lodge and McGraw (1991) connected schemata with the quantity of factual political knowledge. They cite theoretical and empirical evidence to argue that knowledge and political information are not randomly stored in long term memory but tend to be organized in a meaningful way in packets of semantic associations. The term 'schema' refers to these associations: According to Lodge and McGraw, the politically unsophisticated will have less-

developed political knowledge structures compared to the more political experts. Consequently, since these associations are encoded and organized in long term memory, they will be better able to absorb political information in a meaningful manner and make informed judgments on political parties, candidates and events. This view on political sophistication partially bridges the gap between schematic approaches and the view of political sophistication as expertise. Subsequent research drew heavily on the latter view and interest in schema theory declined during the 1990s mainly as a result of the above mentioned theoretical and methodological criticisms (Lawrence 2003, Houghton 2009). Nonetheless the rationale behind schematic theory is still present in contemporary research⁶. The view of political sophistication as political expertise is discussed in the next section.

1.4 Political Sophistication as Expertise: Political Knowledge and Level of Information

The third and most widely accepted view on political sophistication draws on the general concept of 'expertise'. In cognitive psychology expertise refers to 'highly skilled, competent performance in one or more task domains' (Sternberg and Ben Zeev 2001, p. 365). Expertise has been a much discussed topic in cognitive psychology with regards to many aspects of human behavior, such as algebra, chess, bridge or even taxi driving⁷. However, political expertise research during the 1970s and 1980s was rare and only

⁶ See Rahn et al. 2002 for the influence of schema theory in other aspects of political psychology.

⁷ See Krosnick 1990, Eysenck and Keane 2005 for an overview

during the 1990s it has come to the center of attention by political psychologists (Krosnick 1990).

Experts of all skills differ from novices in their ability to process large amounts of meaningful information (McKeithen et al. 1981). This is because they are generally considered to have more and conceptually richer chunks of knowledge, which are abstractly connected (Chase and Simon 1973, McKeithen et al. 1981). In other words they have ‘an extensive cognitive apparatus’ (Chase and Simon 1973, p. 56) that is forged through systematic practice (Fiske, Kinder and Larter 1983) and allows better memory performance (Chi and Koeske 1983).

Fiske and his colleagues were the first to test novice – expert hypotheses⁸ in the domain of political cognition (1983). In particular, they investigated whether the extra conceptual capacity of political experts led them to different decision strategies as a function of improved cognitive organization. They found that novices took into account only the information that were consistent with their prior expectations, while experts focused on and assimilated both consistent and inconsistent information as a result of their greater cognitive ability and broader range of selective exposure. Although Fiske, Kinder and Larter measured political expertise by political participation and interest items, they stress the point that political expertise includes the integration of these two items and knowledge.

Neumann (1986) suggests a composite definition of political sophistication that ‘emerged from a process moving back and forth between empirical and theoretical

⁸ As we mentioned earlier expertise implies an unusually efficient performance in one particular field. The term cannot be transferred literally in political psychology because the criteria for expertise for political judgments are looser than in the case for example of chess masters or algebra experts. Still the researcher is able to compare how experts differ from the rest of the sample. See also Funk (1997, p.679-681) for a similar argument.

analyses' (p. 194). Neumann attempts to bring together previous approaches on political sophistication. His definition of the concept of political sophistication rests in three distinct yet reconcilable factors: political salience, political knowledge and conceptualization. The first component includes 'political interest, concern and attentiveness toward politics'. Political knowledge refers to information over what the government is and does (see also Barber 1973, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996 and Chapter 3), while political conceptualization stems from Converse's notion of the belief system. These three components are conceptually entwined: 'Interest and attentiveness to political life lead to the gradual accumulation of a reservoir of factual knowledge, which in turn manifests itself in political conceptualization, that is knowledge in use' (1986, p. 54)

Luskin (1987) was the first who attempted to reconcile various approaches to the concept of political sophistication. He first attempts to build a definition of the concept for the first time since its conceptual birth. According to Luskin an individual is politically sophisticated 'to the extent to which his or her political belief system is large, wide ranging and highly constrained' (p. 860). Hence, in Luskin's view, political sophistication implies size and range, meaning that the concept is clearly discriminated from Converse's 'issue publics'. What is more, the author asserts that by 'constraint' he refers to cognitive organization rather than attitude consistency. In alignment with Fiske, Kinder and Larter he argues that political sophistication is political expertise as both concepts tap extensive and organized knowledge. Finally in Luskin's view the use of abstractions such as the liberal-conservative continuum are not a prerequisite of political

sophistication as individuals may be sophisticated and not use these concepts but also may be unsophisticated and using them.

Luskin suggested that political cognitions cannot be actually counted, but can only be inferred 'from what a person says or does' (p. 864). Still, some measures are far more direct and work better than others. Luskin (1987, 1990) proposed a multifaceted measurement of political sophistication that includes a careful measurement of levels of conceptualization, placement of political actors and parties as well as levels of factual information. He proposed that an individual's level of political sophistication (S) can be given by:

$$S = (I_1 + I_2 + 1) (D + 1)$$

I_1 measures of the levels of conceptualization. It is coded '0' for the lowest level, '1' for the 'group benefits' and 'nature of the times' levels and '2' for the ideologues and near ideologues levels. I_2 represents the recognition of differences between parties and candidates and it is similar to Converse's measurement. The coding is again 0 for individuals who give 'empty responses', 1 for substantive responses referring to clearly defined issues and 2 for responses that capture an important amount of the liberal conservative differentiation. Finally, D is the number of policy issues out of a total of 11 on which the respondent can both locate his/ her position and is able to correctly locate the parties' positions, gaining one point for every correct answer. Consequently the S scale ranges from 1 to 60. Luskin finds the sample's mean in the S measurement to be very low (16.7). Finally it important to note that according to Luskin, if the researcher has to pick a single measurement for political sophistication the measures of information holding represent the most accurate approach.

Smith (1989) dismisses the validity and reliability of the levels of conceptualization and attitude constraint indexes and puts levels of political knowledge on the center of attention with regards to the measurement of political sophistication. By citing evidence from cognitive psychology studies, Smith indicates that as more and more political information are absorbed in long term memory, individuals develop hierarchical structures (or schemas) in order to store this information. Hence, greater amounts of information lead to a larger hierarchy in structure which in turn enhances an abstract unification of the different topics. While Smith admits that political knowledge and conceptual sophistication are distinct concepts, he argues that the two are so closely related to each other 'that the distinction makes no difference for any question of interest to political scientists' (p. 226).

An alternative view of political sophistication as expertise comes from John Zaller's seminal work *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (1992) where he develops his notion of political sophistication through the concept of 'political awareness', defined as "the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics *and* understands what he or she has encountered" (1992, p. 21)⁹. Partially agreeing with Luskin, Zaller states that political awareness is best measured by neutral factual information about politics as these constitute 'a type of measure that to a greater extent than any of the others captures political learning that has actually occurred – political ideas that the individual has encountered, understood, and stored in his head' (1992, p. 335). He further justifies his choice by arguing that tests of factual knowledge capture

⁹ Zaller, although recognizes that his concept of political awareness overlaps with the concept of political sophistication, chooses not to participate to the long standing debate we describe in this chapter by stating on the one hand that 'scholars have used a variety of concepts and measures to capture what is here being called political awareness' (p.21) and that the 'choice of labels is perhaps mainly a matter of personal or disciplinary taste' (p.21)

more directly ‘what has actually gotten into people minds, which, in turn is critical for intellectual engagement with politics’ (p.21) and that political knowledge tests constitute robust predictor of a variety of relevant criterion variables including political participation, media exposure and political interest (Zaller 1986, Price and Zaller 1990 – cited in Zaller 1992), while similar sophistication measurements such as interest in politics or media exposure are prone to social desirability effects.

These contributions paved the way for the reach of consensus on the clarification of the concept of political sophistication as well as the most appropriate means of measurement. Subsequent research measured the impact of sophistication on heterogeneous aspects of political behavior based on the methodological framework provided by Luskin, Smith and Zaller. Eventually, levels of political knowledge were considered as the best means to conceptualize and measure political sophistication. As Luskin asserted:

‘Given the close correlation between quantity and organization and between quantity and accuracy. [political sophistication] is roughly the same variable as *information*, in the sense of information already held, which omits organization, and as *knowledge*, which omits organization but requires accuracy’ (2002, p. 220).

The debate over the measurement of political sophistication gradually declined during the 1990s. The bulk of subsequent research uses the concept political knowledge, political information, awareness expertise, and sophistication interchangeably signifying the reach of consensus in the literature (e.g. Deli Carpini and Keeter 1993, 1996; Cassel and Lo 1997; Funk 1997; Goren 1997, 2000, 2004; Lau and Redlawsk 1997, 2001, 2006;

Gomez and Wilson 2001; Alvarez and Brehm 2002; Lawrence 2003; Levedunsky and Jackman 2003; Milner 2003; Lachat 2004; Lau et al. 2008; Claassen and Highton 2009; Clarke et al. 2009; Highton 2009, Luskin and Bullock 2011).

We have analyzed the history of the concept of political sophistication since its foundation in the early 1960s. We discussed the theoretical arguments and research evidence from the three main perspectives on the concept: levels of conceptualization, schemata / constraint and expertise. Throughout this thesis the terms political ‘awareness’, ‘sophistication’, ‘expertise’ and ‘knowledge’ are employed to describe the same variable: ‘the quantity and organization of a person’s political cognitions’ (Luskin 1990, Luskin and Bullock 2005a). Although quantity and organization of information could be seen as two discrete components of political sophistication in practice they are very close (Luskin and Bullock 2005a). The link between quantity and organization of political knowledge is further analyzed Chapter 3.

This dissertation extends the literature on political sophistication in the following ways:

First, it contributes to the understanding of political sophistication by conceptualizing systemic determinants of aggregate levels of political sophistication. It combines theoretical and empirical evidence to challenge the often assumed universality of the rationally ignorant citizen (e.g. Luskin 1987, Converse 1990, Elff 2009). By using Greece as a case study it argues that aggregate levels of political sophistication are tied to longstanding socioeconomic and cultural norms, political socialization processes and temporal stimuli. In turn, this thesis empirically demonstrates that the frequently assumed

global pattern of ignorance cannot be considered as an inherent, intercultural characteristic of voters.

Second, this work contributes to the debate over the methodology of political sophistication arguing in defense of a theoretically driven approach on the measurement of political sophistication rather than a data driven approach aimed at the replication of the low information pattern (e.g. Elff 2009).

Third, this thesis puts forward a thorough and analytical research over distribution of political sophistication. Despite the importance of the concept of political sophistication, the question of the distribution of political cognition in mass publics outside the United States remains open, as analytical knowledge surveys are costly and researchers rely on convenience knowledge items to extract levels of sophistication. Our results illustrate that the average Greek citizen is relatively well informed over political affairs contrary to the theoretical expectations of the rational choice theory and the empirical evidence from the United States.

Fourth, apart from aggregate variations in political sophistication due to differences at the aggregate level, this thesis assesses the impact of individual-level factors on the levels of political knowledge that have not been adequately examined in Europe. It extends current empirical evidence on the determinants of political sophistication and particularly on role of the media in political learning.

A fifth contribution is that it extends the scarce empirical evidence over the impact of political sophistication on decision-making processes of citizens in a European political system. In particular this dissertation challenges previous studies that have indicated limited impact of political sophistication in political decision criteria in a

European context (Kumlin 2001) by bringing evidence to demonstrate that the levels and organization of political knowledge decisively affect the quality of public decision-making.

Despite the degree of consensus among political scientists over the appropriate methodology of measurement, the concept of political sophistication in general and the use of political knowledge questionnaires in particular have received criticism from low information rationality theories that argue that levels of political sophistication ignore alternative processes of political decision-making and suppose that voters are encyclopedias. I continue by discussing surrogate strategies of decision-making that voters employ in order to adjust their voting and attitude preferences.

CHAPTER 2

VOTERS' DECISION MAKING IN A LIMITED INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

The main contribution of the political sophistication literature up to the 1980s was to show that the vast majority of the public does not come against politics in ideologically predictable ways and that ideology is of little use when it comes to deciding over political issues. On top of this, subsequent research demonstrated that the American electorate was largely uninformed, lacking even the most rudimentary factual information over politics. A common line of critique draws on the fact that these contributions focused more on the ways citizens do not think over politics rather than the ways they actually do (Lawrence 2003). Since it was evident that ideology fell short to explain political preferences, public opinion scholars turned their focus to the development of surrogate models of political decision-making.

By employing theoretical and methodological tools from cognitive psychology several scholars attempted to bring a 'new look' to the study of political choice by shedding light on the complex processes that take place inside voters' minds when they are called to decide over political affairs. Although the initial view over the public's inattentiveness and lack of knowledge over political affairs is undisputed, several researchers point to the conclusion that citizens are able to employ surrogate strategies of decision making and form meaningful political preferences reflecting their political predispositions and interests without much quantity of political knowledge. As

Sniderman described it: ‘what marks the new look in public opinion, then, is the denial not of the classic premise of minimal levels of information and attention of mass publics but rather of the conclusion of minimal coherence and reasonableness in their thinking commonly drawn from it’ (1993, p. 219-220).

To this direction the ‘new look’ approach offers three main groups of theories, one focusing on the aggregate and the other two at the individual level. The first, is known as the collective rationality model and proposes that the even though citizens often make judgmental errors in political choices, the public as a whole may still act rationally because individual errors in political choices are cancelled out by errors in the opposite direction (Page and Shapiro 1992). The second, called the ‘cognitive heuristic theory’, suggests that voters are able to act as if they were fully informed by drawing on simple rules of thumb for the formation of their political preferences and voting behavior (e.g. Popkin 1991, Lupia 1994). Finally, the third called the ‘on-line’ model integrates theories of memory systems and affect to argue that citizens decide over political issues through a use of a running tally that gets updated even though the information used to update it are quickly forgotten (e.g. Lodge et al. 1989, 1995).

2.1 Public Opinion as a Rational Collectivity?

In their book “The Rational Public” (1992, see also 1999) Page and Shapiro contested the pessimism over the meaning of a representative democracy based on an ignorant public that does not know where it stands on fundamental political issues. If the public’s lack of information and interest over political affairs make it incompetent to hold

'real' political preferences, the meaning of representative democracy has to be questioned. Although they refer to some measurement drawbacks on Converse's black and white model, the authors do not contest the general finding of the Michigan and Converse studies over the existence of an ill-informed public. Nevertheless, they argue that factual knowledge surveys "do not really provide unequivocal grounds for holding the American citizenry in contempt" (p. 12, see also Graber 2001), because:

Some of the political information questions in surveys amount to little more than trivia quizzes. Other put a heavy premium upon knowledge of number and proper names that are of questionable value to ordinary citizens. Does it really matter whether people can name political figures, so long as they can find or recognize their names when needed and know something about the main candidates on the ballot? (p. 12)

On a second level, Page and Shapiro conform to the view that political ignorance is rational, that the vast majority of the electorate does not know much over political issues and consequently that it would be unrealistic to expect the average voter to have clear preferences over public policies. Yet, by changing the unit of measurement from the individual to the aggregate they argue that public opinion as a whole is stable, meaningful and organized in a coherent pattern. This is because "the simple process of adding together or averaging many individuals survey responses tends to cancel out the distorting effects of random errors in the measurement of individuals' opinions" (p. 15). Hence, according to Page's and Shapiro's view the public can be uncertain or ignorant at the individual level but at the same time public opinion as a whole will hold coherent political preferences (see Converse 1990 for a similar argument). These can be developed in a coherent way along with a number of deeper individual-level and value laden 'long

term preferences' that may fluctuate around a mean position but these fluctuations will be cancelled out by other respondents' similar fluctuations in the opposite direction. By drawing on a wealth of empirical surveys from 1935 to 1990, Page and Shapiro justify their argument showing that the American public holds relatively stable opinions in several issues and when collective opinion changes it does so in a consistent and predictable manner. On top of this, the authors argue that the inference of meaningful patterns in aggregate preferences shows that collective opinions 'are related to deeply held beliefs and values concerning individual liberty, suspicion of big government and big business, esteem of work, care for the helpless, desire for peace and the like that are embedded in American history and culture' (1999, p. 104).

Page and Shapiro's arguments have been subject to a fair amount of criticism from Bartels (1996) and Kuklinski and Quirk (2000). Bartels argues that the 'miracle of aggregation' argument put forward by Converse and the authors of the *Rational Public* can only be met in cases where individual voter errors are truly random and uncorrelated. However, this assumption cannot be made in the cases where the judgment error does not stem from individual differences but from collective reactions to events or media priming, as is the most likely case in a modern political environment. In his words: 'If sources of error affect the entire electorate (or a significant fraction of the entire electorate) in similar ways, the resulting errors will simply not cancel out no matter how large the electorate may be' (1996. p. 199-200). Kuklinski and Quirk (2000) further challenged the Collective Rationality thesis by arguing that Page and Shapiro's hypothesis does not take into account the lack of objective and balanced information flows in public discourse where media and politicians often present complex and

technical issues in a simplified form and, as it has been stated elsewhere, they ‘rarely aspire to any complexity of language or argument’ (Crouch 2004, p.24). The relation between media and political knowledge is discussed in Chapter 5.

2.2 Cognitive Heuristics and Theories of Low Information Rationality

In his seminal work ‘An Economic Theory of Democracy’, Downs (1957) argued that the vast majority of the public transfer the extensive cognitive costs of following and understanding political affairs to various endorsers that voters perceive as agreeing and trustworthy, rationally choosing not to make the decision by themselves. As Downs has famously put it, the most rational path for an average citizen is not to take any decision apart from deciding whom to trust for her decision-making. These experts may be people from the individual’s social environment, interest groups (including political parties) or professional experts who are occupied in providing political judgments to citizens. Yet, the transfer of political decisions to experts has some important drawbacks as the decision costs, although are significantly reduced, are not fully minimized. This is because the voter still has to make an informed judgment on whether he/she and the expert share the same political goals and on the other hand whether the expert actually has more information and judgment ability than himself / herself. Consequently, even though citizens can ‘rationally’ base their political judgment on various experts, the allocation of decision making may sometimes lead to inaccurate political choices.

Downs was the first to indicate that citizens may use shortcuts in order to avoid cognitive costs of judging by themselves. His argument was by and large the forerunner of ‘cognitive heuristic’ concept developed by Kahneman and Tversky in the 1970s. Cognitive heuristics are problem solving strategies that are often used by individuals unconsciously (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000, Lau 2003) and reduce the complex tasks associated with a problem into ‘simpler judgmental operations’ (Tversky and Kahneman 1974, p. 1124). They are practical ‘rules of thumb’ (Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991, Lau 2003) that individuals employ in order to simplify various choices and they are efficient in the sense that they effectively reduce decision costs. Although heuristics fulfill a useful function in making decisions, as I show below, they may sometimes lead to ‘severe and systematic errors’ in human judgment (Tversky and Kahneman 1974, p. 1124)¹⁰.

Kahneman and Tversky distinguished four different heuristic groups that help people navigate in the complexity of demands of everyday decision-making: availability, representativeness, anchoring and adjustment and simulation. The first two are directly relevant to the public’s political decision making. The representativeness heuristic describes the strategy often employed by people to ‘select or order outcomes by the degree to which the outcomes represent the essential features of the evidence’ (1973, p. 238, see also Tversy and Kahneman 1974). According to their proposed definition a person who employs this heuristic “assesses the probability of an uncertain event by the degree to which (i) is similar in essential characteristics to its parent population and (ii) reflects the salient features of the process by which it is generated.”(1972, p. 430). For

¹⁰ Tversky and Kahneman showed in experiments that participants were falsely calculating probabilities of various events by relying on various heuristics.

example it is common to use stereotypes to judge whether a person belongs to an occupational category from the degree to which the person is representative of this category but at the same time ignoring all other information (Tversky and Kahnemann 1974). To use an example in political-decision making, if one knows that Jose Manuel Barroso, the president of European Commission is a conservative politician, his or her attitude toward conservatives will drive evaluations toward him. A second common heuristic studied by Tversky and Kahneman is the availability heuristic (1974, 1983) according to which people 'assess the frequency of a class or the probability of an event by the ease with which instances or occurrences can be brought to mind' (1974, p. 1127). This 'take the first' rule is central for the ways that people decide over politics. For example if one has recently watched a news program about EU internal policy it is highly likely that his / her evaluation toward the EU will be driven by the program he or she saw recently, because it will be more easily available in long term memory¹¹.

The use of cognitive heuristics in political behavior has been well documented in several surveys. A large number of information shortcuts based on the availability and representativeness heuristics have been found to be in use by voters, including party identification (Campbell et al. 1960, Popkin 1991, Zaller 1992, Rahn 1993), people from their social environment (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995, Lupia and McCubbins 1998, 2000; Ahn, Huckfeldt and Ryan 2010; Ryan 2011), retrospective judgments over the state of the economy (Fiorina 1981), stereotypes of candidates' personalities and appearance (Rahn et al. 1990, Popkin 1991, Riggle et al. 1992), ideological endorsements (Conover and Feldman 1984), the 'public mood' (Rahn 2000) or voting intention polls (Lau and Redlawk 2001).

¹¹ In fact this example is a key feature of the Receive-Accept-Sample model developed by Zaller (1992).

Two notable early contributions illustrating the use of heuristics were the works by Iyengar (1990) and Mondak (1993). Drawing on his research on the priming effect of media in voters' evaluation criteria (Iyengar and Kinder 1987), Iyengar demonstrated the existence of an 'accessibility' heuristic, similar to the availability heuristic discussed above: As people tend to be specialists rather than generalists in political knowledge (either because of media priming or individual characteristics), they tend to disproportionately use their opinions on the issues they know more about in order to deal with issues about which they have limited information. For example, Iyengar showed that voters who are relatively informed about race issues tended to evaluate president Reagan based on racial considerations.

Based on the assumptions of Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (1986)¹², Mondak (1993) studied the peripheral strategies employed by voters by conducting a quasi-experimental survey in which half of the sample is asked over their voting preference in the appointment of Supreme Court of Justice a) with a mention of the governor who supported the candidate and b) without any mention, Mondak showed that the reference of supporting information functioned as a cognitive heuristic in both opinion holding (the number of respondents willing to give an answer) and opinion direction.

Rahn (2000) argued that apart from using elites and ideology as heuristics, affect can also facilitate low information rationality helping people to form political attitudes.

¹²Petty and Cacioppo (1986) developed the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) for assessing the possibility of high or low elaboration in different situations. Elaboration refers to "the extent to which a person thinks about the issue-relevant arguments contained in a message" (Petty and Cacioppo 1986, p. 128). According to the ELM individuals analyze persuasive messages via a central or a peripheral route. The central route processing involves a thorough examination of provided information while the peripheral route refers to superficial judgment based on simple cues.

Rahn's argument draws on Damasio's famous card experiment where it was demonstrated that strategic decisions in the game were based on emotional responses that preceded conscious reasoning (Bechara et al. 1997). Rahn tests the hypothesis that the 'public mood', (defined as 'a diffuse affective state...that citizens experience because of their membership in a particular political community', Rahn et al. 1996, p. 31) could drive political preferences in cases where relevant information is absent or when facing complex political choices by analyzing political preferences toward NAFTA. Yet it remains unclear from this research whether political unsophisticated actually increased their competence in making reasonable political decisions through the public mood heuristic.

2.2.1 The Compensatory Role of Cognitive Heuristics: Do Voters Need to be Sophisticated?

The view that people rely up to a degree on cognitive heuristics in order to form their political choices is uncontested. The interesting question is up to what point do information shortcuts effectively compensate for the lack of political sophistication. A part of cognitive heuristics literature offers comforting evidence that restore faith in citizen judgment, counter arguing the traumatized image of the ignorant voter deciding at random described by the political sophistication studies of the 1960s. If people can decide based on simple rules of thumb, the absence of political information does not undermine the foundations of representative democracy. In order to pursue this central hypothesis, several scholars sought to examine the employment of heuristics for informed decision making as an alternative to the knowledge-based model of political choice.

McKelvey and Ordeshook (1985) were the first to theoretically examine the plausibility of this hypothesis and found that roughly 2/3 of uninformed voters could be making the same choices they would make if they had perfect information over candidate positions by accurately using cost-effective cues such as other voters, history of candidates and interest groups. These findings paved the way for empirical research over the use of cognitive heuristics by voters. Subsequent researchers appeared more positive toward the compensating capability of cognitive heuristics.

Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock (1991) examined the employment of cognitive heuristics by voters along with their levels of political sophistication¹³. Their central argument is straightforward: ‘On the one side people take advantage of heuristics to compensate for lack of information; on the other the particular heuristics they take advantage of depend on the amount of information they have’ (p. 20). Some common heuristics that individuals take advantage of in order to simplify choices in political matters are affective evaluations, the likability heuristic and the desert heuristic.

Sniderman and his colleagues discovered that unsophisticated voters often make affective inferences when evaluating policy proposals toward particular groups: disliking blacks has a higher impact on the formation of attitudes toward racial policies among the least politically sophisticated voters, while prejudice against homosexuals significantly affects the way that the politically unaware decide on issues regarding discrimination of

¹³ The authors use education as a proxy of political sophistication. They criticize the multifaceted measures of political sophistication for packing together multiple dimensions of political interest and awareness. According to the authors ‘it is precisely because political sophistication implicates so many facets of information processing that it is likely to play a role of high centrality in reasoning about political choices’. Their rationale is that it covaries in theoretically predictable ways with political information and awareness and that its measurement is precise and error free. However, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, this approach has been strongly criticized as subsequent panel surveys discredit the causality between education and sophistication (e.g. Jennings and Niemi 1981, Luskin 1990, Highton 2009).

AIDS infected people. The desert¹⁴ heuristic refers to the voters' sense of justice. Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock use the example of blacks and homosexuals to show that citizens form their policy preferences by using a rule of thumb that says that people who are considered to be responsible of their bad economic or social situation do not deserve as much aid as individuals who cannot be blamed for their condition. Hence according to Sniderman and his colleagues (see also Sniderman et al. 1986) instead of analyzing the ideological and value contents of the message and the policy alternatives offered by parties and interest groups, citizens use a simple shortcut by making an attribution of responsibility: "If those for whom help is being sought have been trying to help themselves, then [the citizens] will favor government helping them; if not, not" (Sniderman 2000, p. 73).

Finally, Sniderman and his colleagues identify a third heuristic that they call the 'likability heuristic'. This shortcut helps citizens decide on where political parties stand on the important issues of the day: by using their feelings toward parties as an information shortcut citizens estimate where they stand on the issue and then are able to accurately place the party they like (or dislike) near (or away from) their own preference (see also Sniderman and Brody 1985, Sniderman 2000).

A second major contribution is the introduction of the low information rationality theory proposed by Popkin (1991). The author draws on Downs (1957) and Tversky and Kahneman (1974) to argue that the public uses 'low information rationality' to make political judgments in an efficient and accurate manner by using political information shortcuts. In alignment with Downs he argues that the main source of citizens' political knowledge comes from daily life experience through the ways that citizens interact with

¹⁴ Sometimes referred as the 'self-help' heuristic (see Sniderman 2000)

the state and government to bring off their private affairs. The media and especially political campaigns help citizens make the link between their everyday information and the positions of parties and candidates. Popkin criticizes scholars that link the public's ability to make accurate judgments about politics with their levels of political sophistication, by arguing that such factual knowledge questions is a misleading way of assessing the electorate's competence in making reasonable political decisions because they underestimate the effects of information shortcuts¹⁵:

'People learn about specific government programs as a by-product of ordinary activities { ... }. They obtain economic information from their activities as consumers, from their workplace or from their friends. They also obtain all sorts of information from the media. Thus they do not need to know which party controls Congress, or the names of their senators, in order to know something about the state of the economy or proposed cuts in Social Security or the controversies over abortion.' (p.213).

When direct information is difficult to obtain, Popkin argues that citizens are able to successfully rely on three cognitive heuristics for their decision making during an election: they may take advantage of the representativeness heuristic to 'judge whether a person will be of a particular kind by how similar he is to the stereotype of that person' (p.12)¹⁶. What is more, according to Popkin, citizens are in a position to make effective judgments over a candidate's political record and future performance by using his or her

¹⁵ Yet in later publications he implicitly acknowledges sophistication effects in political choice (Popkin and Dimock 1999)

¹⁶ As we discussed earlier, the representativeness heuristic was introduced by Kahneman and Tversky (1972, Tversky and Kahneman 1974). According to their proposed definition a person who employs this heuristic "assesses the probability of an uncertain event by the degree to which (i) is similar in essential characteristics to its parent population and (ii) reflects the salient features of the process by which it is generated." (1972, p. 430). For example it is common to use stereotypes to judge whether a person belongs to an occupational category from the degree to which the personal is representative of this category but at the same time ignoring all other information (Tversky and Kahnemann 1974).

personal characteristics as proxies. On top of these and especially in second order elections such as primary elections (where citizens hold different kinds and quantities of information about each candidates), voters make use of a third information shortcut that Popkin names the 'Drunkard's Search': as the drunk first looks for his car keys in the spots where the street lamps shed light on because it's easy to see there, similarly voters look for tangible voting criteria by comparing the personal qualities of the front-runner candidate (who gets the largest share of publicity) with the rest of the candidates. It is important to note that in contrast with Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock (1991), Popkin argues that information shortcuts are not used solely by the uninformed but instead their use is an 'inescapable fact of life' (p.218) regardless of levels of education or political sophistication.

The compensatory use of cognitive heuristics by the uninformed layers of the public was further advocated by Lupia (1994). The author chose to focus on the decision making process of voters on a complex technical issue of five reforms on automobile insurance. Lupia found that people with a low level of encyclopedic knowledge who could correctly identify the position of the insurance industry were able to draw on this heuristic and eventually were more likely to mimic the behavior of the more informed layers of the sample and vote similarly, in comparison with those who did not possess adequate knowledge to base their responses on the particular heuristic. Lupia concludes that, since knowing the industry position is equally effective toward an informed decision with having broad contextual information on the reform, voters may use their limited information to make the same choices they would make in the light of more encyclopedic information.

Lupia and McCubbins (1998, 2000) further explained the conditions under which people with limited political information are able to make informed choices. They argue that citizens do not need excessive political information in order to make reasoned judgments. Instead they can rely on sources they consider to be more knowledgeable than them such as experts, political actors and the media. Lupia and McCubbins further argue that institutions play an important role in the limited information political reasoning as they regulate through verification of events and imposing penalty on deceiving information. The authors use the example of the United States campaign-finance disclosure laws aimed to ensure transparency in political donations. According to Lupia and McCubbins:

‘this enables voters to identify which groups or individuals support a given candidate or initiative and how much a change in the status quo policy is worth to them. If a person is reasonably happy with the status quo, and would thus like to see only a small change in policy, and if she observes the sponsor of a ballot initiative spending several million dollars to affect the election, then, without any further information, she can infer that the initiative proposes a very large change in the status quo and she should oppose it’ (2000, p. 60).

In this sense, according to the Lupia and McCubbins argument, institutions play an effective role in informed political reasoning allowing voters to compensate for their lack of political sophistication.

2.2.2 Criticism on Theories of Low Information Rationality

Even though the general finding that citizens employ cognitive heuristics up to some degree in order to form their political preferences is undisputed, the idea that this

allows the politically unsophisticated to compensate for their poor levels of political information has met strong criticism from different theoretical and methodological standpoints.

A first dimension of skepticism concerns the extent to which uninformed citizens who form their political preferences on the basis of information shortcuts would make the same choices under the light of full information. The decision on what constitutes a ‘correct’ choice in the public’s political preferences is far from apparent because of the difficulty in finding criteria outside the decision-making process or outside experimental settings (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000). Still, several surveys have demonstrated significant differences in the use of heuristics between the politically sophisticated and unsophisticated. As we analyze in chapter 6, it has been found repeatedly that citizens with low levels of political sophistication tend to follow cues that are inconsistent with their general political predispositions (such as values or ideology), thus ending up yielding to persuasion messages they would oppose had they decided under the light of full information (Zaller 1992, 1996, Lau and Redlawsk 2001, 2006). In this sense, the role of political sophistication becomes important in correctly employing heuristics. As Sniderman et al. assert the “comparative advantage [of experts] is not that they have a stupendous amount of knowledge, but that they know how to get the most out of the knowledge they possess” (1991, p. 24). Kuklinski and Quirk (2000) also considered the extent to which citizens are confident enough to rely on heuristics even when the most important part of information is missing. To this direction, they conducted an experiment designed to assess how different information affect support for a hypothetical candidate, with different groups of respondents being exposed to different heuristic types. The

experiment demonstrated that people relied with increased confidence on heuristics to form attitudes on extremely complicated issues where it was evident that they lacked crucial information.

Another group of scholars challenged the 'low information rationality' hypothesis on different methodological grounds. Bartels (1996) challenged the low information rationality hypothesis by demonstrating that levels of political knowledge exert a significant influence in vote choices. He measured the influence of political sophistication on the electoral choices of demographically homogeneous groups in US presidential elections. His analysis illustrated a significant impact of political awareness on the vote choice, as otherwise socially homogeneous groups exhibited important differences in their electoral behavior when sophistication was taken into account. Lau and Redlawsk conducted a series of studies in which they attempted to build an integrative theory over the political sophistication / cognitive heuristic interaction (1997, 2001, 2006; Lau et al. 2008). Their focus moved away from issues such as opinion holding or attitude formation and they investigated the extent to which the public uses cognitive heuristics to cast a 'correct vote', which is defined as a voting decision 'that is the same as the choice that would have been made under conditions of full information' (2006, p. 75). By studying participants' decisions on an information board in a mock election with hypothetical candidates, Lau and Redlawsk examined the impact of values and beliefs, political information and cognitive heuristics on the mock voters' decision making processes. They concluded that only 70 percent of respondents voted correctly by employing information shortcut techniques and that the percentage raises to

approximately 95 percent when respondents decided on the light of full information (2006).

Apart from the degree to which the use of information shortcuts increases citizens ability to reach meaningful political conclusions, a second dimension of criticism questions the central assumption regarding the low cognitive cost of various heuristics. The argument put forward here states that an often neglected prerequisite of 'low information rationality' is that the decision makers have to carry at least some factual knowledge in order to take advantage of available heuristics in the political environment. As Delli Carpini asserts: 'the heuristic model is based on low information rationality rather than no information rationality' (1999, p.146). For example, using the cognitive heuristic of group endorsements requires a minimal knowledge regarding a political actors' group affiliation and some minimal knowledge regarding the issue's history; using campaign spending as heuristic as is the case in Lupia's and McCubbins' framework requires excessive information such the parties' spending or the identification of donors. Employing the representativeness heuristic studied by Popkin (1991) presupposes the recognition of political actors. The probability of employments of the likability heuristic has been found to increase with levels of political sophistication, as voters have to carry some information to connect policies with candidates in order to adjust their behavior based on their likes and dislikes of the candidates (Lawrence 2003).

In this sense, theories of low information rationality do not seem to offer an alternative to political sophistication theories because 'much of the information that is necessary for heuristic decision making {...} is precisely the kind of information that many citizens lack' (Delli Carpini and Keeter 2000 , p.23). In fact it has been often

bypassed by a number of sophistication critics, that Sniderman and his colleagues (1985, 1991; Sniderman 2000, see also Boudreau 2009) have underlined that the level of political information an individual holds has an important impact not only on the type of cognitive heuristic she chooses but also on the correctness of the decision. As Sniderman has put it “it takes smarts to take advantage of smart moves” (2000, p. 72). Interestingly in a subsequent survey, Popkin himself implicitly acknowledged the role of political sophistication in citizens’ decision making processes by analyzing electoral turnout and attitudes toward the House Banking Scandal in the United States (Popkin and Dimock 1999).

What is more, the cognitive heuristics literature focuses extensively on the United States two-party system where the voters have a binary choice of either voting for the incumbent or the challenger. In fact, it has been argued that the dyadic nature of the American political system seems to provide a coherent set of alternatives which is a prerequisite for the use of information shortcuts. In Sniderman’s words,

“citizens can overcome informational shortfalls about politics, not because they (mysteriously) can simplify public choices effectively, but because these choices are systematically simplified for them. Issue alternatives are organized in advance, typically, binary, mutually exclusive and characteristically exhaustive...We take issue consistency conceived programmatically to be conditional primarily on the organization of choice sets by institutional factors external to the chooser and only derivatively by factors internal to the chooser” (2000, p.81)

Under this view, it seems that Delli Carpini’s and Keeter’s argument over the concordances between the sophistication and cognitive heuristics hypotheses becomes

more plausible when we take into account the wide variety of political parties, actors and ideological orientations found in European multi-party systems. How easily can an average citizen follow cognitive shortcuts among a large number of political candidates and groups who advocate a plethora of political ideas? We have evidence that the use of party cues is dependent on the particular characteristics of a political system (Merolla et al. 2005). How could we expect cognitive heuristics to function within a typical European political system? Let us take the likability heuristic as an example: In a typical European multi-party system a large number of different parties take ideological stances that stem from a series of different standpoints: liberalism, nationalism, neo-fascism, communism, social democracy, traditional conservatism, green politics or market liberalism. Making use of the likability heuristic in this complex environment requires at least a basic knowledge of the background of each party –let alone the recognition of political actors associated with this party. In other words, citizens' reliance on information shortcuts becomes more cognitively demanding in comparison with the American two-party political system. One could argue that voters could use a shortcut for the shortcut by focusing only in the two large parties or the parties that have a chance of being elected in government (a method with a similar logic to Popkin's Drunkard's search heuristic we discussed above). This tactic could prove partially useful in deciding who to vote. However, when it comes to deciding on the important political issues of the day, such as economic matters, the treatment of asylum seekers or foreign policy issues where every party has a say, it is hard to assume that the cognitive demands of using information shortcuts in a two-party and a multiparty system remain the same.

Moreover, political science literature has highlighted a series of developments within western European party systems that could have an effect on the availability and visibility of information shortcuts: It has been argued that the western political parties have been transformed from ideologically coherent entities to more generic and ideologically neutral parties that mitigate their ideological orientations and systematically seek to aggregate a variety of heterogeneous social interests in order to appeal to a larger and increasingly volatile electorate (Dalton 1984, 2007; Dogan 2001; Clarke et al. 2004, 2009; Mair 2008). This process is enhanced by the market liberalization under the process European integration (Mair 2008). As a result, the parties' political platforms have become looser and incoherent and political rhetoric increasingly focuses on valence issues¹⁷ rather than highlighting differences between policy alternatives (Clarke et al. 2004, 2009). A looser political platform may result in a more ambiguous political rhetoric which in turn may reduce the availability of party cues.

On the other hand, the development of the professionalization of political marketing (Gibson and Römmele 2001) has led to the condition where 'voters are seen more as consumers than loyal partisans, to be wooed with sophisticated advertising rather than serious political education'. (Gibson and Römmele 2001, p. 32). On top of that, it has been argued that the mediatization of politics has shifted citizens' attention to the personal qualities of candidates rather than their programmatic positions (Iyengar 1994). This means that, even if cognitive heuristics can at least partially compensate for the lack of factual knowledge around political issues, the citizen's task to make use of a particular

¹⁷ Valence issues are those "that merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate", while 'position issues' are those 'that involve advocacy of government actions from a set of alternatives over which a distribution of voter preferences is defined' (Stokes 1963, p. 373).

heuristic in order to decide on an issue becomes increasingly difficult as the available cues become less visible for the politically unsophisticated¹⁸.

In sum, the above analysis suggests that the use and effectiveness of common information shortcuts may be subject to particular systemic conditions. We have a number of reasons to expect that the validity of information shortcuts will be dependent on the type of the political party system, the prevalence of the catch all parties within the political sphere and the quality of public discourse. While there are several surveys highlighting the use of various cognitive heuristics in the decision making processes of European voters especially in regard with public opinion support for European integration (e.g. Anderson 1998, Sanchez-Cuenca 2000, Hooghe and Marks 2005), the question over the compensatory role of information shortcuts has only recently started to receive attention (e.g. Hobolt 2007, Tilley and Wlezien 2008, Petersen et al 2010). Although we lack the data for an assessment on the effectiveness of cognitive heuristics in a cross national comparative investigation, our focus on the particular characteristics of the Greek political system may shed light on the function of information shortcuts in a polarized multi-party system. In Chapter 6 I assess the effect of party leaders' evaluations and ideological self-placement in the formation of attitudes toward the issue of the foundation of private universities in Greece and find that despite the mediating effects of heuristics in political choice, levels of political sophistication decisively affect the quality and correctness of public attitudes.

2.3 Memory Based Models and Lodge's Online Model

¹⁸ Although, as Popkin (1991) would argue, they can still use the heuristic of the personality of the actor who advocates or opposes a particular policy proposal .

Lodge and his colleagues (Lodge et al. 1989, 1995; Lodge and Taber 2000, 2005; McGraw et al. 1990, Taber et al. 2009) initiated an affect driven model to describe the ways used by citizens without much political knowledge to make candidate evaluations and make voting decisions¹⁹. They challenged the long standing memory-based approach, according to which citizens base their political evaluations on a synthesis of pro and con evidence that are available in their long term memory system, by arguing instead that voters decide over political issues ‘on-line’: Citizens form some first affect-laden impressions when they encounter an unknown candidate, political party or idea²⁰ based on various types of stereotypical information. When citizens are exposed to new information they retrieve their initial evaluation counter from memory and they instantly update this “running tally” that holds a summary impressions and evaluations of the candidate. This online tally is then stored in long term memory but the information that contributed to its initial formation is quickly forgotten. Upon presentation of the associated social object, voters automatically recall the affective tally on which they rely to form an impression. This heuristic is called the ‘how-do-I-feel-heuristic’ and is roughly similar with Sniderman et al.’s (1991) likability and Rahn’s (2000) public mood heuristic described in the previous section.

The on-line model has important implications in our understanding of the public’s political decision making processes. Similarly to Festinger’s Cognitive Dissonance theory (1957) it implies that citizens are subject to “motivated reasoning”, meaning that they are

¹⁹ On these premises Capelos (2002) examined the way citizens evaluate political leaders involved in scandals

²⁰ Lodge et al. (1989) carried out a mock election experiment with imaginary candidates to test this hypothesis.

unable to escape their initial emotions associated with a political object in the light of new information even if they attempt to be objective (Lodge and Taber 2000, 2005; Kim et al. 2010; Redlawsk 2002; Taber and Lodge 2006, Taber et al. 2009). In other words, ‘citizens’ prior attitudes toward the people, groups or issues implicated in political arguments strongly bias how they process those arguments, though selective exposure or selective judgmental process’ (Taber et al. 2009, p. 138).

In an experimental setting, Taber and Lodge (2006) asked participants to evaluate policy proposals over gun control and affirmative action measuring at the same time respondents’ attitude strength towards these issues. Next, they were asked to view information coming from different sources such as the Democratic Party or the National Rifle Association with participants being revealed the source of each message. Their results illustrated that subjects mainly sought out information confirming their pre-existing attitudes and were evaluating attitudinally congruent arguments as stronger than the respective incongruent arguments²¹. By adopting this strategy, participants were lead to attitude polarization, ending up strengthening their pre-existing beliefs in the light of new, incongruent information. An interesting finding was that Lodge and Taber brought evidence pointing to the conclusion that it is the political sophisticates who are more prone to this type of bias (2000, 2006). In the authors’ words: ‘biased processing is most likely among politically sophisticates ‘who typically hold the strongest attitudes, with the most confidence, and who have the most facts at hand, thereby making them more able to

²¹ The authors recognize that there is a distinction between *accuracy* and *directional* goals in information-seeking processes. An accuracy goal motivates toward an impartial, correct conclusion, while a directional goal motivates toward supporting an already reached conclusion. Yet, they argue that due to the inescapable use of ‘on-line’ reasoning, “feelings become information” (2000, p.207). Consequently, if one knows that the information he or she evaluates is congruent or incongruent with his/her predispositional expectations reaching an impartial conclusion becomes particularly difficult as a result of automatic affective information processing (see Nir 2011 for a different perspective)

assimilate supporting evidence and better equipped to discredit arguments that challenge their established beliefs or attitudes (Lodge and Taber 2000, p. 211, see also Taber and Lodge 2006, Taber et al. 2009, Kim et al. 2010). More recently Redlawsk et al. (2010) argued over the existence of an “affective tipping point” in the effects of negative information, after which anxiety²² leads to the reconsideration of initial opinion thus eliminating motivated reasoning processes.

A second implication of the on-line model concerns the issue of political sophistication. According to Lodge et al., the fact that the majority of the American public does not carry extended political information, falling short to answer factual questions over politics does not necessarily mean they cannot make informed political decisions because “the forgetting of the facts...is of little consequence to the online model, since the affective value of campaign messages has already been integrated into the evaluation and vote decision” (1995, p. 311). Still, not all people have the same propensity of deciding over politics on-line. McGraw, Lodge and Stroh (1990) showed that politically sophisticated individuals were better able to draw on their ‘running tally’ to inform their evaluations and thus did not need to retrieve specific information from memory to render an evaluation, due to their increased processing capabilities. What is more, political sophisticates made use of a larger amount of available information in contrast with the less sophisticated respondents who relied disproportionately to information which were consistent with their expectations in order to make a political evaluation.

²² Anxiety has repeatedly been found to enhance political learning. See Marcus et al. 1993,2000; Brader 2005 and chapter 4 this dissertation.

Another experiment conducted by Rahn et al. (1994) showed that the information environment played an important role in the implementation of the online model. More sophisticated voters were more likely to judge online in comparison with the unsophisticated in a cognitive demanding environment such as a political debate, while both sophisticated and unsophisticated voters could draw on online evaluation in simpler information environments such as political advertisements.

In sum, although the online model does not directly participate in the low information rationality debate, Lodge's suggestions offer a new approach on the ways an apparently uninformed public reaches political conclusions 'on-line'. Still, a question remains on why do some people still have extensive stored political knowledge and others fail to answer even the most fundamental aspects of politics. In later works, Lodge and Taber (2000) suggest that this is subject to individuals' motivation of either being accurate over their political conclusions or of seeking to justify a preferred conclusion. The positive relation between political sophistication and motivated reasoning becomes an inescapable aspect of political choice (Taber and Lodge 2006, Taber et al. 2009). People interested in politics acquire more information over political affairs than in turn strengthen their attitudes making them unable to yield to messages countering their attitudes. In this sense, the 'motivated reasoning' literature comes in line with the traditional political sophistication approach according to which political sophisticates are more resistant to persuasion messages contradicting their ideological predispositions (e.g. Luskin 1987, 1990; Zaller 1992, 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). As Taber and al. assert: 'Built into our cognitive and emotional processing systems are mechanisms that motivate and enable political action. The irony of motivated reasoning is that these same

mechanisms undermine our ability to rationally respond to new and challenging information' (2009, p.154).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has discussed the three main theoretical frameworks groups proposed for explaining citizens' decision making processes that were developed in the light of the political sophistication model that painted a grim picture of the American electorate's competence in making meaningful decisions over political issues. It is important to note that apart from the collective rationality model proposed by the authors of the *Rational Public* (1992), the basic deductions of the on-line and heuristic models are complementary to political sophistication theory. On the one hand, the heuristic model deals with the paths that citizens use to reach political decisions in the absence of full information. In this sense as Delli Carpini (1999) has argued, the use of cognitive heuristics describes 'a human condition rather than a particular form of decision making'. Hence we may add two additional questions in the relation between sophistication and information shortcuts: The first is which groups of citizens rely on each criterion to decide on a political issue and up to which extent does the employment of cognitive heuristics increase public competence in political decision making. The second is whether the cognitive cost (and consequently the influence) of cognitive heuristics remains stable in different party system types. Before I touch on these issues in the 6th and final chapter of this dissertation, in the next chapter, I further elaborate the concept of political sophistication based on the broad theoretical framework described in Chapters 1 and 2.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGNING AN INSTRUMENT FOR THE MEASUREMENT OF POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION

In Chapter 1 we discussed the theoretical and methodological evolution of the concept of political sophistication. Political sophistication, defined as the ‘quantity and organization of a person’s political cognitions’ Luskin (1987), is a latent variable which cannot be approached through direct methods. Researchers can only measure the *application* of the individuals’ cognitive abilities (Luskin 1987, Levendusky and Jackman 2003). As we described in chapter 1, systematic research over the most accurate and reliable means of measurement of political sophistication arrived at the widely accepted conclusion that the best single method for accurately tapping levels of political sophistication are questions of factual knowledge (Smith 1989, Luskin 1990, Luskin and Bullock 2005b). The vast majority of works regarding political sophistication in the 1990s and the 2000s uses tests of political knowledge in order to measure the latent concept of sophistication. As Luskin asserts: ‘Given the close correlation between quantity and organization and between quantity and accuracy. [political sophistication] is roughly the same variable as *information*, in the sense of information already held, which omits organization, and as *knowledge*, which omits organization but requires accuracy’ (2002, p. 220)

Despite this principal clarification, there are still some open questions with regards to the structure of such questionnaires that center mostly on the issues of question

range, discrimination, difficulty and coding. The first and most important challenge concerns the choice of items used in a political knowledge scale. The researcher faces the difficult task to choose criteria over the importance of items used in a study. Thus, the central questions become: *what is important to know over politics* and how can we employ a criterion for justifying the selection of knowledge items?

Moreover, another frequently cited cause for concern is the length and detail of the scale. Can we assume that instruments of five knowledge items function as well as questionnaires containing numerous items? Some other aspects that merit attention are whether open or closed questions are more reliable in the estimation of political knowledge, the correctness of a possible distinction between different levels of error in factual questions and the precautions against guesswork by participants in the cases where a questionnaire consists of closed type questions.

These puzzling issues reveal a series of methodological cautions that the researcher needs to heed to in order to construct a valid and reliable knowledge scale. It comes as no surprise that these important methodological aspects of the measurement of political sophistication gave birth to a second circle of debate among political scientists and social psychologists, this time over the most effective methods of measurement.

This chapter has two aims: The first is to review the theoretical framework over the content of a questionnaire measuring political sophistication and develop a theoretical argument over the inclusion of items in factual knowledge questionnaires. The main methodological argument put forward here is that in cases of exploratory research, i.e. when the public's levels of political sophistication are measured for the first time, item choice should be based on theoretical criteria (over what citizens should know about

politics) rather than on data driven expectations. That is to say, the focus should be in tying the theoretical components to a corresponding measurement method rather than ‘fixing’ items with the purpose of achieving a large differentiation of respondents. The second aim of this chapter is to review and evaluate different question coding and answer scoring approaches as they have been articulated in the literature regarding political knowledge tests for quantitative surveys. The chapter is divided in two sections: In the first I discuss the theoretical and methodological framework described above. In the second I make use of these conclusions to justify the methodology of measurement employed in this dissertation.

3.1. Content of Political Knowledge Questionnaires

How should a researcher pick the best items for measuring political knowledge and consequently political sophistication? According to the theoretical background we described in Chapter 1, the ideal method would be to delve into respondents’ thought processes and cognitive ability. However such processes cannot be directly measured. Thus researchers can only rely on the application of these processes (Smith 1989, Luskin and Bullock 2005b). As we discussed in chapter 1, after many years of debate around the concept and the best means of measurement of political sophistication, a consensus was established on the use of political knowledge levels as the most accurate single instrument: the latent ability we want to measure (political sophistication) can be tapped through its application, which is the respondents’ levels political knowledge (Luskin

1987, 2001; Zaller 1992; Levedunsky and Jackman 2003). Consequently, the relation between sophistication and knowledge can be summed as:

$$X_i = \xi_i + \varepsilon_i,$$

where X_i is the respondent's latent political sophistication, ξ_i is the application of the respondent's political sophistication (in this case political knowledge) and ε_i represents the measurement error between political knowledge and political sophistication.

It should be noted however that even though sophistication requires quantity *and* organization of political information, the two are very proximate. As Luskin puts it:

The quantity of political information a person holds is highly correlated with both how well he or she has organized it and how accurate it tends to be. Large but disorganized belief systems, since long-term memory works by organization, are almost unimaginable. Large but delusional ones, like those of the remaining followers of Lyndon LaRouche, who believe that the Queen of England heads a vast international drug conspiracy, are rare" (Luskin 2003, 2005a, p. 2).

Consequently, the error between knowledge and sophistication in practice is much smaller than one would expect from the definition of sophistication. Still, it is important to note that it is impossible to measure the *totality* of an individual's political knowledge. We can only make inferences on the distribution of correct responses in the items the researcher chooses to include the measurement. Hence, factual knowledge questionnaires entail a second level of error between the respondents' political knowledge true score and the observed scores we receive in political knowledge measurements. Thus, the relation between political sophistication and information tests can be represented as:

$$X_i = \xi_i + \varepsilon_i + \varepsilon_2,$$

where ε_2 is the difference between the respondent's true political knowledge and the observed political knowledge we obtain from knowledge questionnaires.

It becomes apparent that the selection of specific factual items is crucial for the accurate measurement of political knowledge and consequently political sophistication as it affects to a large degree the accuracy of the obtained results. A potential problem arises from the fact that the key variable cannot be directly observed and the factual items a researcher chooses may be inappropriate. It is surprising that despite the large number of surveys and publications around the concept of political sophistication and its impact on voters' decision making, the discussion over the content of the questions that should be included in political knowledge questionnaires remains remarkably limited. Most scholars in the United States simply use the ANES political knowledge questionnaires, while the critique of these measures mostly concentrates, as we discuss below, on coding issues. In Europe, in the few cases where the impact of political sophistication has been examined, most authors use available political knowledge questions as indicators, construct a scale without justifying the choice of items (e.g. Gordon and Segura 1997, Hendriks-Vettehen, Hagemann and van Snippenburg 2004, Semetko et al. 2003, Norris 2010) or attempt to tap political knowledge by proximate variables such as political interest or media exposure.

The publications by Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter are notable exceptions as they offer an extensive theoretical and methodological justification of choice of specific knowledge items. Based on previous works by Barber (1973) and Neuman (1986), Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993, 1996) argue that the core of any valid

political knowledge questionnaire should evolve around three distinct yet reconcilable aspects of politics, namely what the government *is* and *does* and *who* it is²³.

Knowledge of what the government *is* encompasses information over the ‘understanding of the rules’ (1996, p. 64) that shape a particular political system: knowledge over the structure of government, the basic functions of democracy and the basic elements of the party system. As the authors put it:

A citizen who is concerned about the deteriorating public services but who understands the different responsibilities of local and national government may vote differently in both local and national elections than if she were less aware of these relations. (...) A citizen trying to determine why the savings and loan industry collapsed is aided by knowledge for who is responsible for government oversight in such cases and why such oversight failed. (...) Regardless of how it is used, such information is valuable in making sense of the political world (p. 64)

In fact we could think of similar examples in European parliamentary political systems, where the understanding of the rules of the game become particularly important as the governance is shared by national governments and the institutions of the European Union. For example, a time honored strategy by politicians is to use the EU institutions as scapegoats in order to avoid blame for tough domestic decisions (see Dimitrakopoulos and Richardson 2001, Milner 2006). A public that is informed over the rules of the

²³ Zaller (1992, p. 343) suggests a similar content of knowledge test by stressing the importance of ‘location tests’ and recognition items. Location tests ask respondents to locate the relative ideological place of political actors and parties in the liberal conservative continuum, while recognition items focus on various political actors. On top of that, Zaller uses the interviewer’s opinion of each respondent’s level of political information which is coded in a five-point rating scale. However, he does not present an analytical justification of his choice. Similarly, Milner (2003) has supported a similar structure without theoretically validating his proposal.

political system can resist politicians' disorientation efforts and attribute responsibility correctly. What is more, citizens need to be aware over the institutional structures of their national political system: the parliament, the limits of jurisdiction between local, national and supranational authorities etc. In short, information over the institutional structure of a political system constitutes a fundamental aspect of political knowledge as it affects the formation of opinions, the way individuals use their vote to reward or punish political actors and potentially alters voting decisions.

The second dimension of political knowledge according to Delli Carpini and Keeter involves knowledge around what the government does and it is based on Berelson et al. (1954) definition of the informed citizen as 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). Berelson et al.'s definition fully taps the essence of politics. First of all, the sine qua non of an informed citizen is the knowledge of the important issues that are at stake and lie in the center of political confrontation. On the other hand Berelson and his colleagues stress the importance of knowledge of the history of political issues. For example, a citizen in Greece cannot comprehend the country's economic problems without having some information over the major political decisions of the past governments or without being at least partially aware of the country's economic situation some decades earlier. Simonds (1982) argues that citizens' knowledge of political history serves an additional important function in the comprehension of politics. By being knowledgeable on political history an individual is able to make reasonably justified deductions over the *potentials* of the outcomes of political decisions. According to Simonds, historical awareness is an

important prerequisite of an informed citizenry as ‘it is the capacity to follow a process across time, to identify tendencies (including but certainly not confined to, the consequences of causal connections) permits judgments about potentials, about limit and about opportunity’ (1982, p. 598) which are an essential dimension of being informed.

Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993, 1996), Neuman (1986) Luskin (1987), Zaller (1992) and Milner (2003) also highlight the importance of knowledge about political actors and parties, what Neuman calls ‘the basic medium of political currency’ (1986, p. 16). Citizens are asked in elections to choose the most appropriate leaders for governing the country while in parliamentary democracies they are asked to elect the members of the parliament. In order to make an informed choice it is particularly important to have some knowledge over the political group the politician represents, where he or she stands on important issues as well as his or her record in politics. What is more, as we described in chapter 2, people quite often rely on the cognitive heuristic of political figures in order to form their political behavior. Besides, the increasing personalization of politics that is observed within European political systems over the past two decades (Dalton, McAllister and Wattenberg 2000, Crouch 2004, McAllister 2008) makes the recognition of political actors particularly important for the European voter²⁴. Hence, it is not hard to see why a basic knowledge of political actors helps citizens to choose cognitive heuristics more wisely. Yet, as Neuman argues, the recognition of political actors is the most fundamental aspect of political knowledge, as it constitutes the basis of political choice, tapping additional levels of information:

²⁴ Besides, as we discuss in Chapter 4, an important macrohistorical characteristic of the Greek voter that adds to the importance of questions regarding political actors is the attachment to local political figures and party leaders.

The basic fact of political relevance to the voters is the names of political candidates. Simple recognition of the candidates' names represents the minimum necessary awareness for a functional political life. It is difficult to imagine an individual with a sophisticated sense of a candidate's policy positions, background and political style who is unable to identify the candidate's name. After all, a great deal of political advertising, from bumper stickers and billboards to television spots, does little more than put the candidate's name in front of the public (1986, p. 15)

Equally important to the knowledge of actors is the knowledge of political parties and especially the parties' general ideological orientations as well as where the parties stand on the important issues of the day (Converse 1964, Neuman 1986, Luskin 1987, Zaller 1992, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1993, 1996, Milner 2003). For example, in order to comprehend the political world it is essential to know that left parties favor the state's strong participation in the economy and consequently reject efforts for the privatization of welfare state services. It is equally important to know that right and far right parties call for stricter laws for immigrants and asylum seekers. This component of political sophistication is measured in Converse's 'Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics' and is extensively discussed by Luskin (1987). As he asserts:

A politically sophisticated person may or may not believe that free enterprise is a good thing, that government spending is the root of inflation, or that effective control of handguns will lower the murder rate. These points are debatable. But he or she is unlikely to believe that Ronald Reagan is now a Democrat or that the Democrats currently hold a majority of seats in the U.S. Senate. Or that the Democratic party is more conservative than the Republican. (p. 881)

Delli Carpini and Keeter's validate their suggestions over the triadic content of a questionnaire measuring political knowledge through an expert survey of a random sample of 111 members of the American Political Science Association (1993). The questionnaire asked the participants' views on the general topics and particular information that an average citizen should know. According to the results 89 percent of scholars chose the topic areas of 'institutions and processes', 82 percent 'issues and policies', 77 percent chose history and 67 percent highlighted the importance of 'current political alignments'.

3.2 The Problem of Choosing Specific Knowledge Items: In Defence of a Theoretically- Driven Inclusion of Items

Despite the consensus over the general aspects of politics that knowledge items should focus on, some important questions remain unanswered over the criteria regarding specific items that should be included in political knowledge questionnaires. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993, 1996), Lawrence (2003) and Levedunsky and Jackman (2003) suggest a method for picking specific items for a valid knowledge scale which is based on item response theory. Item response theory is widely used on educational testing. It is based on latent trait theory that is used to assess the impact of specific items on a latent trait variable (see Reise et al. 1993). Item response theory indicates that a participant's performance on a test can be explained by his or her level of a hypothesized latent trait or ability. The utility of each knowledge item is decided with the criteria of a) the degree that it decidedly discriminates respondents (i.e. how well a single item discriminates

between respondents who fall in different levels of the latent trait) and b) its difficulty (i.e. how difficult the item is to answer)²⁵.

This method may be useful for conducting cost efficient knowledge tests with a few items, which focus on the discrimination of respondents in conjunction with the latent variable, with the purpose of conducting comparative research in different points of time or political systems. In fact this is the intention of all three studies. However, despite the fact that all studies come up with a few and useful items that can be safely replicated over time, they are partly based on assumptions that cannot be taken for granted – especially in exploratory research as the one conducted in this dissertation- for a number of reasons:

First, the purpose of the information tests as stated above is to tap respondents' political knowledge in a series of issues that are theoretically distinct with regards to their importance for the comprehension of politics. In other words, the theoretical function that this instrument serves is to analyze individuals' thinking processes and particularly to decide whether citizens have the essential cognitive structures (what the government is, who it is and what it does) for the comprehension of their complex political environment. As analyzed earlier, the theoretical background requires choosing the most appropriate questions that tap what the government is, who it is and what it does. Consequently, items should be chosen on the basis of the portion of knowledge they tap, rather on the basis of their discriminative ability and their relative difficulty. Item difficulty and discrimination are useful parameters for the categorization of respondents but not for the measurement

²⁵ In a binary latent trait model based on IRT such as the one discussed here, the discrimination parameter of a single item is given by the logistic regression coefficient while the difficulty is given by the logistic regression intercept in a model where the dependent variable is coded 1 in the case of a correct response and 0 in the case of a wrong or 'don't know' response.

of political knowledge per se. Although convenient -and beyond doubt cost-effective-, it does not seem reasonable to remove items that tap important aspects of politics (such as the placement of parties) in order to ease the comparison between respondents. For example, according to Delli Carpini's and Keeter's expert survey most scholars argue that identification of ideological positions of parties and candidates are important in the understanding of politics. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that such items should be included in all occasions no matter if it falls short from a discrimination or a difficulty point of view.

Furthermore, the use of item response theory presupposes the unidimensionality of political knowledge or in other words that the set of separate items assess a single underlying trait. (Reise et al. 1993). However, although some scholars suggest that political sophistication is unidimensional (Neuman 1986, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1993, 1996, Zaller 1991, Lawrence 2007), meaning that citizens knowledgeable in one domain will tend to be knowledgeable in others, there is an equally large number of surveys that suggest that political sophistication is multi-dimensional. This line of research suggests that large segments of the electorate tend to be specialists –or 'issue publics' as Converse has put it-rather than generalists (Krosnick 1990, Gordon and Segura 1997). Most surveys try to locate possible sources of multidimensionality of political sophistication in respondents' demographic and occupational differences that reflect different political interests and in turn diverse political knowledge (Neuman 1986, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).

A third reason for the unsuitability of item response theory (and data driven analyses in general) in an exploratory survey of political sophistication, is that the IRT

presupposes an a priori high discrimination with regards to the latent variable. In other words it presupposes a particular distribution of political sophistication. Indeed previous studies in the United States, where ‘the political ignorance of the American voter is one of the best documented data in political science’ (Bartels 1996, p. 184), have found that the mean level of political knowledge is low while its variance is high (Neuman 1986, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Can we take this for granted in an exploratory research of political sophistication? Elff (2009) writes that ‘there seems hardly any reason to doubt that the situation is different in other countries’ (p.1). On the contrary, I believe that the broader literature on political sophistication offers reasons to question this assumption:

As argued in the works by Stimson (1975), Miller and Miller (1976) Nie et al. (1976) and more recently Lupia (2000) and Kuklinski et al. (2001) political sophistication may be influenced by changes in the political environment. As I argue in Chapter 4, we have plenty of reasons to expect significant cross-national variation in political sophistication depending on the educational system, the media environment and the longstanding cultural and historical factors embedded in each political culture. I use Greece as a case study to argue that the ability, motivation and opportunity triad employed by Luskin (1990) to explain variation in individual level of political sophistication can be transferred on the aggregate level. Consequently, the typical distribution of political sophistication that has repeatedly been observed in the United States cannot be taken for granted in an exploratory research conducted in a different cultural and institutional context. In an exploratory research like the one carried out in this dissertation, the distribution of political sophistication in the Greek population cannot

be presupposed and any theoretical assumptions that imply a particular distribution need to be empirically confirmed instead of taken for granted.

3.3 Coding Issues

3.3.1 Item Format: Open Items or Multiple Choice?

A political knowledge test that intends to measure factual information can take multiple forms. Respondents may be asked to name the answer they consider as correct in an open-ended and short-answer item, they may be requested to place the leader or party in question in the liberal-conservative or the left-right scale, or alternatively they may be instructed to identify the correct answer among others in a multiple choice format. Although the American National Election Studies make use of a combination of all three methods²⁶, the correctness of each has sparked a vivid debate among students of political knowledge and sophistication.

Close-ended items have been proven very popular in quantitative research and especially in the measurement of attitudes as they offer the advantage of easier coding and simpler post-hoc analysis (Schuman and Presser 1981). According to Mondak (1999, 2001) and Mondak and Davis (2001) the advantage of multiple-choice questions is that they may limit a respondent's tendency to answer 'don't know' despite partially knowing the correct answer but being hesitant to provide it. According to Mondak and Davis, some groups of respondents have the tendency to answer 'don't know' more than others

²⁶ Typically the ANES questionnaires use open-ended questions in recognition of political actors and parties. Respondents are asked to name the office or party affiliation of a political figure or give a short answer around the meaning of a concept such as liberalism or conservatism. However it adopts a multiple choice format in questions that focus on parties policy positions.

for personality or social related reasons²⁷, while others are willing to take a risk and provide an answer despite not being sure. Thus, according to Mondak and his colleagues although some groups of respondents may have the exact levels of political knowledge, they will provide different results because of their propensity to ‘gamble’.

In order to mediate this effect Mondak and his colleagues (2001) argue in defense of a multiple choice question format when measuring factual knowledge over politics. According to their analysis, it is necessary to provide a set of options (as is the case with the multiple choice format) where the respondent recognizes his initial opinion and thus he or she is encouraged to give a response. However, as the authors acknowledge, the use of multiple choice items in a factual knowledge test inevitably enhances guesswork because respondents are more tempted to make a random choice.

Although many different approaches have been suggested to deal with guessing issues in closed type questionnaires, there is a significant level of disagreement between scholars over the necessity of post-hoc corrections by the researcher as well as the most suitable method for doing so (see Mondak 2001, Mondak and Davies 2001, Mondak and Canache 2004, Luskin and Bullock 2005a, Luskin and Bullock 2005b, Sturgis et al. 2008, Miller and Orr 2008). Apart from guesswork-related problems, Elff (2009) suggests that the use of multiple choice items may additionally distort the validity of results. He argues that as respondents in surveys are not penalized by giving wrong answers, they may be ‘tempted to avoid cognitive effort by randomly selecting one of the alternatives given in a

²⁷ See also Barabas 2002 for a confirmation of these findings. For example a number of surveys link women’s low political sophistication levels to their observed propensity to answer ‘don’t know’ rather than attempt to give an answer in the case where they are not sure for the answer they give (see Mondak and Anderson 2004). This view however has received a fair amount of criticism (Luskin and Bullock 2005b). The issue of gender based differences in political sophistication are analyzed in the second part of this chapter

close format question, even if they could have found a correct answer if the question would have been presented to them in an open format' (p. 16). In any case, the researcher has to choose between the measurement error associated with open ended questions -and the personality related problems associated with a propensity in giving 'don't know' answers- and the inevitable guesswork that comes with multiple choice formats.

3.3.2 Strict or Relative Scoring?

Another important matter than has troubled researchers of political knowledge is whether researchers should recognize degrees of error in false answers. For example should a respondent that answers that Jose Manuel Baroso is the president of the European Parliament or the European Union receive the same score with someone who thinks that Baroso is a famous World War II general or a dictator in Latin America? Traditionally, ANES items do not recognize degrees of error and code responses in a binary form as correct or wrong. This method is criticized by Mondak (2001) who suggests that some incorrect responses undoubtedly reveal greater knowledge over others and hence binary coding may threaten the validity of a knowledge scale as partly informed and uninformed respondents are coded identically. In fact, Mondak's objection is credible in cases where political knowledge scales are consisted from a small number of items. However, as Luskin and Bullock (2005) assert, this is not the case with larger scales where partially informed respondents are differentiated from uninformed, as the former will have on average a higher score since they will correctly answer other items of the scale.

3.4 Content and Methodology of this Survey's Political Knowledge Questionnaire

The selection of items for the measurement of political sophistication put forward in this dissertation is based on the theoretical criteria we described above: what the government is and does and who the government is (Barber 1973, Neuman 1986, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). I chose to include open ended items where possible and following Luskin and Bullock (2005b) I preferred strict from lenient scoring keeping in mind that the large number of items is adequate for successfully correcting party informed from uninformed respondents. Before carrying out the survey in a nation-wide representative sample, a pilot survey was conducted in order to check for the comprehension of the question wording by respondents and exclude the possibility that some open ended questions could take more than one correct answer. A convenience sample was drawn from first and final year undergraduate students from the Communication and Media Studies faculty of the University of Athens (N=116). A second pilot survey was conducted in a sample consisting of 66 first and final year students in September 2008 in order to test some minor changes in the question wording.

The final questionnaire used in the national sample included 23 items. The formation and content is described in table 3.1

Table 3-1: Format and Content of the Political Sophistication Questionnaire

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		✓					✓

The final item choice that was tested in the nation-wide sample consisted of the following items: 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 Panagopoulos²⁸ and Yiannis Ragousis²⁹). Special care was taken to avoid asking over actors who were synonymous with other public figures.
- Three items asking participants to name the party that Barack Obama, Evangelos Venizelos³⁰ and Evangelos Averof³¹ belong.
- Two item asking respondents to name of the Greek finance minister³² and the Greek EU Commissioner.
- One item asking respondents to state the reasons behind the recent resignation of Vasilios Magginas, minister for employment³³.

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ At the time Ragousis was the general secretary of PASOK.

³⁰ Leading political figure of the dominant center-left party PASOK

³¹ Historical leader of the Greek conservative party New Democracy

³² At the time the office was held by Georgios Alogoskoufis who had already completed four years in office.

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.
- An item asking respondents over the minimum number of MPs needed for the formation of government in Greece³⁴.
- 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 right³⁵.
- An item asking respondents to describe what does the term 'neoliberalism' mean.

In this item respondents were coded '0' in the cases where they gave false or incoherent answers and '1' in the cases where participants realized that 'neoliberalism' 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

³³ 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.

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ We considered responses with the order Tsipras, Papandreou, Karamanlis, Karatzaferis as correct in alignment with Zaller's suggestions over the measurement of placement of actors and parties (1992, p. 338). Luskin and Bullock (2005b) 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 of 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 2011a).

the term³⁶. In the few cases (N=12) where the respondents gave evaluative answers, political sophistication levels were not calculated.

- An item asking respondents to describe what the term 'mixed name' means with regards to 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 on the economy or were supporting the idea that private enterprises should have a leading role³⁷.

In the largest part of the political sophistication questionnaire I chose to use open ended items with some safety cautions. First, I attempted to minimize respondents' hesitation to give an answer by explaining to participants that some of the questions they will be asked may be difficult for many people to answer correctly. On top of that, respondents were encouraged to take their time and think over the questions and provide the answer they consider as more correct. In three of a total of twenty-three items I preferred the multiple choice format as this particular set of questions focused on respondents' understanding of party positions in economic policy makes the use of open form items untenable because respondents are asked which of the parties agrees with which specific policies. I believe any guesswork taking place in these particular questions may only minimally undermine the accuracy of results because the large number of open-

³⁶ 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).

³⁷ 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.

ended and placement items included in the questionnaire cancels out any guessing effects (Luskin and Bullock 2005b).

A respondent's total political knowledge (K) is estimated by the following equation:

$$K = \sum_{i=1}^{20} a_i + 3 \sum_{i=21}^{23} a_i$$

where, the first twenty items of the table 3.1 are added and the items that measure respondents' comprehension of the basic positions by parties are multiplied by three. The reason behind the coefficient was the underrepresentation of items tapping parties' placements and ideological positions or put differently the 'organization' aspect of political cognition. The underrepresentation was an inevitable result of the by and large formalistic structure of the Greek parties' political manifestos and the catch-all strategies employed by the two major parties after the 2004 election (see Vasilopoulos and Vernardakis 2011a)³⁸. By making use of the coefficient the final scale consists of two almost equally represented dimensions: on the one hand participants were called to answer knowledge questions namely recognition and placement of national and international political actors (total 14 points) and the second consists of questions related to the institutional rules, placement of parties and ideological items (total 16 points). The reason behind the integration of institutional and ideological items lies in the sound institutional differences between the Greek and United States legislative systems. Greece is a presidential parliamentary republic. The institutional structure involves a unicameral parliament that is directly elected by the people, the government and prime minister

³⁸ This does not imply that the Greek political system lacks contemporary political cleavages based on distinct value predispositions (Vernardakis 2008).

which are subject to the parliament and the President of Democracy who although holds a decisive institutional role in practice his duties are limited to ceremonial events and is not involved by any means at political decisions. Consequently citizens' decision making in the context of a unicameral parliament such as the one in Greece is much simpler compared to the United States bicameral legislative system (Gordon and Segura 1997), where political outcomes are determined by checks and balances between the President and the two chambers of the Congress³⁹.

A second reason behind the multiplication of particular items was the underrepresentation of items tapping the organization aspect of political sophistication (namely items a₁₈ to a₂₃). As we mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, while quantity and organization of information closely converge still they are not identical. As Luskin has argued quantity and organization may not be synonymous in cases of conspiracy theorists that may hold large chunks of political information but these are not interconnected in logical manner. The measurement scale constructed here controls for this scenario, as in the final version of the scale items tapping organizational aspects of political cognition represent 43 percent of the total political sophistication questionnaire.

3.5 Validity and Reliability Analysis of the Political Sophistication Scale

The decisive criteria for the value of a scale measuring a latent concept such as political sophistication are the validity and reliability of the scale. In general, the relation

³⁹ In fact the ANES items that fall in the institutional category focus almost exclusively on questions of jurisdiction and voting procedures between the House of Representatives, the Senate and the President.

between a latent variable ξ_i and the indicator used for the measurement of that variable (X_i) can be represented as

$$X_i = \xi_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where ε_i is the measurement error and i represents observational units. In our case X_i refers to our political knowledge test, ξ_i to political sophistication and the error is the difference between our obtained score and the true political sophistication of the respondent, which cannot be measured as we do not have the way in assessing the extent of the whole of a person's political cognitions.

Validity refers to 'evidence that the score to some acceptable extent measures a specific attribute' (McDonald 1999, p. 199) or 'the extent to which a set of items taps the content of some domain of interest' (Zeller and Carmines 1980, 78) or to put it more simply a 'valid measure actually measures the concept we think it measures' (Jackman 2008). Our instrument is constructed for the measurement of ξ_i , representing the respondent's political sophistication. Since this value is unobservable to us, a useful solution to assess the validity of the scale is to correlate it with a number of variables for which we have valid theoretical grounds to believe that are associated with the latent trait we intend to measure⁴⁰. This method assesses *construct validity*.

Our dataset includes variables that are associated with political sophistication such as education (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) and political interest (Luskin 1990, Zaller 1992). Furthermore, we have included the following item: *Some people seem to*

⁴⁰ This technique is common for the assessment of the validity of a scale. See Jackman 2008 for an overview of applications. For the implementation of the technique in the field of political sophistication see Delli Carpini and Keeter 1993, Mondak 2001 and Luskin and Bullock 2005b.

follow what is going on in politics most of the time whether there's an election going on or not. Others are not that interested. Would you say you follow what is going on in politics, most of the time, some of the time, only now and then or hardly any at all? This item has been highlighted as a variable that positively and significantly correlates with political sophistication, interest and emotional attachment to politics (Converse 2008).

Table 3.2 reports the results of the correlations of political interest, following what is going on in politics and education with the total political knowledge scale and each knowledge domain. As political sophistication is anticipated to relate to the criterion variables, we expect their association to yield positive and significant correlation coefficients (see Delli Carpini and Keeter 1991 for a similar analysis for the American National Election Study political knowledge items).

Table 3-2: Validity Analysis of the Political Sophistication Scale and its Sub-contents

	K (final scale)	ideology items*	political actors items	political history items	K unweighted	political institutions items	interest in politics	following what is going on in politics	education
K (final scale)	1	.769**	.772**	.703**	.973**	.569**	.392**	.335**	.299**
ideology items*	.769**	1	.261**	.244**	.601**	.187**	.251**	.238**	.254**
political actors items	.772**	.261**	1	.621**	.870**	.583**	.352**	.254**	.249**
political history items	.703**	.244**	.621**	1	.790**	.540**	.299**	.286**	.112**
political institutions items	.569**	.187**	.583**	.540**	.644**	1	.223**	.166**	.128**
K unweighted	.973**	.601**	.870**	.790**	1	.644**	.400**	.333**	.282**
interest in politics	.392**	.251**	.352**	.299**	.400**	.223**	1	.504**	.090**
following what is going on in politics	.335**	.238**	.254**	.286**	.333**	.166**	.504**	1	.055
education	.299**	.254**	.249**	.112**	.282**	.128**	.090**	.055	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Coefficients are Pearson's r correlation coefficients *: Unweighted

Results presented in Table 3.2 confirm that all the criterion variables were significantly correlated with the total knowledge score and each of its distinct components in the expected direction. Overall, the weighted knowledge scale shows a higher external validity as it correlates significantly and more strongly with two of the three criterion variables and marginally less with respondents' interest in politics. Interest in politics produces the strongest association with both the weighted and unweighted knowledge scale ($r = .392$ and $r = .400$ respectively) while the variables 'following what's going on in politics' ($r = .335$ for the weighted and $r = .333$ for the unweighted scale respectively) and level of education ($r = .299$ and $.282$) exhibit a lesser degree of association. As for the relative strength of correlations of the criterion variables with each component separately, interest in politics is more strongly associated with all four important elements of political knowledge.

Some other important conclusions can be drawn from Table 3.2 when we check the relative pattern of relationships among different knowledge components. First of all, different components of political sophistication are significantly correlated with each other although the strength of the correlation varies. The stronger correlations appear between the recognition of political actors (*who the government is*) and the items measuring knowledge of political institutions (*what the government is* $r = .583$). Finally, it is interesting to note that following what is going on in politics is not significantly related to education, a finding that as we discuss in Chapter 4 should be attributed to the private perception of political interest in Greek politics. Overall, results indicate that the weighted knowledge scale successfully passes the test of construct validity, as it exhibits significant statistical association with three of the most basic aspects of political

sophistication (namely political interest, education and following politics) in a theoretically predictable manner.

We now turn to assess the reliability of the scale. Generally, reliability ‘concerns the extent to which an experiment, test, or any measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials’ (Carmines and Zeller 1986, p.11). In particular we are interested in appraising the *inter-item reliability* of the political knowledge scale as well as each of its components. Jackman (2008, p. 124) describes inter item reliability in the following way: ‘Suppose we have indicators x_j , $j = 1, \dots, J$, of a latent trait ξ and we combine the information in the indicators to generate the scale measure z . A measure of the reliability of resulting scales is the average level of correlation among the items, appropriately normalized by the number of items.’ By far the most convenient and popular estimate of inter-item reliability is the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. Table 3.3 reports Cronbach’s alpha estimators for the total (unweighted) political knowledge scale and for each of its components separately. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients range from 0.51 in the three political institution items to 0.83 in the recognition of political actors, signifying that the overall scale and its subcomponents pass the test of reliability.

Table 3-3: Reliability Analysis of Different Knowledge Domains

	Cronbach’s α	Number of Items
K (unw.)	.84	23
Political Actors Items	.83	13
Political History Items	.75	5
Political institutions Items	.51	3
Political Ideology Items	.62	5

Concluding Remarks

Despite the resolve of the political sophistication measurement debate that eventually led to the use of factual political knowledge questionnaires, a number of issues concerning data collection on the public's levels of political information remain open. In this chapter I attempted to sum up and organize the different perspectives on what citizens should know over political affairs and the ways that this knowledge can be reliably grasped in quantitative surveys. The second part of the chapter dealt with the analysis of the VPRC questionnaire that is the basis for the empirical investigation of political sophistication in the remaining chapters.

The main argument put forward in this chapter was that a theoretically driven inclusion of knowledge items should be preferred in exploratory surveys where the public's level of political information is measured for the first time. Among else, I argued that we have reasons to anticipate significant cross national variation in the accumulative distribution of political sophistication. In the next chapter I further explore this issue by constructing a theoretical proposal for the conceptualization of political sophistication at the aggregate level and by using Greece as a case study I illustrate the 'paradox' of a, by and large, politically sophisticated electorate.

CHAPTER 4

CONCEPTUALIZING POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION AT THE AGGREGATE LEVEL: A THEORETICAL PROPOSAL AND A CASE STUDY

The previous chapter touched on the issue of what citizens should know over politics in order to make informed political judgments. In the conclusions of the previous chapter I argued over the use of a theoretically driven inclusion of items in political knowledge tests, based on the criteria proposed by Barber (1973), Neuman (1986) and Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996), that could be summarized as knowledge over ‘what the government is and does and who it is’. Every party of the triad exerts a distinct contribution in the comprehension of political affairs. Knowing what the government *is* translates into awareness over the rules and institutional structure, the role of the parliament and the obligations from participating in transnational and supranational allegiances such as the European Union or the United Nations. Moreover, possessing knowledge over what the government *does* is necessary for choosing sides on the important issues of the day and being informed over the different alternatives offered by political parties and organizations. Finally, the third part of the triad, the ability of recognizing and identifying key political figures is the prerequisite for choosing political representatives, the central aspect of any democratic polity.

However, at the empirical level, levels of political knowledge fall short of reaching these standards. As we discussed in Chapter 1, systematic research in political knowledge levels in the United States has revealed an ignorant and apathetic electorate

that lacks even the most basic information over political issues. A question that arises is whether political ignorance is a universal norm that cuts across different cultural settings and political systems. It is surprising that despite the intensive research over the determinants of political sophistication at the individual level, this question has not been posed as most scholars readily assume that the aggregate distribution of political sophistication will resemble the pattern of ignorance that has been systematically showed in the United States (Elff 2009, Luskin 1987, p. 889, Converse 1990). In the previous chapter I concisely argued that levels of political sophistication should not be presupposed when conducting exploratory surveys as there are a number of factors that may potentially affect the public's propensity to obtain political information.

In this chapter I present a theoretical proposal concerning the conceptualization of political sophistication at the aggregate level focusing on the motivational aspects of political learning. In the following pages I reconceptualize Luskin's ability-motivation-opportunity triad proposed to explain individual-level variation in levels of political sophistication at the aggregate level. Instead of seeking aggregate-level variation in institutional differences that reduce or increase the costs of becoming informed over politics, my focus is on questions of political culture, generational characteristics and short-term effects. To this purpose I draw on theoretical tools offered by historical sociology, culture theory and cognitive psychology. My purpose is not to produce an exhaustive analysis of the heterogeneous theoretical concepts discussed in the following pages, but rather to construct a generic theoretical proposal that can be empirically evaluated.

The issue of possible variations in aggregate levels of political knowledge and cognitive organization has only recently received attention in the literature. Two notable exceptions are the works of Gordon and Segura (1997) and Grönlund and Milner (2006) who attempt to explain national-level variation in political sophistication along with a number of institutional and political characteristics. Gordon and Segura (1997) were the first to investigate the impact of institutions in political sophistication⁴¹. Based on Luskin's (1990) Opportunity, Ability and Motivation trichotomy they consider the ways by which different institutions influence individuals' capability and incentives in becoming politically informed. To this direction they test the impact of party system type (two-party vs. multiparty systems), electoral proportionality, compulsory voting and type of parliament (unicameral vs. bicameral) in overall levels of political sophistication. Their findings indicate that political sophistication is positively associated with electoral proportionality, compulsory voting, degree of unicameralism and multi-partyism. Yet an important drawback in Gordon and Segura findings is that they extract the dependent variable (political sophistication) by calculating the absolute distances between the respondent's placement of each of his or her country's political parties on a ten-point left-right scale and the mean placement of the same parties by the rest of respondents. This coding allows for a comparative assessment of political sophistication because of the lack of knowledge items in comparative surveys, yet on the other hand it has the important disadvantage that in countries where political sophistication is low, the mean placement of parties will significantly differ from the positions that would be given by political sophisticates. More recently, Grönlund and Milner (2006) compared political sophistication in a comparative perspective by assessing a series of individual and

⁴¹ See Popa and Fazekas (2010) for a similar analysis.

aggregate level characteristics using political information items as a dependent variable. Contrary to Gordon and Segura (1997) they demonstrate that, at the aggregate level, political knowledge is not associated with the existence of a proportional electoral system. Their second major finding is that the effect of education on sophistication varies with level of economic egalitarianism.

In the next section I offer an alternative conceptualization of political sophistication at the aggregate level. In the first section, I argue that there are a number of reasons to anticipate that levels of political sophistication will differ in different structural and cultural settings. In the second part, I use Greece as a case study to argue that while we have little reason to anticipate that opportunity in political learning and ability to comprehend political information will differ among advanced industrial nations, the motivation for obtaining information over political affairs is subject to structural, generational and short-term factors that differ between nation-states. In turn, the argument goes, these characteristics bear a significant impact on the aggregate distribution of political sophistication.

4.1 The distribution of political sophistication in different cultural contexts. What do we expect citizens to know?

In his seminal contribution ‘An Economic Theory of Democracy’ (1957a) Downs argues that it is irrational for citizens to invest time and effort in gathering political information so as to reach accurate voting decisions, as the relative cost of this information is high while the expected returns for reaching correct political decisions are

low (p. 334-335- see also Downs 1957b). Consequently, according to the Downsian paradigm, the low utility of political knowledge leads citizens to acquire limited amounts of information from 'free data' sources such as everyday conversations with people from their social environment or by passively consuming information from the mass media. Downs acknowledges a number of exceptions to this pattern for those who have a high utility return (i.e. farmers who are affected by the government allocation of agricultural funds), those who obtain political information for reasons of personal entertainment or use it as a class or status symbol.

The cost / benefit dimension in acquiring political information has been generally acknowledged and further conceptually evolved by subsequent scholars in an effort to investigate individual-level variation in political sophistication levels. A notable early contribution comes from Barber (1973). As the author writes: 'Most people acquire knowledge and retain knowledge when they have a need for it, the ability to take in and hold it and the chance to get in and keep it without excessive cost' (1973, p. 48). Hence, apart from a person's subjective assignment of importance in obtaining political information that coincides with Downsian utility analysis, Barber proposes two additional dimensions in political learning. He argues that citizens do not lack opportunities in getting informed since the media offer a wealth of political information. Instead, the utility of political information is subject to the individual skills and resources to analyze and store it in long term memory as well as the motivation to do so:

'The opportunity problem is its lack of organization. Every student knows how much easier it is to put facts into his head when he can organize them into some coherent framework, some set of relationships that 'makes sense' out of a mass of detail. Bits and

pieces of fact get lost quickly unless they are glued together in a larger picture. But much political information as it reaches the average citizen consists of just such unglued bits. He is bombarded with stimuli on many topics, from many directions, presented in many contexts....The cost of sorting all this out may be very high indeed, requiring considerable time and skill (resources) and/or considerable desire (motives).' (p. 48)

Luskin (1990) similarly connects the acquisition of political knowledge with opportunity, ability and motivation: 'To become highly sophisticated, we must encounter a certain quantity of political information, be intellectually able enough to retain and organize large portions of the information we encounter, and have reason enough to make the effort' (1990, p. 335). In Luskin's view opportunity translates into flows of political information from the mass media. Ability refers to inherent cognitive ability or -simply put- citizens' intelligence, while indirectly as I discuss below it may refer to respondents' level of education. Finally, motivation, which is according to Luskin's analysis the most important determinant of political sophistication at the individual level, stems from temporal political interest or long standing predispositions affected by political socialization processes (see also Jennings 1996).

With the exception of the rational choice model (Downs 1957) that touches on the issue of the expected aggregate distribution of political knowledge on the general public, the current explanations of political information acquisition were developed for the investigation of individual-level variation on levels of political information and were developed and justified in particular within the political environment of the United States. Yet, as I argue below, Luskin's ability-opportunity-motivation scheme offers promising ground to anticipate cross-national variation in aggregate levels of political sophistication

as every particle of the triad is not rooted solely on different individual experience or personality types but is decisively affected by factors operating at the aggregate level.

4.2. Considering Ability, Opportunity and Motivation at the Aggregate Level

Ability

Since we do not have any indication over variations in cross-national levels of intelligence, if we are to find any significant variation in levels of political sophistication at the aggregate level due to ability, these could only refer to aggregate levels of education attentiveness. Education has long been considered a causal determinant of political expertise. Formal education attainment has been found to exert a positive and significant influence in political learning even after the control of relevant socioeconomic and demographic variables in the United States (Neuman 1986, Neuman et al. 1992, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) and elsewhere (Hendriks-Vettehen et al. 2004). In Converse's words: "education is everywhere the universal solvent and the relationship is always in the same direction...The educated citizen is attentive, knowledgeable and participatory and the uneducated is not" (1972, p. 324).

At an early level the relation between formal education and political sophistication is apparent: Primary and secondary education attainment provides the development of essential verbal and writing skills that are a prerequisite for understanding political discourse. On top of that, basic education provides some fundamental information over the political and institutional structure of a state, forging

the grounds for political socialization. Yet, nearly all studies move beyond the impact of basic education showing that educational attainment has a continuous impact in levels of political knowledge while the most striking differences occur between university graduates and the rest (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Eveland and Scheufele 2000, Freile 2010). As Delli Carpini and Keeter conclude: 'All education, but especially college, has a powerful effect on political knowledge through the development of skills and orientations that make it easier for the well schooled to comprehend and retain political information' (1996, p. 192-193).

Despite the frequency and robustness of these findings, the connective mechanism behind education and various forms of political participation is, by and large, unclear (see Hilligus 2005 for an overview). As for political cognition which is the focus of this study, skeptics have argued that influence of formal education on political sophistication is driven by a spurious effect. Luskin (1990) measured the impact of formal education on political sophistication along with interviewer rating of 'apparent intelligence'⁴² to conclude that it is intelligence, occupation and interest that cause education effect on political expertise: 'Education may be taking credit for other variables' work. Students must pick up some political information in school, but apparently do not wind up knowing much or more, other things being equal the longer they spend there' (1990, p. 349). Smith (1989) makes a similar point. Ultimately any spurious effects can be revealed through panel studies that assess levels of political sophistication before and after university attainment. Yet, available data show that the explosion of higher education after the Second World War in the United States did not have any significant impact on

⁴² The American National Election Study includes an item where the interviewer subjectively assesses the respondent's level of political information and competence.

overall levels of political knowledge in any domain, including knowledge over institutions and processes⁴³ (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Popkin and Dimock 1999). This is another cause for concern in the relation of education and sophistication emphasizing ‘that specific knowledge of political institutions is conceptually different from education’ (Popkin and Dimock, 1999, p. 125).

Jennings and Niemi (1981) measured levels of factual political knowledge and ‘ideological sophistication’⁴⁴ of individuals before and after some of them attended college. Their results showed that difference in political knowledge scales scoring was negligible while in ideological understanding the difference was in place before university attainment. Westholm et al. (1990) studied changes in ‘political literacy’ namely the recognition of international organizations and political facts in Swedish adolescents during a period of two years, distinguishing between different types of curriculum (social science, natural sciences and vocational). Results showed that differences in political knowledge were present before students were assigned in different curricula. They conclude that ‘such observations to no small extent reflect differences that predate, rather than result from, educational differentiation’ (p.187). In a similar panel study, Highton (2009) investigates the impact of tertiary educational attainment taking into account other demographic characteristics. His results demonstrate that ‘sizable differences associated with receiving a partial or complete undergraduate education are evident before individuals graduate from high school. College educational

⁴³ Dalton (1984, 2007) argues that a cognitive mobilization of the Western publics has taken place during the last decades that has had in turn an impact on the public’s knowledge. Although the cognitive mobilization index (an addition of education and political interest) appears to have an impact on the levels of conceptualization index he does not move on to an over-time comparison in factual knowledge such as the one carried out by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996).

⁴⁴ Measured as ‘the ability to apply and describe correctly the abstract concepts of liberalism and conservatism with respect to the two political parties’ (p. 248).

attainment is therefore a proxy for other causes of political sophistication that are already in place by the age of 18' (p. 1572). Highton argues that the decisive factors for political learning are cognitive ability (measured as high school performance), parental level of politicization and pre-adult political engagement (such as political discussion and exposure to political information).

These studies show that differences in ability of obtaining political information stem from differences outside educational enrollment. However, as is the case with opportunity, a basic degree of formal education as a necessary condition must be present in order to acquire political information. Understanding political affairs requires for example literacy skills so as to understand political discourse. Also it requires a basic knowledge of history and knowing the fundamentals of a country's institutional structure. These criteria are satisfied in advanced industrial nations as a result of the universality of secondary (and partially tertiary) education enrollment (OECD 2008). Consequently, we can conclude that ability of becoming politically sophisticated, conceptualized at the aggregate level, will not differ significantly between at least advanced industrial states.

Opportunity

Opportunity at the aggregate level could be conceptualized as a) the availability of political information in a political system and b) the parameters that affect the cost of obtaining this information. The first concerns the free flow of information in a society being dependent on the level of media freedom. A prerequisite of political learning is the *availability* of political information. For example, a citizen of an authoritarian regime

exercising censorship in media and internet content cannot become politically sophisticated no matter how motivated or cognitively able he or she is because this person lacks the opportunity to be exposed to political information⁴⁵. A minimal prerequisite of becoming politically sophisticated is that political information is there for citizens to acquire it and utilize it in order to make an understanding of politics. Learning about politics requires the choice of acquiring political information from the mass media⁴⁶.

Apart from national differences in levels of education, changes in information diffusion in a political environment may significantly affect overall levels of political sophistication. The ‘information explosion’ that begun through the mass media and continued during the internet era made political information easily accessible to the mass publics compared to the past, reducing cognitive costs of obtaining political information (Bimber 2003) and potentially enhancing passive learning processes similar to those described by Downs⁴⁷. Yet, levels of opportunity tend to converge between Western societies. Freedom of speech is an uncontested issue at least in Europe and the United States, while the evolution of information and communication technologies has made the acquisition of political information easier than ever before, bringing access to a variety of news sources of all styles and qualities even to the most geographically detached communities.

⁴⁵ In this sense my conceptualization of opportunity of becoming politically sophisticated is narrower than the one in Luskin’s triadic scheme (1990). Luskin considers opportunity as the ‘information to which one is exposed’ (1990, p. 335)

⁴⁶ This is not to downplay the role of interpersonal communication in acquiring political information. Yet, since only a very few citizens have direct access to ministers, members of the parliament and other governmental officials, the main source of the diffusion of political information are the media even in the cases where citizens learn by discussing politics with their social environment (see Zaller 1992, 1996; Mutz 1998).

⁴⁷ This however, as we discuss in the next chapter, does not imply a straightforward relationship between media consumption and political learning.

Consequently, if we are to find significant cross-national variation in overall levels of political sophistication, the third part of the triad, motivation, examined at the aggregate-level could be conceived as the most important factor that shapes aggregate levels of political knowledge at least in the case of established democracies that provide basic access to education and allow the free flow of political information. This is not to say that there are no differences attributed to varying levels of opportunity. National media systems share important differences as long as the degree of political parallelism, professionalization and degree of state regulation promoting political pluralism are concerned (Hallin and Mancini 2004). We have reasons to suspect that different media systems will bear an influence on aggregate levels of political knowledge. Norris (2010) investigated the extent to which political knowledge variation in Europe can be attributed to differences in information flows measured by the ‘Cosmopolitan Communication Index’, consisting of items measuring media freedom, economic developments and external openness (see Norris and Inglehart 2009). Her analysis showed significant cross-national variation in overall levels of political information even after controlling for theoretically relevant variables.

Motivation

In the next pages I argue that the motivational factor of acquiring political information on an aggregate level is subject to characteristics of the macro, meso and micro time level. These are entwined with each other and are defined and justified as following:

Macro

Macro-level characteristics refer to macrohistorical tendencies that shape the foundations of every nation's political culture or the 'pattern of orientations to political action...embedded in every political system' (Almond 1956, p.396- see also Elazar 1966 p.84). These are the persistent and enduring elements of a political culture that extend beyond living memory and may be a product of historical conditions or rooted in longstanding cultural norms. As Elazar has put it, political culture is 'rooted in the cumulative historical experiences of particular groups of people' while "the origins of particular patterns of political culture are often lost in the proverbial mists of time" (1966, p. 84). As I discuss below, 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. The interpretation of contemporary social and economic phenomena with regard to distinct macrohistorical conditions has a long theoretical history dating back to Weberian sociology. More recent theoretical schools based on historical sociology, such as the New Institutionalism (March and Olsen 1984, 2006) focus on the evolution of institutions. In particular a number of theorists argued that the development of institutions is path dependent (e.g. Levi 1997, Pierson 2000, Mahoney 2001) meaning that "a crisis, or a serendipitous confluence of events or social pressures produces a new way of doing things" (Sanders 2006, p. 39) where 'once a country or region has started down a track,

the costs of reversal are very high' (Levi 1997). Path dependence may lead to the consolidation of persistent differences between two societies even when they share similar institutional structures. As Hall and Taylor put it, path dependence "rejects the traditional postulate that the same operative forces will generate the same results everywhere, in favour of the view that the effect of such forces will be mediated by the contextual features of a given situation often inherited from the past" (1996, p.941). Lipset and Rokkan's classic essay 'Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments' (1967) offers retroactively an example of path dependence for the analysis of party systems and political behavior. They argued that "critical junctures" during the periods of Reformation, nation state building, and the Industrial Revolution created major political cleavages that laid the foundations of political parties and created longstanding electoral allegiances.

The role of the historical condition in the aggregate motivation to participate in politics has been demonstrated in two notable studies. 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 with the quality of a democratic system. Among other attitudes, the authors trace a link between considerable variation in political cognition⁴⁸ among different nations with regard to their distinct historical experience (p. 45-62). To use an example, Almond and Verba argued that Italy's alienated political culture, which results in low levels of political involvement (including political information) is attributed to its pre-unification historical experience that included centuries of fragmentation and external tyranny, which cultivated a political

⁴⁸ Political cognition was measured by items asking respondents to identify national party leaders and cabinet offices.

culture of social isolation and distrust that prevented motivation for an active participation in politics. In the case of Mexico, the traditional parochialism that characterized the prerevolutionary political system had a negative influence on political performance as expressed through civic associations, political activity *and* political information.

In his study on the formation and performance of political institutions in Italy, Putnam argues that ‘social patterns plainly traceable from early medieval Italy to today turn out to be decisive in explaining why, on the verge of the twenty-first century, some [Italian] communities are better able than others to manage collective life and sustain effective institutions’ (1993, p.121). In turn these macrohistorical characteristics shape the course of collective action and consequently the social meaning of political participation. Putnam’s study offers a good example in the different meanings of political participation between the Italian North and South (1993). In the northern areas, the historical condition has benefited a political participation based on a civic we-ness and personal interest is pursued with regard to broader public needs, as ‘citizens...though not selfless saints, regard the public domain as more than a battleground for pursuing personal interest’ (p. 88). In contrast, in the southern part of the country where the collective actor is predominantly the family, political participation reflects the pursuit of short-term material interest in a manner similar to a zero-sum game. Both of these analyses link political participation to a collectivity’s macrohistorical experience illustrating that the degree to which citizens participate in politics in countries (or regions in the case of Putnam) with identical institutional structures is mediated by long term

contextual forces. In turn, as I will demonstrate for the case of Greece, the long-term bears a significant influence on the motivation to become politically sophisticated.

Meso

As meso-level factors increasing motivation to acquire political knowledge I consider the diffusion of enduring political orientations cultivated by the historical developments that shape the political environment for different generations of voters. The meso-level factor may shape distinct political subcultures that potentially bear a significant effect on motivation to participate in politics. Karl Mannheim (1952) classically argued that apart from a common and time narrowed historical location, a further binding factor that upgrades a generation into a social unit is that the social experience takes place in a particular life stage where experiences are fresh encounters with social reality. The ‘impressionable years hypothesis’ described by Mannheim is central to the understanding of generational trends in political behavior. The late adolescence and early adulthood first contacts with the social and political environment have been found particularly important for the development of general political orientations during lifetime especially for those who get politicized through significant historical events⁴⁹.

Several studies have revealed significant generational trends in political participation, commonly attributed to differences in early adulthood political socialization. (Stewart et al. 1998; Blais et al. 2004, Clarke et al. 2004, Wass 2007). As

⁴⁹ For example the ‘New Deal’ generation in the United States consisting of youths who exercised their voting right for the first time during the 1930s, developed a stronger attachment to the Democratic party compared with earlier generations at similar ages (Campbell et al. 1960- see also Sears and Levy 2003).

for political interest, the main variable behind motivation to become politically sophisticated, Prior demonstrated the persistence of levels of interest in politics through the life cycle (2010). By analyzing panel data in four countries over a period of over 40 years, he found that political interest constitutes a central element of political identity and even though short-term fluctuations may take place under extreme circumstances, political interest is not affected in the long term (2010 p.763). These studies illustrate important and persistent generational differences in the motivation to acquire political information. Therefore it is reasonable to anticipate that, as political interest is central to sophistication, overall levels of political sophistication in a political system may potentially be affected by cohort replacement. This was empirically shown by Jennings (1998) who conducted a survey focusing on generational and life-circle effects on levels of political knowledge to conclude that factual knowledge ‘follows well established patterns of solidification and crystallization in young adulthood’ (p.250) with respect to the social events during early life stages.

Micro

The micro level is the third time-level that potentially affects motivation over acquiring political information and it refers to temporal and ephemeral changes in motivation to obtain political information. Short-term changes in levels of political sophistication at the aggregate level can be hypothesized through two distinct theoretical approaches: temporal emotional reactions⁵⁰ to political events that enhance political

⁵⁰ Of course, emotions may be long-term as well. See the categorization by Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (2004)

learning and decreases of cognitive costs of becoming informed as a result of a polarized political period according to the premises of the rational choice model.

Concerning the first, a large number of social scientists studying the role of affect in political behavior have traced a link between emotional arousal and political learning: Cognitive psychologists have illustrated that people are more influenced by potential losses in decision-making rather than gains (Kahneman and Tversky 1979), that negative events increase human attention (May et al.1995) and that negative traits are better remembered than positive ones (Pratto and John 1991). By applying these findings in the context of political decision-making, several studies have demonstrated that negative emotions (such as anxiety and fear) enhance political learning processes.

Marcus, Neuman and Mackuen (2000, see also Marcus et al. 2005) developed a complementary model of political judgment based on affect. By drawing on early research on the role of negative events in information-seeking processes, the authors put forward a theory of political decision-making based on emotions. The 'Affective Intelligence' model describes the interaction of two distinct affective systems that are positioned in the limbic region of the brain and correspond to different subconscious reactions. The first, called the disposition system is by and large responsible for 'managing reliance on habits' and previously learned strategies' (2000, p. 46). Moreover, the disposition system 'relies on emotional assessment to control the execution of habits...It provides people with an understanding, an emotional report card, about actions that are already in the repertoire of habits and learned behaviors' (p.10). The disposition system is employed in everyday decision-making, often without thinking, when people

make evaluations of routine and recurring events. A typical example of the disposition system use is the influence of party identification in political choice (Marcus et al. 2005).

On the other hand, the surveillance system alerts individuals over possible threats outside normality bounds motivating them to rely less on habitual decision strategies and more on an active cognitive process of the situation at hand. The nature of negative affect is ephemeral and non-constant as the brain tends to return to a state of habitual calmness and tranquility (Marcus and Mackuen 1993, Marcus et al. 2000). The model proposed by Marcus, Neuman and Mackuen has important consequences on the conceptualization of political sophistication at the aggregate level, as it signifies that citizens respond to the conditions of the political environment and that in case of unusual, threatening events (such as economic crises or wars) the surveillance system motivates people to actively seek for political information, increasing in turn aggregate levels of political knowledge.

In fact, this has been demonstrated empirically by several surveys from different political systems. Inglehart and Hochstein (1972) found that during the fierce clash between student and working groups and the De Gaulle government that took place in the spring of 1968 in France, resulted to a rapid and acute politicization expressed through an increase in political discussion and media attentiveness. In turn, this temporal stimulation brought a significant increase in the broad public's levels of political sophistication measured with Converse's index of attitude constraint. Subsequent surveys on attitude constraint in France showed that levels of attitude consistency returned to normal levels once the 1968 crisis was resolved (Inglehart 1985). Marcus and Mackuen (1993) find that political learning is motivated by emotions and in particular that anxiety positively influences active information seeking and learning (see also Nadeau et al. 1995). Pantoja

and Segura (2003) studied the impact of two law propositions that were harmful to Latino immigrants in California on this group information seeking tendency. They showed that in a political environment generating threat, citizens are motivated to acquire political information, increasing their levels of political knowledge. Brader (2005) found that political advertisements that accentuated on messages inducing fear motivated political information seeking among participants. Finally, Valentino and his colleagues (2009) investigated the motivating role of anxiety in political learning in an experimental setting where participants were exposed to low and high threat conditions. Their studies confirmed the hypothesis developed by Marcus and Mackuen: anxiety has a strong impact on attention, information seeking and learning.

However, temporal changes in levels of political sophistication are not always a product of dramatic or exceptional events. Stokes (1963) brings as example the Roosevelt New Deal era to argue that political conflict can lead to a strong ideological focus that can bridge the gap in ideological consistency between elites and the broad public. Moreover, as we mentioned in Chapter 1, the studies conducted in the United States during the 1960s and the 1970s showed an increase in political sophistication as a result of more ideologically focused campaign and larger ideological differences among candidates (p. 415). Nie et al. (1976) showed a substantial increase in politically sophisticated voters compared with the 1952 and 1956 elections that were covered in the *American Voter*, arguing that ‘the way in which citizens conceptualize the political realm is dependent on the political content to which they are exposed’ (p. 121). Stimson (1975) similarly argues that a genuine change had taken place in American politics since the 1960s and suggests that the previous presidential elections which were the focus of

Converse's research were 'vastly less ideological in the minds of voters than all those which have occurred since then'. Miller and Miller (1976) confirmed Nie et al.'s findings for the same period arguing that the reason behind the increase in the public's awareness was that citizens 'were offered particularly clear and distinct candidate and policy related electoral choices in 1972'. Finally, in a recent study over cross national variation in ideological voting in Europe, Lachat argued that even though ideological voting is mediated by political sophistication, increased ideological polarization generally reduces the cognitive cost of sophisticated political decision-making (Lachat 2008, p.4).

Up to this point we have argued that there are a number of reasons to anticipate significant cross-national variation in aggregate levels of political knowledge and sophistication. We argued that the important factors that contribute to political learning at the individual-level can be extended on an aggregate level analysis. Opportunity, ability and motivation are subject to particular systemic and cultural characteristics that in turn shape individual behavior. Yet, in the context of a Western European political system where media freedom is uncontested and educational levels raise almost uniformly, the impact of opportunity and ability on the aggregate level diminishes. This is not however the case with motivational factors that are as we argued above are indissolubly tied to macrohistorical facets of political culture, specific generational particularities and short term effects. In the next sections I use Greece as a case study to evaluate the impact of macro, meso and micro level factors on aggregate levels of political sophistication.

4.2.1 The Macro-level Factor: Structural Facets of the Greek Political Culture

As noted earlier, by the term ‘macro-level factors’ in motivation to become politically sophisticated, I refer to the longstanding cultural and structural components of political identities and citizenship that exert an influence in the ways that citizens motivate themselves to participate in politics. In this section I focus on the systemic and cultural factors that have shaped a motivated and relatively politically sophisticated general public in Greece. Literature offers two distinct but complementary explanations on the development of the foundations of the Greek political system. The first focuses on the impact of historical occurrences on the formation of the Greek political and economic system and nation-building process that in turn bear a macrohistoric influence on political behavior, grounded on the preservation of particular systemic characteristics. The second concentrates on the interaction between deeper and even earlier cultural schemata (stemming from religion, tradition and a distinct view of the self) and the persistence of particular modes of political conduct.

The Greek case offers 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 vote officials in the national assembly and parliament. (Charalambis 1989, Papakostas 2001, Tsoukalas 1980/1999). 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 deeply democratic one (Bermeo 1995, Mouzelis 1986). Yet, they developed in a *sui generis* fashion that deviates significantly from the respective developments in the rest of 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 (as was the case in the United States and Britain) nor came as the product of robust revolutionary movements (as was the case in the 'February Revolution' in France). Instead the transition to a universal suffrage came by and large as a compromise between local elites and the central authority that resolved the tensions over political power that had characterized the new born Greek state during the first decades after independence⁵¹ and in essence they reproduced and extended the Ottoman-inherited clientelistic system in a nation-wide scale (Charalambis 1989, 1994; Demertzis 1997; Charalambis and Demertzis 1993; Mouzelis 1986, 2003; Sotirellis 1991). Thus, since their birth, democratic institutions in Greece were formalistic in nature and discrepant from the dominant mass political culture. 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 1990).

⁵¹ The reader is referred to Svoronos (1953/1999) and Koliopoulos and Veremis (2002) for a detailed recount and analysis of events.

This formalistic democratic system is legitimized through an extensive mechanism of clientelistic networks and patronage⁵² (Charalambis 1989, 1994, Papakostas 2001). 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 1990, Meynaud 1966/2002, Mouzelis 2003, Papakostas 2001, Tsoukalas 1980/1999). In his classic study on the Greek political system, Meynaud (1966/2002) describes the utilitarian function of clientelism in early modern Greece:

It is quite often in Greece for a man to give his vote for utilities that was given or promised, without any reference to ideological predispositions. For an outside observer coming from a developed country this could be condemned as fraud and be considered as a sign of amoralism. But this is the view of a man whose conservation in life is not dependent on basic material needs. In reality [the Greek population] often lives in such misery that patronage can be viewed as a necessity for the continuation of being. Since a man's vote is one of the scarce goods that society provides it is only natural that these groups of impoverished to try to receive the highest benefit for it. (p.67)

As Tsoukalas convincingly illustrates, another structural aspect of the early modern Greek polity 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 despite the fact that the Greek

⁵² Patronage and clientelism are very similar terms referring to "the instrumental use of positions of power to distribute jobs, goods and other public decisions to partisan supporters in order to maintain and strengthen positions of political power" (Piattoni 2001, p.6). The most important difference is that clientelism usually refers to fully mobilized polities "in which the distribution of jobs in the public administration no longer suffices to secure any fundamental advantage to the incumbents" (Piattoni 2001, p. 6).

economic and social structure was excessively pre-industrial and the absence of a private economic sphere made a striking contrast with 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, while Greece had for decades a disproportionately high percentage of public spending and employment.

The too-close entwinement between a ‘hypertrophic’ state and the local nobility (based on a clientelistic distribution of public resources) signifies 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 2001) phenomenon rested on the continuation of the personal character of politics after the mass migration to the urban centers from the rural areas. Papakostas argues that ‘as the state bureaucracy was built with people coming from these extensive social networks, it became deeply embedded in social relations based on kinship and local identities. It was therefore difficult to transform the matters of the citizens into impersonal administrative cases’ (2002: p. 48). Hence, as Mouzelis (1986) asserts, clientelism was central in the development of party allegiances in Greece throughout the 20th century. Even after the intense civil war of 1946-1949, as in the 1950s and 1960s the two dominant parties (the right-wing ERE and the center-left Centrist Union) were extensively exercising

clientelistic practices in order to gain voters, while the parties were ‘built structurally around a network of local notables’ (Lyrintzis 1984, p. 101- see also Mouzelis 1986). Same was the case in the Greek dictatorship during the period 1967-1974, where the Junta attempted to legitimize itself through an extensive mechanism of clientelism and machine politics⁵³. Although persistently present, clientelism has transformed to a large degree throughout the decades, from a system based on the exchange among the local nobility and an abject and fragmented citizenry to what has been called ‘bureaucratic clientelism’ (Lyrintzis 1984) that, as I discuss in section 4.2.2, was an inherent aspect of party mobilization in the Greek Third Republic.

Up until now, the focus of attention has been devoted to an economic and historical recount of the developments that lead to the emergence and crystallization of political institutions and practices in Greece. A second complementary dimension of literature delves into the impact of cultural aspects on the formation of macro-time level political orientations. According to several scholars and students of Greek politics, the structural particularities described in the previous paragraphs reflect some macrohistorical and deeper-held cultural values that lie in the core of the Greeks’ self-identity, society and the state (Pollis 1965; Campbell 1983; Demertzis 1990, 1994; Papanizos 1994). Pollis (1965) argues that in contrast with the Western appreciation of the self as an autonomous individual who seeks self-fulfillment a neutral and just state, self definition for the Greek national identity is developed in terms of personalized group-relatedness (such as family, clan or village) which has been partly maintained through the years despite the socioeconomic and demographical adjustments. In turn, this view of oneself has tangible

⁵³ Although the Greek dictatorship clearly failed to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of voters (see Bermeo 1995).

consequences for political participation as “each interest group, each political party presumes, psychologically, that the existing political machinery has been structured by those in power for their self-interest and is by definition inimical to the interests of those out of power” (Pollis 1965, p. 40), while ‘Political issues are discussed in terms of political personalities’ and ‘rewards and punishments are meted out in terms of ‘personal’ evaluations rather than policies or programs’ (p.41). Campbell (1983) argued that the constant feature of Greek civic life lies in the significance of the family as a social unit, where ‘the success of one family is seen as depressing the fortunes of another’ (Campbell 1983, p. 186) and ‘the exclusive commitment to the interest and reputation of the family not only enjoins distrust but also requires a man to exploit, within acceptable limits, the weakness and difficulties of other if this will benefit his family’. (p. 186). Hence, according to this approach on the foundation of the Greek political system these longstanding social norms have shaped a political culture inclined to individualism and social mistrust.

Another group of scholars have looked into the influence of Orthodox Christianity as a source for the articulation of broad orientations towards politics. Demertzis (1994, 1997; Charalambis and Demertzis 1993) argues that contrary to the Protestant and Catholic dogmata where the relation between man and God is mediated by Reason and Law, Orthodox Christian develops an unmediated, personal relationship that rejects secular satisfactions. In turn, his argument goes, this conception fosters feelings of fatalism that contradicts the idea of public responsibility and free citizenship. Diamantouros (1994) sees a ‘cultural dualism’ in the early modern Greek state between the positive state-view cultivated by members of the elite and the pre-modern, religious

Byzantine view of the self that dominated among lower classes. The combination of Byzantine and Ottoman personified traditions cultivated attitudes of disbelief toward mediated politics such as political institutions and central authority. At the same time these cultural values contradicted the Western ideal of a neutral state legitimized on the grounds of legal-formalistic authority.

How do these structural characteristics of the modern Greek national identity stemming from cultural meanings and historical circumstance exert an influence on aggregate levels of political sophistication? The clientelistic system and the 'hypertrophic' state that have been by and large ever-present in Greek political life have forged a different context and meaning of political participation compared to most of Western democracies. While for the Western European or American citizen choosing among different parties and candidates is ultimately a choice based by and large on collective, organized group interest, electoral behavior for a significant portion of the population in Greece translates into tangible material interest, such as employment or housing. 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 of politics that collides with the modern democratic understanding of it' (1994, see also Demertzis 1990). As 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 2001, p. 42). In fact, political parties are ever-present in the Greek public sphere crosscutting all facets of

public life. In this sense the Greek political system responds more to a 'partocratic' system where 'the party logic penetrates all institutional spheres undermining their autonomy and their specific values' than a party democracy (Mouzelis 2009, p. 2 , see also Mouzelis 2003).

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: The electoral turnout percentages 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 Third Republic where the mean electoral turnout in Greece is significantly higher than the respective percentage of other democracies (Blais 2008). The impressive participation in elections compared to the rest of European democracies is 'rationally' justified if we take into account the increased expected utility associated with the vote choice in a culture where parties intersect in the whole of public life and the vote is often associated with tangible material benefits. The increased expected utility gained by participating in politics in turn affects motivation of obtaining political information at the national level. 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. In the case of Greece, the widespread party clientelism that stems from a cultural tradition and historical particularities increases potential benefits of acquiring information over political affairs. Yet, as I discuss in the next sections the motivation in acquiring political information is not subject solely to deep-rooted socioeconomic path development and

cultural norms, but may also be affected by meso and micro-time level parameters, which are embedded respectively in the generational political socialization and short-time factors. In the next section I examine the second time level, the meso-level, vis-à-vis the Greek political culture.

4.2.2 Meso-Time Level: Political Competition and Generations in Greece

As discussed above, the meso time level affecting nation-wide motivation toward political learning centers around the distinct politicization circumstances for different generations of voters. In a broader sense, apart from unexpected historical occurrences (such as civil war, revolutionary movements or social revolt), the meso time level touches on a series of structural characteristics of a political system such as the ideological polarization that shapes the nature of party competition and the historical circumstance that shape a general habitus toward obtaining political information for different generations of voters.

In this section I argue that the turbulent post-war Greek political history that includes a bloody civil war, a seven year dictatorship and a heavily ideologized political competition during the 1970s and 1980s has further contributed to the creation of a highly sophisticated electorate for the generations that had their impressionable years during these politically stimulating periods. I begin by discussing the nature of political representation in the Greek post-war political system until the late 2000s. In the next section I use Eurobarometer data covering a period of 26 years, to investigate period, age and cohort effects in the motivation to acquire political information.

4.2.3: The Greek Post-War Political System (1946-1967) and Dictatorship (1967-1974)

The central theme in Greek politics from the end of the Second World War until the end of the 1980s was the varying relationship between the winners and losers of the civil war (1946-1949) that started at the end of the Second World War⁵⁴. The armed confrontation between the leftist rebels (EAM) and the British and US-supported right state forces consolidated a deep political cleavage that shaped the ideological structure and the degree of polarization of the Greek political system for future decades that would form the foundations of ideology, use of symbols and partisan identifications in the decades to come (Meynaud 1966/2002, Moschonas 1994, Nicolakopoulos 2000, 2005 Tsoukalas 1984, Seferiades 1986). By and large, the resistance to German occupation and the civil war signified a transition from the politics of patronage to the politics of intense ideological polarization (Tsoukalas 1984, Nicolakopoulos 2000). As Nicolakopoulos puts it, referring to the resistance to Occupation: ‘the experience of EAM created for the first time in the modern Greek history a feeling of collective power and action, that terminated the -until then- dominant clientelistic system, totally revising the most basic aspects of the relations between the people and their state of existence’ (Nicolakopoulos 2000, p. 29). The civil war initiated a serious confrontation between two totally opposite worldviews for the future of the devastated Greek state that bore class characteristics

⁵⁴ In this chapter I only discuss the aftermath of the Greek civil war. Among the large number of essays and monographs on the topic, the reader is referred to the works of Margaritis (2001) for a recount of historical events and Nicolakopoulos (2000), Nicolakopoulos et al. (2002), Demertzis (2011) for a thorough analysis of the motives and social meanings of the period.

(Nachmani 1990; Nicolakopoulos 2000). Those developments were at odds with the pre-war Greek political system which, as discussed above, was based on a formalistic institutional structure while consensus was consolidated on material personal interests based on client-patron exchanges.

Yet, it is important to note that despite the two opposing sides diametrically different plans for the future of the Greek state (attachment to the communist or capitalist block of countries), the dominant discourse of the post-civil war state did not bear the characteristics of an ideological confrontation based on opposing social, economic and political values nor was organized around a propagation of the devastating effects that the communist or authoritarian rule would have for Greece (Moschonas 1994, Tsoukalas 1984). Rather the Greek state was cautious not to employ any class references on its confrontation with the leftish camp (Tsoukalas 1984). Consequently, the anticommunist suppression and the extended use of physical force was propagated as necessary in order to save the Greek nation from the Slavic forces that wished its unification with Bulgaria and Yugoslavia (Tsoukalas 1984, Gounaris 2002). It is evident that any mention of a 'civil war' was enough for prosecution (Tsoukalas 1984).

The characteristic that shaped the Greek political culture of the 1950s and 1960s was the handling of the relations between the right authoritarian state and the left-leaning social layers. After the win of the state forces, the Greek society was characterized by the deep cleavage between the 'national-minded' camp and the supporters of the communist and non-communist Left. The intensity of the ideological polarization and the politics of fear were the main characteristic of the political system cutting across almost all aspects of social life. The primary intention of the post-civil war regime was to legitimize itself in

the eyes of the general population and exclude communists and left-leaning citizens from social and economic life. This was achieved by two parallel strategies: On the one hand, the post civil war state took a series of extreme authoritarian and exclusionary measures to oppress the leftish camp: the communist party was outlawed in 1947 with many of its sympathizers ending up in exile or concentration camps with a common accusation of espionage in favor of the Slavic communists; all aspects of the fragmented social unions (such as trade unions) were subject to the complete control of the state; the Greek palace and the army often intervened in parliamentary life and there also had been cases of electoral juggling. On a second level, as the national economy had been devastated by the German occupation and the civil war, the allocation of resources and the restoration of productive mechanisms were left to the hands of the state that soon set up the renovation of clientelistic mechanisms to gather support from the petty bourgeoisie classes and isolate sympathizers of the Left (Charalambis 1989). What is more, the authoritarian mechanism of the post-civil war state attempted to repress any remaining sympathizers of the Left, by connecting social benefits (such as access to education) and public employment with political beliefs. This stance was consolidated legally with the initiation of ‘certificate of national probity’⁵⁵ according to which the undersigned officially declared that he denounces communism. These tendencies were exaggerated during the seven years dictatorship (1967-1974) that came, according to the military rulers, to save Greece from a possible communist takeover that could not be effectively confronted by the corrupt “old political world”⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ The translation of the term comes from Mouzelis and Pagoulatos 2002

⁵⁶ For an analysis of the ideological discourse of the Greek dictatorship see Couloumbis 1974

I believe it is plausible to argue that the above described theme of ‘guided democracy’ (Mouzelis 1986, Mouzelis and Pagoulatos 2002, Nicolacopoulos 2009) had a significant impact on the general public’s motivation in obtaining political information: the civil war added a sense of collectivity in the hitherto private nature of political participation (Tsoukalas 1984, Nicolacopoulos 2000). What is more, the extreme ideological polarization and the oppression by the post-civil war state made economic and physical existence dependent on political ideology, generating fear to a degree that is hardly comparable with the advanced Western democracies even including the dark years of McCarthyism in the United States⁵⁷. These two developments would pave the way for the explosion of political participation that would characterize the Greek political culture in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s.

The first years after the restoration of democracy in 1974 have been characterized as the years of ‘ovepoliticization’ by a wide range of scholars (Sevastakis 2004, Lyrintzis 2005, Nicolacopoulos 2005, Voulgaris 2008). The main aspect of the early period was the massive political participation and the radical ideologicalization to an incomparable degree with any stage of the modern Greek state. The explosion of participation in politics was the product of a series of developments that cut the link with the authoritarian post-civil war state and laid the foundations for the emergence of a new type of political culture. Undeniably, the most important characteristic of the Third Greek Republic was the consolidation for the first time of a parliamentary democracy where all parts adhered to the rules of the electoral game creating a democratic system free from the interventions from palace or foreign powers, authoritarian oppression or electoral

⁵⁷ See Samatas 1986 for a comparative assessment between the practices during the McCarthyism era and the authoritarian Greek post-civil war state.

juggling. The Communist Party was legalized for the first time since 1947; The adherence to traditional Orthodox-Christian values was no longer uncontested⁵⁸ (Dimitras 1990); Greece's entrance to the European Community in 1981 consolidated a sense of democratic guarantee (Diamantouros 1994); the cleavage between the 'national minded' and the 'non-national minded' withered away and a new party system was established in novel ideological schemes similar to those of the consolidated Western democracies, as the political parties were no more 'congeries of party notables clustered around particular individuals' but organized political entities with delineated ideological marks (Clogg 1990, p. 216). These developments brought up an explosion in political participation. As Sevastakis writes:

The early metapolitefsi was characterized by and large from an unprecedented liberal explosion of social meanings, information and discourse. The return of [personal and social] pleasure took place initially as the dynamic of claiming the deprived political tools, the free use of illegal, unacceptable and punishable words and the assimilation of the political codes of the defeated of the civil war. Thus, the period was characterized by an excessive exposure to political-ideological discourse, the overproduction and overconsumption of political information, the explosion of political discussion and ideological polemic (2004, p. 50).

The main characteristic of the Greek political environment of the late 1970s and 1980s was the vast and deep-cutting ideological confrontation between the right and the anti-right forces of the political system (Moschonas 1994). This was expressed through the confrontation of the main parties in the newly shaped political system that monopolized around 85 percent of the vote: the Panhellenic Socialist Party and the

⁵⁸ Although the close entwinement between the church, the state and the political parties was maintained throughout the Third Greek Republic (Georgiadou 1996, Papparizos 1994)

conservative New Democracy. PASOK's early years were characterized by a heavily ideological political rhetoric that integrated calls for a socialist transformation of the Greek economy with a broad ideologicalization of the Greek political history, mobilizing arguments and symbolisms that dated back to the period of the civil war. (Spourdalakis 1988, Moschonas 1994, Lyrintzis 2006). This novel ideological scheme benefited the socialist party, leading to the mobilization of large segments of the electorate, mainly among those who were excluded from political processes from the right authoritarian post-civil war state (Nicolacopoulos 2006). While PASOK offered a polarized and passionate political discourse, New Democracy's early ideological platform was rather abstract (Lyrintzis 1984, 2006) oscillating between the authoritarianism of the guided democracy era (Kalyvas 1997, Nicolakopoulos 2006) and an attempt to build a modern political profile influenced by Thatcher's British conservative party (Lyrintzis 2006). This deep-cutting cleavage was reflected in the two parties' electoral bases: PASOK attracted a large share of the vote among working and middle low classes that proved crucial for its electoral wins in the 1981, 1985 and 1993 elections (Katsoudas 1990, Nicolacopoulos 2005). On the other hand, the traditional electoral basis of the Greek conservatives consisted mostly of middle and upper class voters, while at the same time the party attracted an increased vote share in rural and agrarian areas (Katsoudas 1990, Nicolacopoulos 1990).

The fall of the seven years dictatorship and the democratic reforms initiated by the first conservative governments brought the layers that had been oppressed during the 'guided democracy era' back into politics. What is more, the first decades of the Third Greek Republic were characterized by significant economic growth, rapid urbanization

and increased social mobility. Yet, these trends did little to consolidate a civic culture based on a strong civil society and a positive political participation⁵⁹. The partocratic perception of the public sphere and the lack of voluntary associations were and remain central characteristics of post-authoritarian Greek politics being evident in all aspects of social life (Diamantouros 1983, Mouzelis 2009). The traditional clientelistic networks of the past were replaced by what has been called ‘bureaucratic clientelism’ (Lyrintzis 1984) or ‘party-directed’ patronage (Mavrogordatos 1997) namely the closed 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). Hence, along with the increased ideological polarization of the Greek political environment, the extreme politicization in Greece during the 1970s and 1980s was also partly based on a private perception of public interest (Tsoukalas 1977, Demertzis 1990). Available data from the period show the ‘paradox’ of an exceptionally politically interested electorate that while is satisfied with the level of democracy, at the same time appears disappointed with life in general and distrustful toward the state and political institutions (Demertzis 1990, Inglehart 1990, Charalambis and Demertzis 1993).

The motif of ideological polarization and extreme politicization gradually declined during the 1990s for a number of reasons: The turning point for the depoliticization of the Greek electorate was the 1989 political crisis that ended up with the Prime Minister Andrea Papandreou and other PASOK prominent members being dragged

⁵⁹ By positive participation I refer to Crouch’s distinction between positive and negative citizenship. In positive citizenship “groups and organizations of people together develop collective identities, perceive the interests of these identities and autonomously formulate demands based on them which they pass on to the political system” (2004, p.13). On the contrary, negative citizenship refers to the “negative activism of blame and complaint, where the main aim of political controversy is to see politicians called into account” (2004, p. 13). As we discuss later in the text, the negative notion of citizenship prevailed in Greece during the early 1990s.

to court by their political opponents, giving birth to a morbid period in Greece's modern political history (Lyrintzis 2006). The public agenda was monopolized by political scandals and personal attacks, strengthening feelings of distrust among the electorate (Lyrintzis 2006). A second major development was the gradual consensus of the two main parties over the economic policies and particularly the realization of the socialist PASOK that the future of Greece lied within the European Monetary Union leading to the reduction of the ideological conflict. The transformation of PASOK was symbolically (Givalos 2005) and substantially consolidated with the rise of economically liberal Costas Semites to the party's presidency and the Greek prime ministry. This development brought convergence between the two main parties' electoral bases (Mavris 2000; Vernardakis 2000, 2011; Nicolacopoulos 2006; Vasilopoulos and Vernardakis 2011a) and changed the nature of political competition that moved away from ideologically laden political discourse toward the proliferation of valence and moral integrity issues (Nicolakopoulos 2006, Vasilopoulos and Vernardakis 2011a). A third often highlighted factor by the relevant literature was the rise of commercial media and especially private television that often adopted populist strategies presenting an "endless stream of negative stories about political scandals, rivalry, conflict and self-interest" (Papathanassopoulos 2000, p. 57; also Demertzis and Kafetzis 1996, Pleios 2002, Lyrintzis 2006). These developments lead to widespread feelings of political alienation and cynicism cutting across partisan and ideological lines (Demertzis and Kafetzis 1996, Vasilopoulos and Vernardakis 2011a, 2011b). During the 2000s, feelings of discontent against the political system and especially against the two main parties escalated as a result of extended scandals concerning and the gradual deterioration of the national economy that largely

attributed to the whole political system (Vernardakis 2008, Vasilopoulos and Vernardakis 2011a, 2011b).

Based on the above analysis we can anticipate significant intergenerational heterogeneity in the motivation to become politically informed. In particular, we expect that cohorts that had their impressionable years during the civil war, guided democracy and early “metapolitefsi” eras to be significantly more motivated to acquire political information compared to subsequent generations and particularly those who went through their late adolescence and early adulthood after the 1990s. In order to examine these hypotheses, in the next section I undertake an age-period-cohort empirical analysis in Eurobarometer data from 1981 until 2007.

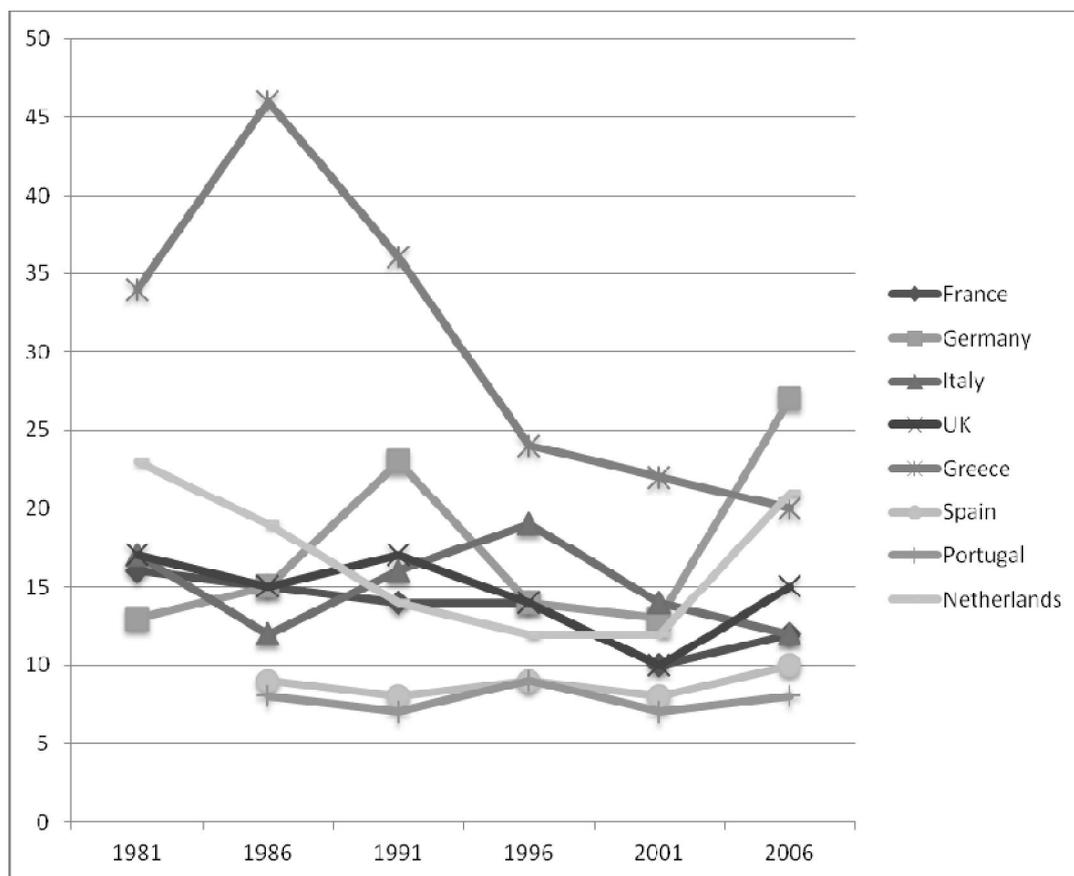
4.2.4 Meso-Level Variations in Political Interest in Greece: An Age-Period-Cohort Analysis

The increased politicization of the Greek public compared to the rest of EU countries is a common (e.g. Inglehart 1990, Fraile 2010) yet theoretically under-investigated finding in comparative surveys. In this section I seek to explore political interest in Greece in a comparative perspective. Then according to the theoretical framework proposed above, I focus on the meso time-level variation in political interest in an age-period-cohort analysis of the Greek public for a period of 26 years, from 1981 until 2006⁶⁰. Similarly to van Deth and Elff (2001, 2004) I use *frequency of political*

⁶⁰ Unfortunately changes in the political discussion question wording do not allow an analysis after 2007.

discussion as a direct measurement of political interest⁶¹. Figure 4.1 reports comparative frequency of political discussion across selected European countries between 1981 and 2010. The Greek public appears to be exceptionally interested in politics, discussing politics far more often than the average European, a finding that has been highlighted in several works (Charalambis and Demertzis 1993, Demetzis 1997; van Deth and Elff 2001, 2004). It is interesting however to notice the fluctuations in overall levels of political interest with regard to the period when the data were collected.

Figure 4-1: Respondent percent who report they ‘discuss politics frequently’ in Selected European Nations (1981-2006)



⁶¹ Unlike ‘degree of political interest’ political discussion frequency is regularly used in Eurobarometer surveys.

Overall, data reveal a sharp decline in active political interest in Greece. As political interest is the key variable behind the motivation to obtain political information (Luskin 1990), it is interesting to locate the source of the decline. The observed drop in political interest may be a product of generational replacement, according to the theoretical framework discussed above, as the most politicized cohorts of voters are replaced with less politicized generations causing the decline in overall levels of political discussion (cohort effect). Alternatively, the decline of political interest may be a product of a depoliticized period or a product of the transformation of the parties into cartel parties and hence of pragmatic orientation of the electorate cutting across different generations of voters (period effect). As we mentioned earlier, it has been hypothesized that a series of developments and particularly during the 1990s gave rise to political apathy (Lyrintzis 2006, Nicolakopoulos 2006). Hence we can expect to find a significant period effect in political interest. I identified seven generations of voters: The civil war generation, born between 1921 and 1930, consists of respondents who had their formative years (16 – 25 years old) during the outbreak of the civil war. The two ‘guided democracy’ generations (1931-1950) were those faced the political turmoil of the authoritarian post civil war state during the 1950s and 1960s. The Metapolitefsi generation (born 1951-1960) consists of those citizens who grew up in the first years after the restoration of democracy and were exposed to an overpoliticized political environment. The PASOK generation (born 1961-1970) consists of respondents who were in late adolescence or early adulthood during the ideologically polarized 1980s. Finally, the Consensus and Post-Democratic generations (born between 1971 and 1990) are the only generations that grew up in a low stimulus political environment.

The Eurobarometer studies offer the opportunity to examine age, cohort and period effects in frequency of political discussion that is the active expression of political interest (van Deth and Elff 2004). The question of frequency of political discussion featured regularly in the surveys up to 2007, allowing for an assessment of generational, period and lifecycle differences in political interest. As we mentioned above political interest is the main factor influencing motivation to become politically sophisticated. Hence exploring the variation in political interest for different age cohorts indicates differences in political sophistication attributable to the meso level factors discussed above.

The age-period-cohort analysis' aim is to statistically separate lifecycle, period and generational influence in regard with an observed behavior. However, the procedure is demanding because of the identification problem that exists 'whenever three or more independent variables need to be included in an analysis and each one is a linear function of the other', causing the 'most extreme kind of collinearity that is possible' (Glenn 2005, p.6). For example, there is a perfect match between a respondent's year of birth and the cohort he/she belongs to. Consequently, the perfect correlation of the independent variables blocks statistical software from performing the regression analysis (Allison 1999, Wass 2007). A frequently used solution to the collinearity problem is to provide different codings for the independent variables, treating age as a continuous variable and cohort and period as categorical variables (Blais et al. 2004, De Vries 2005, Wass 2007). Although all analyses highlight that the solution cannot separate the effects of age, generation and period "with an absolute certainty" (Wass 2007, p. 653), still this method allows for an assessment of a general trend with regard to the variable of interest.

A second challenge of the age-period-cohort analysis concerns the inclusion of additional variables. For example, the increased educational levels of the youngest cohorts constitute a cohort and/or period characteristic (e.g. Blais et al. 2004, Wass 2007). Similarly, the fact that women appear more politicized compared to the past signifies a period or cohort effect that controlling for gender would diminish (see Wass 2007 for a different opinion). Consequently for the purpose of the analysis, I chose to build a model including only the age-period-cohort variables. The model includes age as a continuous variable, age squared so as to tap non-linear age effects (Allison 1999), the Greek cohort coding analyzed above and a categorical variable distinguishing between the pre-1989 (polarized period), 1989-1995 (intermediate period) and post- 1996 (consensus politics period).

Table 4-1: Age, Period, Cohort Analysis in Frequency of Political Discussion in Greece 1981-2007

	B	s.e.
<i>Age</i>	-0.00	0.01
<i>Age</i> ²	0.00**	0.00
<i>Generations</i> ⁺		
<i>Guided Democracy</i>	-0.08*	0.08
<i>Generation (1931-1940)</i>		
<i>Junta generation</i> <i>(1941-1950)</i>	-0.12*	0.06
<i>Metapoliteysi generation</i> <i>(1951-1960)</i>	-0.19**	0.08
<i>PASOK generation</i> <i>(1961-1970)</i>	-0.70***	0.10
<i>Consensus generation (1971-</i> <i>1980)</i>	-1.48***	0.13
<i>Post-Democratic generation</i> <i>(1981-1990)</i>	-1.70***	0.17
<i>Period</i> [#]		
<i>1989-1995</i>	-0.16***	0.03
<i>Post- 1996</i>	-0.58***	0.05
N		55490

*Entries are unstandardized binomial logit coefficients with their respective standard errors in the second column. ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$. The dependent variable is a dichotomous variable coded '1' if respondent discusses politics frequently and '0' if otherwise. +: Reference category is 'civil war' generation (b. 1921-1930). #: Reference category is pre-1989. Data sources: Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File (1970-2002) and Eurobarometer 59.1 (2003), 61 (2004), 63.4 (2005), 65.2 (2006) & Eurobarometer 68.1 (2007)*

Regression results are reported in Table 4.3. Age measured as a continuous and a continuous squared variable appears to have a minimal effect on the probability of discussing politics frequently when the impact of period and cohort is taken into account. On the other hand the statistical analysis suggests that political interest is subject to generational factors with the relation appearing to the expected direction. The cohorts that became politically socialized during the civil war and the guided democracy era appear more likely to engage in political discussion. On the other hand, all subsequent generations exhibit a lesser interest in politics. The generation that had its impressionable years during the first years of the Third Greek Republic appears slightly less likely to engage in political conversation. The boost of disenchantment appears in voters born after 1970 and previous generations, where the unstandardized regression coefficient over-doubles compared to the generation coming into adulthood during the heavy ideological discourse of PASOK's first term in government. Finally, Table 4.3 illustrates a strong period effect in frequency of political discussion, as Greek citizens appeared more interested in politics between 1981 and 1988 compared to the 1989-1995 period, while disenchantment escalates after 1996 and the proliferation of consensus politics in the Greek political system.

Overall, the analysis highlights important divergences in political interest from one generation to another stemming from different conditions of political socialization.

Considering that political interest has been highlighted as the most important motivational factor to obtain political information, these significant generational differences allow us to anticipate similar divergences in the overall levels of political sophistication. Moreover, our analysis points to the conclusion that the gradual replacement of the older and more politicized cohorts by the more recent and less politicized will have a significant effect on the aggregate distribution of political sophistication in Greece.

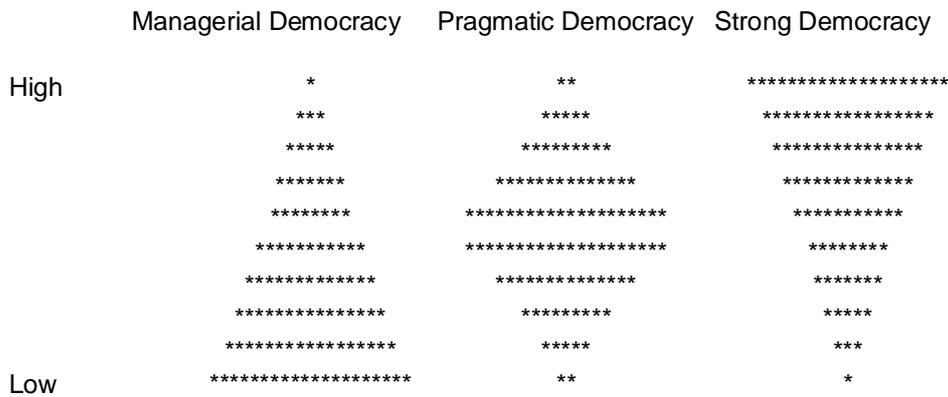
4.3 Micro-Level: Data Collection

Data for the measurement of political sophistication in the Greek public were collected in October 2008, a period which could be characterized as one of the least politically charged periods in Greece's recent political history: It was a year after the 2007 election where the conservative party managed to get reelected for a second time amidst general discontent with the political system that was expressed with increased electoral abstention in the general election (Vasilopoulos and Vernardakis 2011b). In short if 'bad times lead to anxiety, good times to calm' (Marcus et al. 2000, p.77) the Greek political environment in the autumn of 2008 was much different with the one after the shock that would follow the sovereign-debt economic crisis.

4.4 Levels of Political Sophistication in Greece

Figure 4.1 summarizes Delli Carpini and Keeter's (1996) hypothetical distributions of political knowledge. Each asterisk represents one percent of the public. The first pyramid-shaped pattern conforms to Converse's black and white model (1964) and represents a distribution of political knowledge where only a few citizens possess adequate levels of political sophistication, while the vast majority of the public is ignorant of political and public affairs. Delli Carpini and Keeter call this model '*managerial*' as 'only a few individuals are in a position to make effective use of their democratic rights and thus to exercise disproportionate influence over the making of public policy (p. 152, 1996). On the contrary, the second distribution labeled as '*strong democracy*' by the authors implies that the majority of citizens are highly sophisticated over political affairs, possessing adequate levels of factual political knowledge combined together in an organized manner. This pattern corresponds to the ideal of the informed citizen. Finally, the third scheme that is a Gaussian distribution of political knowledge represents according to Delli Carpini and Keeter a '*pragmatic democracy*' that would be 'the product of a political culture in which the acquisition of political information was a civic norm, political information was reasonably accessible through the schools and the mass media, and most citizens had enough motivation and cognitive skill to gather and retain at least a moderate amount of factual knowledge' (1996, p. 153).

Figure 4-2: Hypothetical Distributions of Political Knowledge



Note: The figures display hypothetical distributions of respondents with the highest scores at the top of the figure and the lowest scores at the bottom. Each asterisk represents 1 percent of respondents. Figure comes from Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996,p. 152).

Delli Carpini and Keeter compare these hypothetical distributions with the results of the 1989 survey of political knowledge in the United States to conclude that the shape of the actual distribution lies closer to the model of pragmatic democracy rather than any of the other two paradigms. Yet, as we discussed in the previous section, there are ample reasons to anticipate that the Greek public will tend to exhibit relatively high levels of political sophistication as a consequence of an increased motivation in keeping up with political affairs.

Figure 4-3: Distribution of Political Sophistication in Greece

90-99%	*****	7.5
80-89%	*****	10
70-79%	*****	15.2
60-69%	*****	20.1
50-59%	*****	17.1
40-49%	*****	14.2
30-39%	*****	7.5
20-29%	****	4.6
10-19%	**	2.6
0-9%	*	1.2

Note: The figure displays distributions of respondents' political sophistication. Each asterisk in the second column represents one percent of the public. The first column reports percentage clusters of correct responses on the total knowledge scale (see Chapter 3) ranging from 0 to 100 percent. The third column reports the actual percentage of the sample falling on each category.

Figure 4.2 reports the actual distribution of political knowledge in Greece by using Delli Carpini and Keeter's pyramid scheme. Results suggest that similar to the theoretical expectations of an increased motivation to follow political affairs due to the presence of macro and meso time level factors that enhance political learning, political knowledge in Greece lies between the strong and pragmatic democracy patterns. An impressive 7.5 percent of respondents answered correctly between 90 and 99 percent of questions, while the majority of respondents fall in the 60-69 percent quartile. Overall, nearly 70 percent of respondents answered more than half of the political knowledge questions correctly. On the other hand, this figure despite showing increased levels of political knowledge among the Greek electorate, also highlights some important individual level divergences in overall levels of political sophistication that are investigated in Chapter 5.

Table 4-2: Percentage of Correct Responses per Knowledge Item

Item	Percent Correct %
<i>Evangelos Venizelos party</i>	97,2%
<i>Maximum length of government term between elections</i>	96,4%
<i>Name Greek minister of finance</i>	89,2%
<i>Name the parties currently in parliament</i>	82,8%
<i>Evangelos Averof party</i>	82,4%
<i>Office held by Ronald Reagan</i>	82,2%
<i>Office held by Margaret Thatcher</i>	80,5%
<i>Minimum number of MPs required to form government</i>	79,8%
<i>Barrack Obama's party</i>	76,5%
<i>Office held by Yaseer Arafat</i>	69,2%
<i>Year of the Greek 3rd Republic</i>	67,4%

<i>Know what 'mixed name' is on the issue of Macedonia</i>	63,5%
<i>'New Democracy' are more in favor of free-trade economy</i>	62,5%
<i>Communists are more in favor of state intervention</i>	59,8%
<i>Why did Greek minister Magginas resign</i>	56,9%
<i>Office held by Yannis Ragoussis</i>	52,1%
<i>Place four political leaders from Left to Right</i>	50,0%
<i>Coalition of the Left are more in favor of state intervention</i>	48,7%
<i>Office held by Gordon Brown</i>	36,4%
<i>Office held by Jose Barroso</i>	31,9%
<i>Can describe what the term 'neoliberalism' means in the economy</i>	26,4 + 6,9%
<i>Can name Greek EU commissioner</i>	22,2%
<i>Office held by Yannis Panagopoulos</i>	19,3%

Before we move on to the conclusions it is worth observing the correct response percentages for each item. Table 4.4 reports an analysis by item showing impressive aggregate political knowledge. For example 96.4 percent of respondents can identify that the maximum length of government between two elections is four years, where in the same item in a true/false form in the British Election Study had only 61 percent correct responses (Heath et al. 2002). Moreover, three out of four respondents can correctly identify that Barack Obama's party is the Democratic Party, 82 percent can name all five parties in the parliament, while a third of respondents can correctly describe what the term 'neoliberalism' means. On the other hand voters 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.

Conclusion: Political Culture, Rational Choice and Political Sophistication

The aim of this chapter was to combine theoretical and empirical evidence that support the idea of a divergent aggregate distribution of political sophistication among

different political cultures and time of measurement. I argued that the broad literature on the impact of longstanding socioeconomic characteristics and cultural aspects in political culture, research over the psycho-sociological conditions of politicization among young adults and the motivating role of short-term emotions in information seeking, provide sound theoretical tools for hypothesizing that overall levels of political sophistication will diverge significantly between nations. Furthermore, 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, that is, regardless of national characteristics. I employed this theoretical framework on the case study of Greece to trace the link between these macro, meso and micro time levels of motivation in obtaining political information and demonstrated the existence of a generally politically knowledgeable public as a result of a macrohistorical narrowly private perception of political interest and the increased politicization of the generations that grew up during the civil war and the post war right wing authoritarian state. I believe that the finding of a relatively politically sophisticated public has important consequences for understanding the concept of political sophistication:

First, it comes in contradiction with a frequently cited, yet largely untested, assumption concerning the universality of the ignorant voter (Luskin 1987, 1990, Converse 1990, Elff 2006). The often cited but largely uninvestigated idea that all mass publics are similarly unsophisticated is theoretically questionable and according to our analysis cannot also be justified empirically.

Second, the finding implies that several characteristics of political culture lead to high levels of political knowledge. We discussed the role of micro, meso and macro

situational and cultural factors that increase the general public's motivation to acquire political information. We argued that these elements that are situated respectively in: a) tradition b) political socialization and c) temporal factors affect the cognitive costs and expected utility of obtaining political information. In this sense, the theoretical outline described in this chapter offers a bridge between two –by and large- rival theories in the field of political behavior and public choice, namely rational choice and political culture theories.

Moreover, based on the theoretical framework discussed above over macro, meso and micro variations in motivation to obtain political information, we can form some hypotheses for future research on the aggregate distribution of political sophistication and its impact on the quality of democracy:

A second hypothesis could be constructed around the content of political knowledge along with macro and meso framework described in the chapter. Our case study, Greece, offered reasons to anticipate high levels of political information as a result of macro and meso factors, due to and the increased politicization due to the civil war and the political culture that prevailed after the restoration of democracy. The clientelistic networks and cultural modes of kinship increased the expected utility of knowledge of political actors and parties that were in turn the sources of distribution of private goods through patronage. The increased polarization caused by the civil war and the system of 'guided democracy' shaped the political socialization processes of generations of voters who showed an exceptional pathos with questions of ideology and political partisanship. The differentiated impact of macro and meso factors that increase motivation to become politically informed coincided in the case of Greece. Further research could focus on the

impact of macro level factors in particular knowledge categories. For example, we could find an increased knowledge in the recognition of political actors (at the local or national level) as a consequence of extended patronage networks in countries such as south Italy (Putnam 1993) or Iceland (Kristinnson 2002)⁶².

On the other hand based on the remarks around the meso level of motivation in acquiring political knowledge could lead us to anticipate important changes on aggregate levels of political knowledge with regard to the level of ideological polarization or exceptional social and political events. What is more, it can lead us anticipate significant cross-national variations in the *type* of knowledge. For example it seems reasonable to anticipate that societies that have experienced prolonged and tense ideological cleavages (such as Spain or Portugal) or have been through a process of regime change (as is the case with Eastern European countries) will be relatively more likely to score better in questions of ideological placements or in the levels of conceptualization index.

⁶² However, the influence of clientelism on the recognition of political personnel and general interest in politics is not straightforward. The proliferation of patronage and machine politics is associated with a number of characteristics that prohibit the development of other forms of political participation such as lack of economic development or alienated political cultures (Almond and Verba 1963, Putnam 1993).

CHAPTER 5

THE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

In the previous chapter I presented a theoretical proposal for the conceptualization of political sophistication at the aggregate level and I argued that the collective distribution of political knowledge will be subject to factors operating at the macro, meso and micro time levels. On top of that, I provided empirical evidence demonstrating that the general level of political knowledge in Greece is high and that the average Greek citizen does not conform to the ideal type of the ignorant voter described in the United States. This finding was attributed to macro and meso time level differences in the motivation to acquire political information. In this chapter I change the focus from the aggregate to the individual level of analysis. My aim is twofold: On the one hand I seek to explore the magnitude and underlying individual-level variation in political sophistication across discrete social groups in order to address the question of *who* is informed. On the other I attempt to build an individual-level model of political sophistication that extends current empirical evidence on the role of structural and behavioral factors in political cognition. The question here concerns the factors that increase or decrease political learning focusing on the influence of demographic, political participation and media exposure variables.

The rest of the chapter goes as following: In the next section I undertake a descriptive analysis that investigates the existence and reach of ‘knowledge gaps’ in different social segments. In the second part I construct a simple path model for the examination of the complex relations between different factors that have an influence on individual levels of political awareness. In the third part I employ regression analysis to assess the impact of a series of structural and behavioral variables in levels of political sophistication focusing in particular at the role of different media in political learning. Finally, I reach some conclusions on the individual-level analysis of political sophistication.

5.1 The Distribution of Political Knowledge in Specific Social Groups

Sociologists and Political Scientists have demonstrated significant underlying individual level inconsistency in political information with regard to demographic characteristics as well as to a series of behavioral and attitudinal factors: numerous studies have indicated significant and consistent knowledge gaps in political affairs between various social groups. A large number of surveys have found significant gender, class and age differences in levels of political knowledge in the United States and elsewhere. In this section, I compare political knowledge gaps among different social strata in Greece with regard to age, education and gender. The question put forward in this section is *who* is politically informed.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the motivation to obtain political information is mediated by age-related differences in political socialization. In particular,

in Chapter 4 we showed that the generations that had their formative years during the ideologically stimulating periods of the post-civil war political environment were more likely to exhibit an active political interest. On the contrary, the generations that came of age in the depoliticized political environment during the 1990s and 2000s were less likely to develop a sense of political interest and hence we can anticipate that this difference will be reflected in levels of political sophistication. Apart from the relation between political interest and political knowledge, several studies have argued that age is a positive predictor of political information due to life-cycle effects (Luskin 1990, Hendriks-Vettehen, Hagemann and van Snippenburg 2004). 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 (e.g. Eliasoph 1998). On the other hand, age is negatively associated with the ability to become politically sophisticated, as expressed through levels of education (although as we argued in chapter 4 the causality between education and political knowledge is questionable).

Moreover, levels of political sophistication have been found to be associated with and influenced by levels of income (Neuman 1986, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Hendriks Vettehen, Hagemann and van Snippenburg 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, Hagemann and van Snippenburg 2004). Thus, according to this line of explanation it is the material 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). However, the relation between gender and political knowledge is far from apparent. As there are no reasons to hypothesize the knowledge gaps stem from biological differences between genders, primary scholarly attention has turned to intergender differences in social behavior. The first and most prominent line of explanation identifies the differences between male and female social roles as a source for variation in political knowledge. According to the social environmental argument, women are less likely than men to be employed or educated, while their social interactions are limited compared with men as a result of child-care and household responsibilities. On top of that, a result of the intergender differences on employment rates as well as women's general lower position in employment is that men are more likely to be exposed to political discussions that functions as a motive to process political information (Neuman 1986, Graber 2001). Although the gender gap appears to be diminishing other aspects of political behavior such as electoral turnout (Norris and Inglehart 2000), educational and occupational

differences still persist in contemporary Western societies (Jacobs 1996, Fortin 2005). These structural differences may exert a direct influence on political sophistication. Alternatively they may bear an indirect influence through behavioral variables such as political interest or exposure to media that are associated with overall levels of political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).

However, it appears that the influence of gender on political awareness extends beyond differences in structural and motivational factors. Researchers appear unanimous that despite the control for structural (such as occupational status, education and class) or behavioral variables (such as partisanship, active political interest or exposure to media) gender still appears to maintain a significant influence on levels of political sophistication. (Neuman 1986, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1992, 1996, Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997, Frazer and MacDonald 2003, Dow 2009, Dolan 2011). Neuman (1986) found that women are less politically sophisticated than men despite controlling for a series of socioeconomic, psychological and early socialization variables (p.113). Furthermore, a cross time analysis showed only a modest decline in the gender gap of political sophistication between 1948 and 1980. In a similar multivariate analysis, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1992, 1996) found persistent gender-based differences on levels of political knowledge in the United States in equal socioeconomic clusters. Finally, Frazer and Macdonald (2003) examined the differences in political knowledge scores between men and women in Britain, by controlling for a wide range of theoretically relevant structural and motivational variables. Their results highlight a persistent influence of gender in political knowledge, even after controlling for a detailed account on social habits and frequency of political discussion. These analyses point to the conclusion that

the relation between gender and political sophistication is more perplexing than a simple reflection of differences in socioeconomic and behavioral factors. In fact, the perplexity of the association led researchers to turn their attention to surrogate explanations of the pattern of gender-based information inequality.

Mondak and Anderson (2003, 2004) argued that gender differences in closed item knowledge tests stem from men's increased propensity to guess and avoid to give a 'don't know' answer. On the other hand, Dow (2009) argues that the driving force between the observed gender-based differences in political knowledge are the differential returns of education for men and women, as a result she attributes to unequal socialization. More recently, Dolan (2011) demonstrated that when asked questions over the state of women in American politics the gender gap between men and women appears to diminish. She suggests that perhaps women do not appear politically sophisticated because of the underrepresentation of women candidates and representatives in American politics.

In short, despite the fact that women in Greece appear to have a higher employment rate compared to the rest of OECD countries (71.4 percent) (higher than countries such as France (61.4) or the United Kingdom (66.3) – see Fortin 2005), we expect to find a strong gender gap in political knowledge.

5.2 Political Knowledge in Selected Social Groups: A Descriptive Perspective

Table 5.1 reports the distribution of political knowledge between different gender, age and income groups. The reader should note that at this stage of the analysis I do not seek to highlight causal relationships. Results highlight some substantial knowledge gap

for all examined social categories. Men appear to be more politically informed compared to women with a difference of 12.3 percent. People over 55 years of age have increased knowledge over political affairs compared to younger generations with a knowledge gap of 24.4 percent between the highest and lowest age group. Finally, levels of political knowledge differ according to the level of income, as respondents whose monthly income exceeds 2000 Euros appear better informed compared with lower income categories.

Table 5-1: Distribution of Political Knowledge in Basic Social Groups

Gender	Men	Women		Knowledge Gap
	64.3 (566)	52 (586)		12.3
Age groups	18-34	35-54	55+	
	52.3 (309)	62.3 (441)	76.7 (398)	24.4
Income classes	Low	Medium	High	
	50	60.7	67.7	17.7

Table entries are percentages of correct responses in the political knowledge scale (see Chapter 3).

The magnitude of these knowledge gaps is ample. The descriptive character of these findings does not imply a causal association between these characteristics and sophistication. Still, this finding signifies that although the Greek public appears relatively well informed over political affairs, there is significant underlying individual-level variance in political sophistication. Another way to look into the income class, gender and age inconsistencies in political awareness is to compare groups with combined characteristics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Figure 5.1 reports mean correct percentages in the political knowledge scale for various social subgroups.

Figure 5-1: Mean Percentage Correct Responses in Social Subgroups (%)

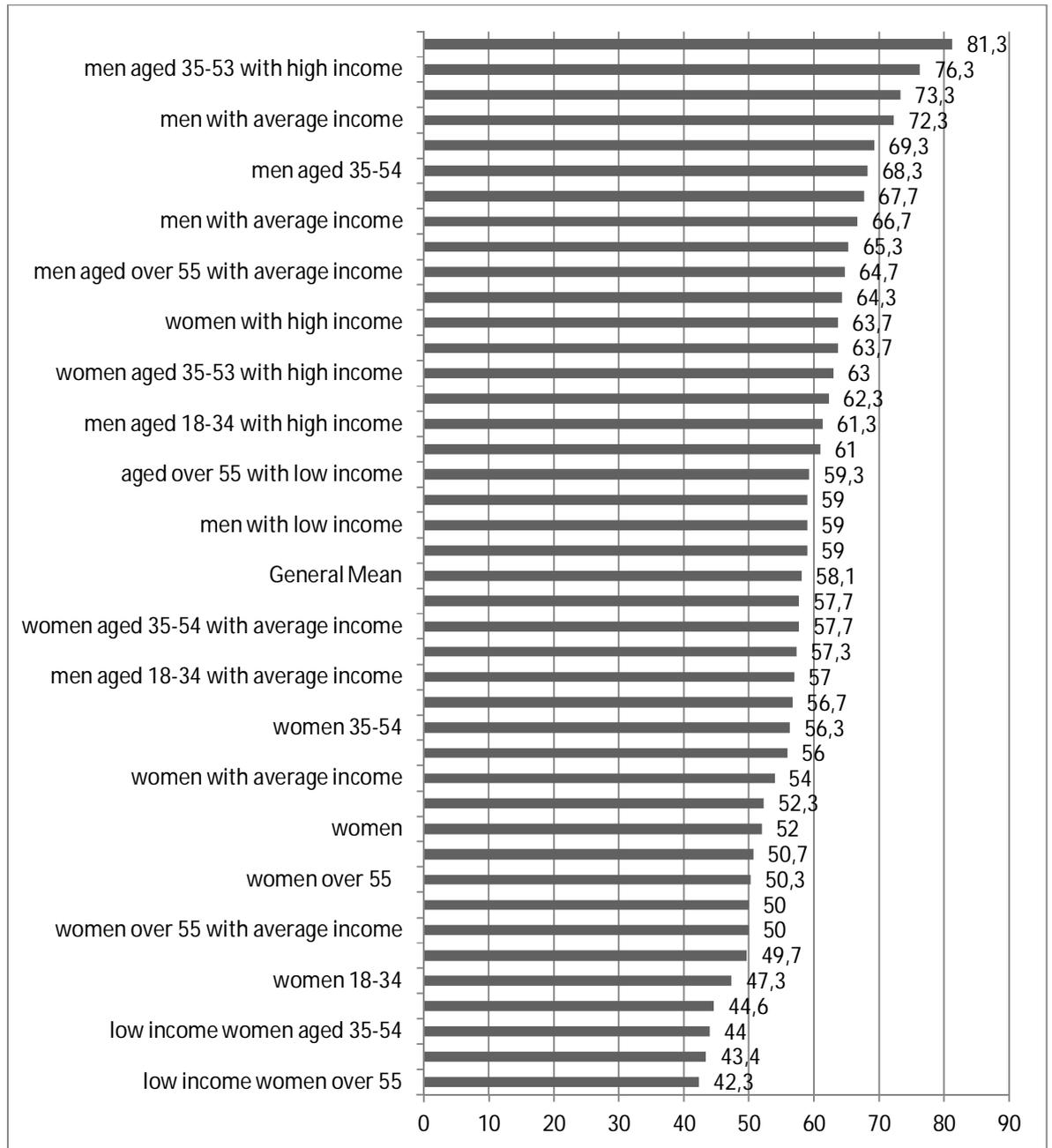


Figure 5.1 shows that gaps in political sophistication greatly intensify for citizens that belong to groups that combine two or more advantageous or disadvantageous social

characteristics. The most politically aware were high income, middle aged males answering correctly 81 percent of the political knowledge questionnaire. On the contrary, low income women over 55 years of age are the least politically sophisticated group answering correctly around 42 percent of the questions. In general women of nearly all ages and income statuses appear less sophisticated compared to men. Yet, Figure 5.1 also reveals some interesting overlaps, as women with high incomes appear to outscore men from low income classes, being placed above the general mean. A final remark concerns the level of inequality between subgroups: Although group-level differences in political sophistication appear to be strong, still the least politically informed group answers correctly over than 40 percent of the questions. In fact the knowledge gap between the highest and lowest political information groups appears reduced compared to a similar analysis conducted in the United States by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996).

These simple figures reflect a wealth of complex and interdependent relationships touching among else on the nature of education, the proliferation of particular social roles, the psychology of personality differences, changes in behavior during the circle of life, and above all on the particularities that shape a national political culture and its constituent political subcultures. In Converse's words 'they are not just "differences". They are orders of magnitudes of differences and conceivably in a real way, orders of magnitudes of orders of magnitudes' (1990, p. 373). In the next section I delve into the investigation of the determinants of political sophistication in an attempt to shed light on some of the basic aspects of political learning in Greece.

5.3 A Simple Path Model of Political Sophistication

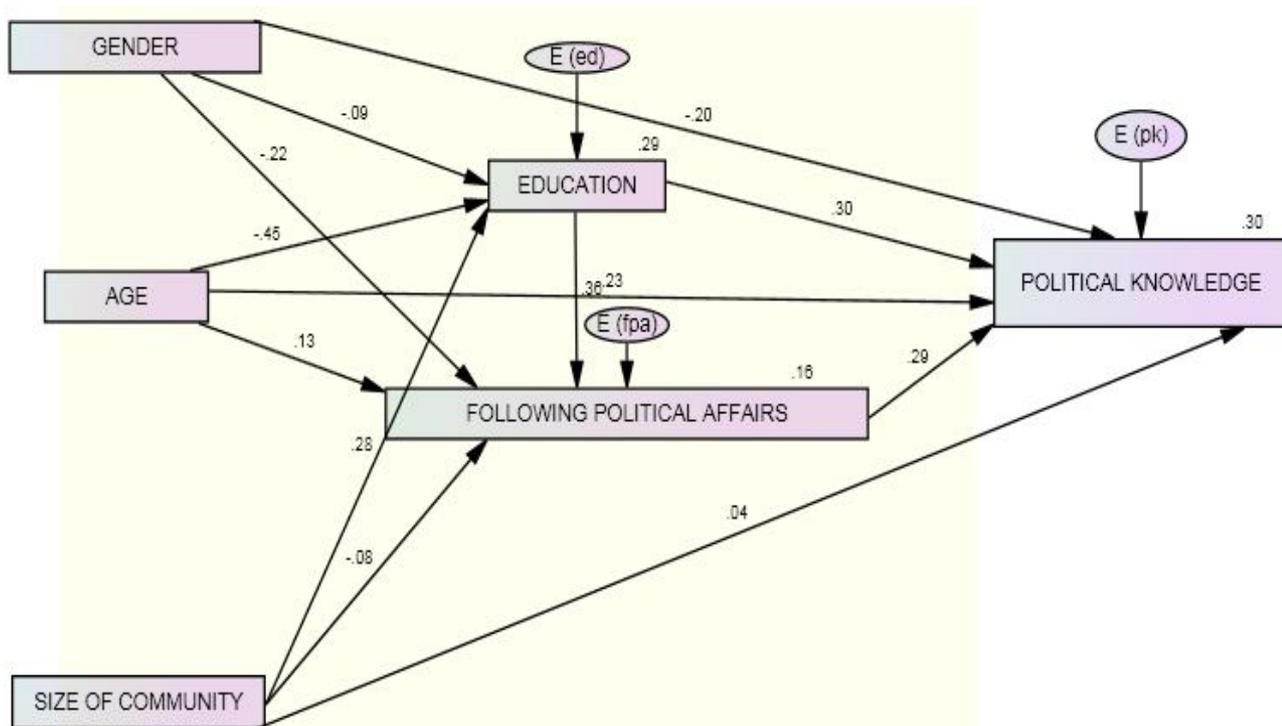
Figure 5.1 shows a simplified path model of overall levels of political sophistication, representing the ability and motivational parts of the triad proposed by Barber (1973), Luskin (1990) and Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) and was discussed thoroughly in Chapter 4: citizens become political sophisticated to the extent that they have the motivation and the ability to do so. The purpose of the path diagram is to highlight the complicated relations between demographic, structural and motivation factors that bear an influence to overall levels of political sophistication. Beginning from the left hand side the model includes the impact of demographic factors, namely respondents' gender, age and size of community. The control group for gender is male and for size of community are rural and semi-urban communities. The ability particle is tapped by respondents' level of education measured through a 14-point variable that ranges between illiterates and postgraduate level of education and is entered as an interval in the path model. The motivational particle is tapped through political interest (Luskin 1990) and in specific through an item that asks:

Some people seem to follow what is going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others are not that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, hardly at all?

The path diagram reveals some interesting direct and indirect effects to levels of political sophistication and allows us to examine the relations between a series of variables before entering them in a multivariate regression. Gender is negatively associated directly with political knowledge as well as indirectly with the other

theoretically relevant variables of ability and motivation. Notably, age bears a direct positive effect on political sophistication while at the same time is negatively associated with level of education, as younger cohorts appear to have a higher level of attained education compared with the elder segments of the sample. At the same time, age yields a positive path coefficient on following political affairs. Living in an urban community yields a positive coefficient for education while it is hardly related to the motivation of becoming politically informed or directly with levels of political knowledge. Overall, elements of ability (tapped by years of attained education) and motivation (tapped by the interest to follow political affairs) appear the most important predictors in the path model.

Figure 4-2: A Simple Path Model of Political Sophistication



Note: Entries are standardized regression coefficients (beta). Normed Fit Index = 0.973, Comparative Fit Index = 0.975

5.4 A Composite Model of Political Sophistication

I use regression analysis in order to assess the impact of a series of demographic and behavioral variables on individual-level variation of political sophistication. On top of the variables of the path model I investigate the impact of several demographic and behavioral variables that could have an impact on political sophistication. Since the dependent variable is continuous, I employ linear regression. Before presenting the regression results, I conceptualize the impact of a number of theoretically interesting variables on political sophistication.

5.4.1 Independent Variables

Church Attendance

The relationship between church attendance and levels of political information is not straightforward and has not been tested empirically. On the one hand one could hypothesize that church attendance as a form of socialization may enhance civic commitment and in turn levels of political knowledge (see for example Putnam 1993, Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995) In the case of Greece however we anticipate a negative influence of church attendance in political sophistication. As we discussed in Chapter 4, It has been argued that Orthodoxy is associated with a rejection of active political participation and particular with the proliferation of fatalist attitudes toward society and politics, hence reducing motivation in becoming politically informed (Demertzis 1994, Papanizos 1994).

Political Interest

Political interest as we discussed in Chapter 4 is the key variable measuring motivation to become politically informed (see also Luskin 1990). The decisive influence of political interest in acquiring political information has been well documented in several surveys (Luskin 1990, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Hendriks Vettehen, Hagemann and van Snippenburf 2004, Elo and Rapeli 2010, Freile 2010, Norris 2010). We expect to find a strong positive relation between political interest and sophistication.

Party Identification

Party identification, describing an affective, lifelong attachment to a political party (Campbell et al. 1960) is central to many aspects of political behavior such as issue positions (Conover and Feldman 1984, Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991), electoral turnout (Rubenson et al. 2004) and vote choice (Campbell et al. 1960), serving as a central cognitive heuristic for political behavior (Campbell et al. 1960, Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991)⁶³. The impact of party identification on political knowledge has been conceptualized in counter ways. Dalton famously put forward a distinction between party mobilization and cognitive mobilization (1984, 2007, see also Inglehart 1990). The cognitive mobilized are those who “possess both the skills and motivation to grapple with the complexities of politics on their own” (1984, p. 267). On the other hand the ‘ritual partisans’ identify with a political party in a habitual way, their political involvement is limited to electoral turnout and attending campaigns, while their level of political

⁶³ See Holberg 2008 for an overview of the literature concerning party identification.

sophistication is rather low. Dalton argued that the erosion of party identification is a result of the cognitive mobilization of Western publics during the last decades:

The expansion of education and the growing sophistication of mass publics generally are decreasing the functional value of partisan ties for some sectors of society. This cognitive mobilization is focused on a group of citizens whose greater political skills and resources enable them to be functionally independent of party cues: the better educated and politically involved. (1984, p.281)

In short, Dalton's analysis implies the existence of a negative relation between party identification and political sophistication at least for some layers of the population. However, the relation between party attachment and political knowledge could be conceptualized in a counter way: identifying with a political party denotes a strong and stable attachment to the political system that potentially increases motivation to acquire political information. In fact several surveys have demonstrated a positive rather than negative influence of party identification on political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Hendriks-Vettehen, Hagemann and Snippenburg 2004).

Exposure to Media

In the 1970s Tichenor and his colleagues found considerable knowledge-gaps in awareness of general science and public issues between higher and lower educational segments of the population classes that tended to increase over time as a result of a disproportionate increase in the infusion of media information (1970). They argued that:

As the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases, segments of the population with higher socioeconomic status tend to acquire this information at a faster rate than the lower status segments, so that the gap in knowledge between these segments tends to increase rather than decrease (p. 159-160).

The knowledge gap hypothesis with regard to the differentiating role of the media along with level of education has been documented in several of surveys (Jerit, Barabas and Bolsen 2006, Norris 2010, Gibson and McAllister 2011). Scholarly attention has turned to media types and particularly in the investigation of the role of television the press and –more recently- the internet in political learning.

To begin with the print media there is a large number of surveys that find a direct positive linkage between reading newspapers and political magazines and levels of political knowledge (Graber 1988, Luskin 1990, Robinson and Davis 1990, Delli Karpini and Keeter 1996, Netwon 1999, Hendriks- Vetehen, Hagemann and van Snippenburg 2005, Elo and Rapeli 2010, Freile 2010). It is thought that newspapers carry more contextual information over politics allowing for a better comprehension of political information (Bennett 1988, Graber 1988). Other scholars have argued that the print media offer a better organization of political information presented because the most important aspects of the story are presented in headlines and in the first few paragraphs (Neuman, Just and Criegler 1992). However, as Neuman's, Just's and Criegler's research suggests, the latent factor responsible for the positive relation between exposure to print media and level of political knowledge is cognitive ability and interest, as people with high cognitive ability tend to prefer the print media. Their research showed that once a cognitive skills test is introduced, the relationship between reading newspapers and newsmagazines and political knowledge becomes spurious (see also Chaffee and Frank

1996, Vettehen, Hagemann and Snippenburg 2004, Elo and Rapeli 2010 for a similar argument).

Literature surrounding the impact of television on political knowledge carries an equal weight of disagreement. One line of research highlights the positive factors of television in political learning: By studying the learning habits of Israeli school children, Salomon (1984) argued that television is more effective than the print media in political learning because it is regarded by citizens as an entertainment medium and hence it potentially increases motivation to learn (but see Neuman, Criegler and Just 1992). Graber (1990, 2001) argued that the audiovisual character of television eases learning and remembering as:

Good visuals make a situation more graphic and vivid. They come closer to reality than purely verbal descriptions. Therefore, they are etched more deeply into memory initially than non-visual messages. In turn, because they are more easily recalled, they are frequently refreshed, which prevents fading. (2001, p. 34)

Several surveys have validated the positive role of television in political learning. Chafee, Zhao and Leshner (1994) find a positive influence of television news programs on biographical knowledge of the 1992 American Presidential Election candidates, although not in the parties' positions. Norris (2000) combined empirical evidence from the United States and Europe to argue that the developments in the mass media, including television, have reinforced civic engagement and particular political knowledge. According to her, the media and knowledge are tied in a 'virtuous circle', as "citizens with higher cognitive skills and increased political interest are most likely to pay attention to the news media, and in turn, the process of media exposure is likely to add to

anyone's store of political knowledge" (2000, p. 228). Finally, in a more recent study, Jerit, Barabas and Bolsen (2006) argued that television serves as a balancing factor between citizens with different cognitive resources as, in contrast with the print media, television does not increase the knowledge gap between low and high education groups, allowing the least educated to become politically informed.

On the contrary, a large number of scholars argue television news offer a haphazard and personalized view of political events. Robinson's (1976) 'malaise' hypothesis classically argued that television "has come to define our politics as a byproduct of its own organizational and idiosyncratic needs" (p. 431), bringing a distinct journalistic ethos that focuses extensively on the negative aspects of politics through a shallow and brief coverage. Moreover, television critics argue that the media and especially television's tendency to seek for new stories in a daily basis makes political learning difficult as the public is presented with a continuous flow of events that are seldom explained in depth, promoting an 'episodic' (Iyengar 1994) coverage of issues that is superficial and oversimplified (Crouch 2004) and thus minimizes the public's "access to substance" (Cappella and Jamieson 1997, p. 238).

A third group of scholars finds mixed results. In their study of the relationship between media exposure and political knowledge, Aarts and Semetko show that watching public television news bears a positive influence on levels of political knowledge, while commercial television has a negative impact (2003). De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006) studied the effects of media in political knowledge and participation in a cross national survey in Denmark and the Netherlands. They argued that the decisive factor for political learning is the content of the news, as "when news contains a lot of relevant and

substantial content, that is when news is informative about the topic of interest, exposure has a positive effect on knowledge gains” regardless of the medium” (p. 332). Finally, by assessing the impact of various media on levels of political interest in Sweden, Stömbäck and Shehata (2010) reach a similar conclusion showing that watching public television news and reading broadsheet papers positively influence to political interest, while private television and tabloid papers do not.

The Greek Media System

Despite the growing similarities of media systems in terms of content, form and substance of communication (McQuail 1994) some considerable differences persist in terms of professionalization, political parallelism (the degree to which the media anchor particular social and political groups) and state intervention in the public media (Mancini 2000, Papathanassopoulos 2001, Hallin and Mancini 2004). In an assessment of the media impact on political knowledge it is important to consider characteristics of the national media system as they may be reflected in levels of political sophistication.

The Greek media system went through profound change after 1990 when private television channels were given license to broadcast. Prior to this development the Greek media system consisted of two public television channels, four radio stations and a large number of national and local newspapers. Public broadcasting was functioning more as a “primitive ideological state apparatus” (Papathanassopoulos 2001, p. 510) consistently promoting the party in office and rest of parliamentary parties (Papathanassopoulos 1997). The post 1990 commercialization of the Greek electronic media radically changed

the form of journalistic style from hard to soft news and the emergence of an everyday life journalistic style where the journalist adopts the role of the advocate of the common citizen (Demertzis and Kafetzis 1996, Demertzis and Armenakis 1999, Papathanassopoulos 2001). On top of that the haphazard liberalization of the television market brought a closer entwinement between businesses, channels and political parties in a clientelistic fashion, where the political endorsements of the media are often decided with regard to the owners' business interests at the time despite a rhetoric commitment to professional objectivity (Papathanassopoulos 2001, Vernardakis 2011). This is not to say that there are not a number of serious and informative political magazines in Greek television.

As for the hypothesized effects of television exposure on levels of political knowledge in Greece, there is a strong consensus among scholars that television viewing in Greece has a generally negative effect in the comprehension of political events (Demertzis 2002, 2003, Pleios 2002, Pantazopoulos 2002, Papathanasopoulos 2002, Sevastakis 2004, Vamvakas 2006). By clearly focusing on the infotainment aspect of news stories, they focus disproportionately on political actors rather than political actions and initiatives (Demertzis 2003). Often, television news present political actors to follow an individual political strategy outside party and ideological lines, and thus they are preventing the viewers to integrate news stories that are presented in television in a comprehensible manner (Demertzis 2003, Pleios 2002, Vamvakas 2006). As Pleios (2002) puts it:

The pseudo-knowledge and the lack of comprehension characterize television's political discourse with regards to the events that are presented. One could suggest that the larger the

number of news bulletins and political TV shows in the daily program, the more the increase of pseudo-knowledge of political events and the spread of incomprehension, (2002, p. 274)

Yet, despite this broad consensus in the negative role of television in political learning in Greece, this relationship has not been until now investigated empirically.

The Greek press has not enjoyed the high readership rates found in other European countries (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Historically the Greek newspapers have had a strong political parallelism and some of them held straight ties with political parties. After 1990, a significant portion of national newspapers attempted to imitate television's journalistic style in order to their revenue loss after the entrance of private television (Papathanassopoulos 2001). The national daily press offers both serious newspapers ("Eleftherotypia", "Kathimerini", "To Vima") and a particular style of tabloid-political partisan newspapers ("Apogevmatini", "Ethnos", "Eleftheros Typos"), while the typical tabloid press as found in other European countries has a very low appeal with only one newspaper of generally low readership ("Espresso").

On the whole, the Greek media system fully corresponds to the ideal type of the Mediterranean / Polarized Pluralism Model developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004), characterized by high political parallelism, low level of professionalization and strong short or long term clientelistic ties between media owners and political parties that lead to clear actor and party attachments.

Internet

Apart from television and press, the internet revolution has brought substantial changes in political communication and the ways that citizens acquire political

information. As we mentioned in Chapter 4, the internet's potential in political learning is profound, as citizens can access unlimited amounts of information in the web anytime of the day they wish to. In this sense, the internet vastly increases the availability of political information and the opportunity of becoming politically sophisticated and leads to an increase in levels of political knowledge (e.g. Grönlund 2007). On the other hand, a substantial change that has been escalated by the internet revolution, concerns the transformation of media environment from low choice to high choice ones (Prior 2007, Xenos and Moy 2007, Gibson and McAllister 2011). Prior (2005, 2007) argues that the internet revolution fell short of making the American public more politically sophisticated because while it offers an unprecedented opportunity of acquiring political information, at the same time the internet brings a selective exposure to politics, in the sense that the least interested citizens have the choice not to expose themselves at all to political information (Prior 2005, 2007; see also Gibson and McAllister 2011). In contrast, television reached the least politically uninterested audiences who were exposed to political information passively or because "there was simply nothing else to watch" (Prior 2007, p. 135).

Moreover, political information from the internet may be biased, false or misleading as they are not filtered by professionals and may not correspond to any journalistic standard (Gibson and McAllister 2011). Consequently, citizens may unwittingly expose themselves to pseudo-information that may undermine their capacity of understanding political issues. In short, despite the web's unlimited capacities for political learning, we have a number of reasons to anticipate that as more and more people rely on the internet for information, the knowledge gap between the educated and

uneducated will tend to increase. The internet revolution may potentially lead to a sharp rise of knowledge gaps between the cognitively able segments of the public that will take full advantage of the beneficial aspects of continuous information exposure and the novices who will either pay no attention at all or will receive poor quality information.

In the model presented below the impact of print media on political knowledge is measured by controlling for motivational and ability factors.

A Closer Look at Media Exposure

Table 5.2 reports news exposure habits in Greece. Greeks rely by far in television for political information, with 85% of respondents watching TV news more than three times per week. On the other hand, newspaper readership is at a rather low level with the majority of respondents reading newspapers less than once a week. Moreover, it appears that the Greeks do not turn to the internet for political information either, a result that is associated with the low internet penetration numbers in Greece compared to the rest of EU countries⁶⁴.

Table 5-2: News Exposure in Greece – November 2008

	Television	Press	Internet
<i>Everyday</i>	59.5	8	4.2
<i>3-5 Days a Week</i>	24.1	11.8	3.2
<i>1-2 Days a Week</i>	8.5	26.5	3.1
<i>Less Often</i>	5.2	26.3	8.9
<i>Never</i>	2.4	27.2	80.6

⁶⁴ In the end of 2008 Greece ranked 23rd of the 27 EU members in broadband internet access with 13.4 percent (source National Regulatory Authority for Telecommunications and Postal Networks –EETT 2009, available at http://www.eett.gr/opencms/export/sites/default/EETT/Electronic_Communications/TelecommunicationServicePurchase/broadbandServices/Broadband_stats_2008_Q4.pdf)

Source: VPRC, November 2008

However, as Table 5.3 shows, relying on newspapers and the internet for political information is associated with the level of education. Daily newspaper readership rates are more than double in university graduates compared to the rest of the samples, while the respective percentage for the internet is almost four times higher. On the contrary, the frequency of watching news on television is not associated with level of education.

Table 5-3: News Exposure by Level of Education

	Television		Press		Internet	
	University Graduates	Others	University Graduates	Others	University Graduates	Others
<i>Everyday</i>	63.3	59.3	15.7	7.2	12.2	3.2
<i>3-5 Days a Week</i>	25	24	19.7	10.9	9.8	2.4
<i>1-2 Days a Week</i>	9.4	8.4	39.4	25	5.7	2.8
<i>Less Often</i>	0.8	5.7	15.7	27.6	7.5	21.1
<i>Never</i>	1.6	2.5	9.4	29.4	51.2	84.1
<i>Cramer's V</i>	0.07 ^{ns}		0.20 ^{***}		0.26 ^{***}	

Source: VPRC, November 2008. *** : p < 0.001, ns: not significant

Finally, table 5.4 reports the mean percentage of correct answers in the political sophistication scale along with choice of medium for political information. Unsurprisingly, people who are frequently exposed to political information in the media appear more informed compared to those that do not. As for medium choice, newspaper readers appears to be the most sophisticated group (69 percent correct responses), followed by those who seek political information in the internet (67 percent) while television watchers appear significantly less informed than the two previous groups.

Table 5-4: Mean Correct Answers by Type of Medium

	<i>Watch news on TV</i>	<i>Don't watch news on TV</i>	<i>Read Newspapers</i>	<i>Don't read newspapers</i>	<i>Look for political information in the internet</i>	<i>Don't look for political information in the internet</i>
<i>Mean Answers Correct (%)</i>	60%	47%	69%	55%	67%	57%

Source: VPRC, November 2008.

Results

Table 5.3 presents the results of four regressions predicting political sophistication on the basis of demographic, motivation and media exposure variables. In order to assess the impact of demographics, motivation and exposure separately I constructed four models. In the variables discussed above I added an item measuring individualism calling respondents to agree or disagree with the phrase “I would rather look to himself than trying to change society”. The five-point Likert scale was recoded as a dummy variable.

Beginning with the influence of demographic characteristics on political cognition, results highlight some theoretically anticipated findings. In particular, and in accordance to the age-period –cohort analysis presented in the previous chapter, age appears to be positively associated with political sophistication. Interestingly, the

significance of interaction appears to persist after controlling for motivational and media exposure variables, leading us to suspect that life cycle effects may be at work. Furthermore, results demonstrate the persistent impact of gender on political sophistication: women appear less politically sophisticated compared to men in all four models, despite controlling for a large number of theoretically relevant socioeconomic and motivational variables. Moreover, regression results confirm the impact of education on political sophistication although as we discussed in chapter 4 this finding may conceal differences in citizens' intelligence of understanding political affairs that existed prior to tertiary education enrollment (Jennings and Niemi 1981, Luskin 1990, Westholm et al. 1990, Kim and Palmer 2008, Highton 2009). What is more, results suggest that political sophistication in Greece is associated with level of income a finding that was highlighted in the descriptive analysis and the path model. A notable finding is that as we expected church attendance has a negative impact on political awareness. Finally, urbanity does not appear to affect political sophistication.

As models B, C and D illustrate, all variables tapping motivation to acquire political information appear to influence sophistication in the expected direction, as politically interested and party identifiers appear more aware of politics compared to the rest of the sample. On the other hand, individualism is negatively associated with political knowledge as respondents who agree with the phrase "I rather look at myself than trying to change society" appear less politically aware compared with the rest of the public.

Table 5-5: Individual –level Determinants of Political Sophistication (OLS Regression)

	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D
<i>Demographics</i>				
Age	0.33*** (0.71)	0.28*** (0.70)	0.23** (0.07)	0.23*** (0.07)
Age ²	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)
Female	-3.44*** (0.41)	-2.87*** (0.39)	-2.77*** (0.40)	-2.80*** (0.40)
Has attended college	3.77*** (0.65)	3.13*** (0.62)	3.21*** (0.63)	3.37*** (1.70)
Resident of an urban area ^A	0.45 (0.47)	0.29 (0.45)	0.27 (0.44)	0.27 (0.45)
Resident of a semi-urban area ^A	-0.40 (0.63)	-0.48 (0.61)	-0.41 (0.60)	-0.43 (0.60)
Income	1.00*** (0.17)	0.89*** (0.16)	0.87*** (0.16)	0.87*** (0.16)
Attends Church	-1.58** (0.50)	-1.20** (0.42)	-1.21** (0.48)	-1.19** (0.48)
<i>Motivational Variables</i>				
Interested in politics		2.03*** (0.42)	1.48*** (0.43)	1.52*** (0.43)
Respondent would “rather look to himself than trying to change society”		-1.96*** (0.40)	-1.98*** (0.40)	-2.00*** (0.40)
Feels close to a party		0.94** (0.43)	0.91** (0.43)	0.95** (0.43)
<i>Media Exposure</i>				
Follows news on tv			2.52*** (0.58)	2.56*** (0.62)
Follows news on newspapers			1.07** (0.52)	0.51 (0.57)
Follows news on the internet			-0.51 (0.73)	-0.53 (0.86)
<i>Interaction Items</i>				
Tv x Education				-0.86 (1.77)
Newspaper x Education				2.12 (1.33)
Internet x Education				-0.43 (1.60)
Constant	6.70*** (1.76)	7.72*** (1.70)	7.11*** (1.72)	7.05*** (1.72)
Adj. R ²	0.25	0.32	0.34	0.34

*Notes: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. Cell entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with their standard errors in parentheses. A: Reference group: Living in rural areas. N = 1199.*

Assessing the influence of different types of media on political sophistication yields some interesting results: Overall, the regression analysis undertaken in Model C suggest that television viewing and newspaper readership are positively associated with political sophistication while learning from politics from internet sources is not associated with an increase in political knowledge. Surprisingly though, the positive influence of television appears more than two time larger than the influence of print media exposure, a finding that contradicts the frequently cited hypothesis over the negative role of television in political learning. On top of that, all interaction items fall short of reaching statistical significance, showing that the choice of medium Greece is not mediated by levels of ability with regard to political learning. Yet while we have confidence for the results concerning the impact of television and press in political learning, the finding impact of the internet in political learning should be interpreted with caution and further evaluated as at the time of survey there was a very low internet penetration in Greece.

Conclusions

This chapter dealt with the analysis of political sophistication in Greece focusing at the individual level with the purpose of a) highlighting knowledge gaps between social groups and b) investigating the determinants of political sophistication. Concerning the

first, the empirical analysis undertaken in this chapter suggests that, although the overall distribution of political sophistication in Greece appears to be relatively high, there is a great deal of individual level inconsistency: Women, the young and the poor appear significantly less informed about politics with all the negative consequences that this entails for the pursuit of their political interests. What is more, the analysis showed that knowledge gaps tend to escalate when one belongs to more than one advantageous or disadvantageous group. These results are in alignment with the deductions of other studies in the Netherlands (Hendriks Vettehen, Hagemann and Snippenburg 2004) and the United States (Luskin 1990, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) despite the important differences in the nature of political representation that were extensively discussed in Chapter 4.

The multivariate analysis showed that the demographic and socioeconomic gaps in political knowledge persist after the control for motivation and media exposure variables. What is more, it addressed the question of political learning through different media. Results indicated that television and the press have a positive influence in overall levels of political sophistication although watching television yields a higher coefficient. This finding contradicts the often cited hypothesis that television exerts a negative role in acquiring political information. On top of that, we found no interaction effects between media choice and education, a finding that implies that contrary to the knowledge gap hypothesis, political information in Greece is acquired at the same rate between different educational strata. Finally, following political affairs on the internet was not found to have any significant influence in political knowledge even after an interaction with the

level of education. Yet, as internet penetration was particularly low at the time of the survey, further research should be conducted in order to confirm this finding.

CHAPTER 6

THE CONSEQUENCES OF POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES: ATTITUDES TOWARD THE FOUNDATION OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN GREECE

As we discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, political psychology has offered a plethora of alternative theoretical frameworks to shed light on the labyrinthine cognitive mechanisms behind the formation of the public's political preferences. Citizens may reach particular decisions on a political issue by linking the ideological dimensions of each message to their own ideological preferences (e.g. Conover and Feldman 1981), by adopting the position of the party they feel closer to (Campbell et al. 1960), by taking cues from politicians they trust (Sniderman et al. 1991, Popkin 1991) or by connecting the issue to relevant political values (Feldman 1988). Each of these theoretical standpoints has proven particularly useful in the understanding of citizens' decision-making and has been validated through extensive empirical research. At the same time citizens differ in their attentiveness to political communication, their levels of political knowledge and their capacity in understanding political discourse. A question that has been the focus of scholarly attention mostly in the United States is which citizens follow each of the different decision criteria in order to decide on political issues.

This chapter contributes to the existing literature on the impact of political awareness on citizens' decision-making processes, by investigating a number of theoretical hypotheses on the public's attitudes toward the issue of the foundation of private universities in Greece, an issue monopolized the political agenda for months and

fuelled an unprecedented clash between the government and a coalition of left wing student groups and political parties. My focus is on the examination of the different routes that citizens follow in order to form political preferences along with their levels of political sophistication. The main question put forward in the chapter is which groups of citizens rely on each criterion to decide on a political issue. In the following sections I discuss the theoretical framework over the influence of political sophistication and the interaction between ideology, values and cognitive heuristics in attitude formation and construct a set of hypotheses that are tested in the empirical part. Overall, results support the hypothesis that levels of political awareness are decisive for the routes that citizens follow in order to reach political decisions.

6.1 The Structure of Public Attitudes

Citizens are often asked in surveys to express their views on wide series of political matters. Their reported opinions are usually aggregated as a homogeneous whole and their sum is considered the expression of the public's will on a particular political issue, in many cases significantly influencing policy outcomes. Still, some political issues (such as fiscal or foreign policy) are too technical and complex for an average citizen to comprehend. What is more, holding a coherent attitude toward an issue implies a basic knowledge of the issue, the comprehension of what is at stake and some basic information over the arguments for and against the policy proposal in question. As we discussed in Chapters 1-3 many citizens do not live up to these standards. What is more, as we analyzed in Chapters 1 and 2, early political sophistication literature centered on

the non-ideological nature of the mass public's political decision-making processes. Successive research focused on alternative explanations for the foundations of the public's political attitudes: political values and, as we discussed extensively in Chapter 2, cognitive heuristics.

6.2 Political Values

A large body of research in the late 1960s and 1970s offered plausible evidence that citizens can make political decisions by drawing on some core beliefs and values, moving from abstract 'end states of public policy' to the articulation of particular political preferences (Rokeach 1968, 1979, Cochrane et al. 1979). Values are 'enduring beliefs' that refer to personally and socially preferable 'modes of conduct or end states of existence' (Rokeach 1968, p. 550, see also Zaller 1992, Rohan 2000, Feldman 2003 for similar definitions of values). The concept of values is indissolubly linked with the concept of attitudes. Whereas attitudes are numerous and relatively specific, values are smaller in number and indicate broader preferences. What is more, while political attitudes show a large degree of instability over time (Converse 1964) political values exhibit a fair degree of consistency in repeated surveys (Inglehart 1985, Heath, Evans and Martin 1994). Hence, according to the value interaction hypothesis, 'instead of maintaining separate political attitudes over diverse questions respondents need only assess the relevance of the questions to a relatively limited set of values' (Alvarez and Brehm 2002, p. 18). A large number of surveys have provided strong empirical evidence that confirm the connection of deeper held values with several dimensions of political

behavior such as political preferences (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987, Feldman 1988, Zaller and Feldman 1992, Pollock, Lilie and Vittes 1993), candidate evaluations (Feldman 1988) or electoral behavior (Evans, Heath and Lalljee 1996, Knutsen and Kumlin 2005).

Although, political values constitute the basis of ideological thinking (Rokeach 1979), the relation between the two is rather complex. Simple possession of political values does not imply the existence, let alone an active use of political ideology (Williams 1979, Feldman 1988). Ideology refers to ‘interconnected sets of values which describe a preferred or obligatory state of a social system’ (Williams 1979, p.21). According to this functional definition⁶⁵, ideology encompasses and integrates different sets of political values that may be ‘bound together’ in a logical consistent or may coexist in a contradictory form (Converse 1964). The value orientations that have shaped European political systems –and continue to dominate in the European publics (Knutsen 1995, Knutsen and Kumlin 2005)- have been consolidated around economic left –right values and particularly the values of an increased regulation of the economy by the state, in order to adjust unfairness versus the value of economic freedom (Knutsen 1995).

Despite the fact that political values help citizens in the formation and organization of their political evaluations, the political environment does not usually offer the contextual information needed in order to make a connection between core values and specific policy preferences. Citizens in contemporary European democracies are called to make political choices within a complex multi-level organizational structure, where decision-making is shared between national and supranational institutions. On the other hand, the media and politicians often present complex and technical issues in a simplified

⁶⁵ I chose this definition as although broad can be empirically investigated. For an overview of various definitions and perspectives on ideology the reader is referred to Heywood 2007.

form and 'rarely aspire to any complexity of language or argument' (Crouch 2004, p.24). Consequently, the link between values and specific political preferences becomes easy to miss especially in the cases where citizens are deciding on technical and non-symbolic issues (Carmines and Stimson 1980, Pollock, Lilie and Vittes 1993). Surveys from the United States have provided an empirical justification of this hypothesis. By associating levels of political sophistication with the use of core values, Zaller has demonstrated that citizens with low levels of political awareness do not usually make an active use of political values but rather pay attention to the source and ideological tags of a political argument (1991,1992,1996). In the cases where they do, they often make judgmental mistakes in their effort to relate the content of political messages with their political values: 'The impact of people's value predispositions always depends on whether citizens possess the contextual information needed to translate their values into support for particular policies and candidates' (Zaller 1992, p. 25). Thus, even though political values may potentially serve as a mediating factor in coping with the complexity of political decision-making, they are effective only in cases where citizens possess the necessary contextual information to become aware of the relationship between a political issue and their values (Zaller 1992). In short, despite the fact that political values can potentially prove beneficial for the comprehension of the world of politics, levels of political sophistication decisively affect individuals' capacity to make an effective use of their value predispositions.

6.3 Cognitive Heuristics

As we discussed in Chapter 2 a second way in which citizens can make reasonable political decisions without having much knowledge over politics is by drawing on judgmental shortcuts or cognitive heuristics. Cognitive heuristics are problem solving strategies (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000, Lau 2003) employed to reduce the complexity associated with a problem into ‘simpler judgmental operations’ (Tversky and Kahneman 1974, p. 1124). They are practical ‘rules of thumb’ (Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991, Lau 2003) that individuals employ in order to simplify choices and they are efficient in the sense that they substantially reduce decision costs. As we saw in Chapter 2, a wave of scholars in the 1990s argued that the use of cognitive heuristics allowed uninformed voters to compensate for their lack of political information and act as if they were fully informed (Popkin 1991, Lupia 1994). These theories of ‘low information rationality’ suggest that voters can effectively compensate for the lack of knowledge around political actors and issues by relying on various judgmental shortcuts.

Common heuristics that citizens use include party identification (Popkin 1991), political actors (Mondak 1993), stereotypes of candidates’ personalities and appearance (Popkin 1991, Riggle et al. 1992) or the likability of certain social or political groups (Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991). On top of these, ideological identification can be also be employed as a cognitive heuristic (Conover and Feldman 1981), as every policy proposal carries an ideological tag (left or right in European politics) that helps citizens categorize and stereotype the messages they receive from the media (Popkin 1991, Zaller 1992). A large number of surveys have demonstrated the existence of a symbolic component in ideological identities (Conover and Feldman 1981, Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991, Zaller 1992). The symbolic component of ideological identification is

particularly important for the comprehension of the ways citizens make political decisions, as it implies that ideological differences within a political system do not stem solely from coherent value cleavages but also from the affective perceptions of each ideological group, their “likes” and “dislikes” as Sniderman and his colleagues (1991) put it.

In regard to the purposes of this chapter, there are two important elements to consider on the impact of political awareness in the employment of heuristics. First, citizens can make use of a cognitive heuristic only when they are aware of the connection between the heuristic and the policy proposal they are called to assess (see Lau and Redlawsk 2006, Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991, Delli Carpini 1999, Kuklinski and Quirk 2000) as ‘the heuristic model is based on *low* information rationality rather than *no* information rationality’ (Delli Carpini 1999, p.23). Hence, the acquisition of basic political information such as party affiliations, political positions and ideological endorsements are essential for making use of some of the most common information shortcuts. However, as Delli Carpini argues, it is exactly this kind of information that citizens have been repeatedly reported to lack (1999). What is more, the cognitive heuristics literature focuses extensively on the United States two-party system where the voters have a binary choice of either voting for the incumbent or the challenger. Delli Carpini’s argument becomes more plausible when we take into account the variety of political parties, actors and ideological orientations as well as the supranational institutional structure, that are present in most European multi-party political systems.

Second, it has been argued that the employment of cognitive heuristics may sometimes lead to ‘severe and systematic errors’ (Tversky and Kahneman 1974, p. 1124).

In the uncertain world of politics, citizens tend to follow cues that are inconsistent with their general political predispositions, thus ending up yielding to persuasion messages they would oppose had they decided under the light of full information (Zaller 1992, 1996, Lau and Redlawsk 2001). According to the argument put forward by Lau and Redlawsk (2001), more susceptible to these effects are the politically unaware who often tend to make judgmental errors by wrongly choosing to rely on heuristics that contradict their political predispositions. In this sense, the “comparative advantage [of experts] is not that they have a stupendous amount of knowledge, but that they know how to get the most out of the knowledge they possess” (Sniderman et al 1991, p. 24).

In the light of the above, it comes as no surprise that the politically sophisticated and unsophisticated differ on the types of the heuristics they employ: Some shortcuts like ideology or group endorsements have been repeatedly found to be used mostly by political experts, while others such as candidates’ appearance or party affiliation are used more often by the unsophisticated (Sniderman et al. 1991, Lau and Redlawsk 2006, Clarke et al. 2009). The explanation for this is that, unlike political sophisticates, citizens who lack the cognitive skills to make use of difficult heuristics will tend to focus on more easy-to-grasp cues, while political experts will be able to make use of more sophisticated and cognitively demanding heuristics.

Although there is not much doubt over the extensive use of cognitive heuristics by large segments of the public, it is difficult to assess whether cognitive heuristics do in fact increase citizens’ competence to make accurate political decisions. The decision on what constitutes a correct choice in the public’s political preferences is far from apparent because of the difficulty in finding criteria outside the decision-making process or outside

experimental settings (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000). Bartels (1996) measured the influence of political sophistication on the electoral choices of demographically homogeneous groups in US presidential elections. His analysis illustrated a significant impact of political awareness on the vote choice, as otherwise socially homogeneous groups exhibited important differences in their electoral behavior when sophistication was taken into account. However, Bartels' initial assumption that citizens with a common social and demographic background will tend to make the same electoral choices, cannot be transferred in most contemporary, increasingly volatile European political system, where social characteristics bear a progressively reduced influence on the vote choice (e.g Dalton and Wattenberg 2000, Dogan 2001, Oskarson 2005, Clarke et al. 2004, 2009).

Lau and Redlawsk (1997, 2006) touch on the issue of correctness of political decisions following two separate methodological routes. First, by defining a correct vote decision as the one that 'is same as the choice which would have been made under conditions of full information' (Lau and Redlawsk 1997, p. 586), they test the extent to which citizens make the same vote choices in a mock election under limited and full information. Their results suggest that nearly 70 percent of the American electorate made correct voting decisions. On a second level they define correctness 'based on the values and beliefs of the individual voter' (1997, p. 586) and investigate the levels of accordance between voters' general predispositions on a series of variables and the vote choice.

By transferring Lau and Redlawsk' correctness criteria from the vote decision to support for particular policies, we believe that the assessment of political values can provide some useful indications over the quality of political decisions and the competence achieved via the use of cognitive shortcuts: If cognitive heuristics can

effectively compensate for the lack of political knowledge, we would expect the cohesion between values and specific attitudes to remain unchanged for every level of political sophistication, because citizens would find a meaningful shortcut to translate their deeper political predispositions into explicit policy preferences. For example, if a respondent can be categorized based on his core political values on the extreme left of the economic left-right, supporting specific economic liberal policies would bear a contradiction between core values and expressed attitudes. It does not seem reasonable to support some abstract commitments and at the same time disagree with specific policies stemming directly from these commitments.

In light of the theoretical framework discussed above, this chapter is concerned with two broad aims:

The first is to extend current empirical evidence concerning the impact of political sophistication on individuals' active use of political values, ideology and other common cognitive heuristics by providing evidence from a different political and cultural setting. The second is to touch on the issue of the quality of the public's decision-making by assessing the contradictions between political values and attitudes for different levels of political awareness. Before presenting the research hypotheses, in the next section I discuss the heuristics- sophistication interaction in the Greek context.

6.4 Bringing the Sophistication – Heuristics Interaction in the Greek Context

Greece offers an interesting case for investigating the role of political sophistication on the use of ideology, political values and cognitive heuristics for three

reasons: First, in contrast with the United States where the vast majority of surveys regarding sophistication and heuristics have been published, the Greek political system is characterized by intense ideological conflict based on economic left-right issues. The Greek political system that was established after the fall of the dictatorship in 1974 is a three pole system dominated by the Left, Center and Right. The social democratic PASOK traditionally represented the Center-Left and the conservative New Democracy traditionally represented the Right. Although the two main political parties platforms' converged during the 1990s as a result of the EU-driven economic liberalization (Vernardakis 2000), the cleavage in economic left and right remains deep between the economic liberal parties and the left parties and unions that systematically and intensively oppose any liberal policy (Vernardakis 2008, 2011). Kumlin (2001) and Oscarson (2007) have argued that the high ideological polarization, which is a typical characteristic of many European political systems, makes the ideological component of each political message becomes more easily identifiable by the less politically sophisticated voters, compared to the American political system where the intensity of party competition is significantly lower.

The second reason is that traditionally there has been a strong sense of party identification in the Greek electorate, which as we described above is one of the most widely used most cognitive heuristics in both sides of the Atlantic (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960, Lau and Redklawsk 2001, Hobolt 2011). Until the landslide of the party system in the 2012 Greek general election, party identification exceeded 60 percent (Vernardakis 2011) while only around a third of the electorate switched party choice between elections (Nicolacopoulos 2006). However as we analyzed in Chapter 4, party identification in

Greece, is up to an extent, based on clientelistic interests and does not solely reflect ideological attachments, a characteristic that makes the investigation of the impact of party identification as a shortcut particularly interesting.

Finally as we analyze in Chapter 4, levels of political sophistication in Greece are relatively high and do not follow the pattern observed in the United States. This finding combined with the increased ideological conflict and the high rates of party identification could lead us to anticipate that political sophistication effects, although present, may be somewhat lower in Greece compared to other national contexts.

6.5 The Issue of the Reform of Constitution Article 16

The fifth paragraph of the Article 16 of the Greek constitution states that “education at university level shall be provided exclusively by institutions which are fully self-governed public law legal persons”. In June 2006, the conservative government of Nea Dimokratia initiated a reform of the article 16 of the Greek constitution so as to allow the establishment of private universities. According to the government the competition between private and public universities would improve of the quality of education in both state and non-state universities. The government invested heavily in this reform presenting it as the spearhead of its promised structural reforms that would modernize Greek society. The major opposition party (the center-left PASOK) initially agreed on the reform by arguing that the establishment of non-state universities would be beneficial for the educational system as it would release universities from the burden of statism and agreed that the competition between state and private universities would

serve the interest of all academic institutions. Both left parties of the parliament (the Communist Party and the Coalition of the Radical left) strongly disagreed with the proposal, arguing that education ought to be free for all citizens and that the two parties were 'selling out' education to the big business. What is more, both left parties argued that allowing the operation of private universities would eventually lead to market-oriented public universities, thus undermining the quality of higher education. The government met further opposition by students and academics who organized numerous demonstrations against the proposed constitutional amendment. In many cases the protests ended with serious clashes with the police that were extensively covered by the media.

The confrontation reached its peak in January 2007, when the parliament discussion for the amendment was due to begin. More than 280 academic faculties around the country were occupied by protesters, academic trade unions put pressure on the government with repeated strikes and rallies were held in Athens and other cities almost on a daily basis. The demonstrations were particularly motivated by the Coalition of the Radical Left party (SYRIZA) that had turned the struggle against the amendment of article 16 as one of the main issues in its political platform. According to the polls, SYRIZA seemed to capitalize on this stance as it appeared to increase its electoral share. An important number of PASOK MPs and student organizations started questioning the party's stance to agree with the constitutional amendment and openly expressed their concerns over the political cost and the ideological direction the party had taken. George Papandreou, the leader of PASOK, came into a difficult position as the party's electoral basis was divided and the party appeared to struggle in the polls. He chose to cut the

Gordian knot by withdrawing the party from the parliamentary discussion over the constitutional reform, denouncing the voting procedure as a ‘parody’.

Despite the cancellation of the constitutional reform, the issue of the foundation of private universities continued to maintain a prominent role in the political agenda during the next year. A few months after the unsuccessful constitutional reform, the government announced its intention to pass a law that would recognize equal rights to graduates from foreign universities’ departments operating in Greece via franchising. The government’s initiative, together with a law that initiated functional changes in the state universities, fuelled a second wave of reactions from the left parties and student unions. Again the Coalition of the Radical Left came to the center of the confrontation by persistently raising tones over the proposed educational reforms and calling the government to listen to the voice of the ‘generation of article 16’.

In sum, the issue of the foundation of private universities in Greece remained in the public agenda for several months and led to a sharp polarization between the conservative government and the parties of the left and especially between the government and the Coalition of the Radical Left. The issue is suitable for an investigation of citizens’ decision-making processes as it cross-cuts economic left-right values, questioning the limits of private sector freedom. What is more, the fact that two parliamentary parties clearly and passionately advocated opposite positions on the issue provides easy-to-grasp cognitive heuristics to the inattentive members of the public, thus allowing the examination of their influence on the public’s decision-making.

6.6 Research Hypotheses

Based on the interaction between values, ideology and cognitive heuristics discussed in the previous sections, we anticipate to observe the following patterns in the Greek public's decision-making over the foundation of private universities:

H1: Respondents' preferences toward the foundation of private universities will be associated with their core political values.

In particular we anticipate that respondents whose political values lean toward economic liberalism will tend to support the policy proposal, while respectively respondents who advocate an increased state intervention in the economy will tend to oppose it.

H2: We anticipate that sophisticated respondents with liberal economic left – right values will tend to show a higher degree of consistency between values and attitudes compared to unsophisticated respondents

The more sophisticated layers of the public will be better able to draw a connection between their deeper held political preferences and attitudes toward the foundation of private universities. On the contrary, the political novices will lack the cognitive means to decode the value implications of the policy proposal (according to Zaller's hypotheses) or will fall short to sensibly employ heuristics (according to Lau and Redlawsk's and Sniderman et al.'s hypotheses) and hence will show a larger degree of inconsistency between values and attitudes compared to the highest sophistication group.

Apart from value-attitude consistency, the public's decision criteria will differ according to the level of political sophistication. Following, Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock (1991) and Lau and Redlawsk (2001) we anticipate that political sophistication will have a significant impact on the choice of cognitive heuristics that citizens employ. In particular:

H3: We expect the more unsophisticated layers of the public to base their judgments on easier to grasp cognitive heuristics.

Unsophisticated segments of the public will tend to form their attitudes on the basis of 'easy to grasp' heuristics such as their evaluations of the relevant political leaders.

H4: We anticipate that the more politically sophisticated segments of the population will tend to form their preferences on the basis of political values and ideology.

On the contrary, we hypothesize that the politically sophisticated will tend to base their judgments on the heuristic of ideology and political values, as they possess the necessary cognitive means in order to align their political preferences with their deeper value and ideological predispositions.

Methodology and Data

As previously, data were made available by the VPRC polling institute and were collected in a nation-wide representative sample in November 2008 (N= 1204). As we discuss in Chapter 3, political sophistication was calculated via a 30 item questionnaire that tapped various aspects of political knowledge, including recognition of political actors and parties, knowledge over political institutions as well as party placement and ideological items.

Core economic left right values were measured by three items coded in five point Likert scales. The items were:

- *The less the state intervenes and the more freedom enterprises have, the better the economy works.*
- *A drastic cut in the business taxes would effectively reduce unemployment.*
- *Private enterprise is the best way to achieve economic growth⁶⁶.*

By adding the scales, a continuous variable was created with a minimum value of two and a maximum of 15. The new scale was then recoded into three categories: laissez-faire (N= 220) middle positions (N= 539) and socialist (N= 277).

Table 6.1 reports the distribution of responses on the issue of the foundation of private universities. A total of 60 percent disagrees, while around one in four respondents appear in favor with the government's proposed reform.

⁶⁶ Cronbach's Alpha = 0.61

Table 6-1: Attitudes toward the Foundation of Private Universities in Greece

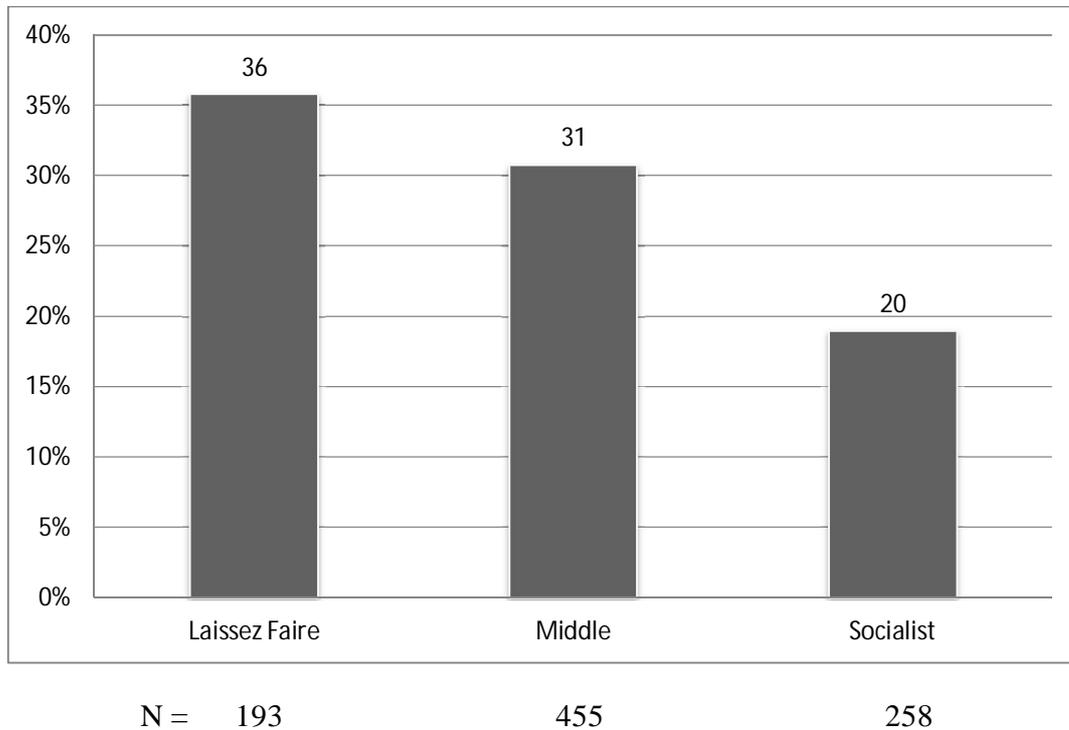
	N	%
<i>Totally agree</i>	138	12
<i>Agree</i>	150	13
<i>Neither</i>	124	10
<i>Disagree</i>	230	19
<i>Totally Disagree</i>	491	41

6.7 Results

1. Levels of Sophistication and Value-Attitude Cohesion

We begin the empirical analysis by assessing the impact of laissez faire / socialist values on the attitudes toward the foundation of private universities. Figure 2 compares the distribution of positive attitudes toward the article 16 amendment according to respondents' value preferences. Results indicate a weak yet significant association between economic left-right values and attitudes toward the establishment of private universities (Cramer's $V= 0.139$, $p. < 0.01$). In particular, Figure 6.2 reports substantial divergence between value predispositions and political attitudes: Only 36 percent of economic liberals appear to be in favor of the establishment of private universities, while around 19 percent of respondents whose political values lean toward socialism appear to stand in favor of the government reform. However, could these value – attitude divergences be attributed to the public's inability to translate its deeply held values into explicit attitudes?

Figure 5-1: Percentage of Laissez-Faire, Middle and Socialist Respondents Agreeing with the Foundation of Private Universities

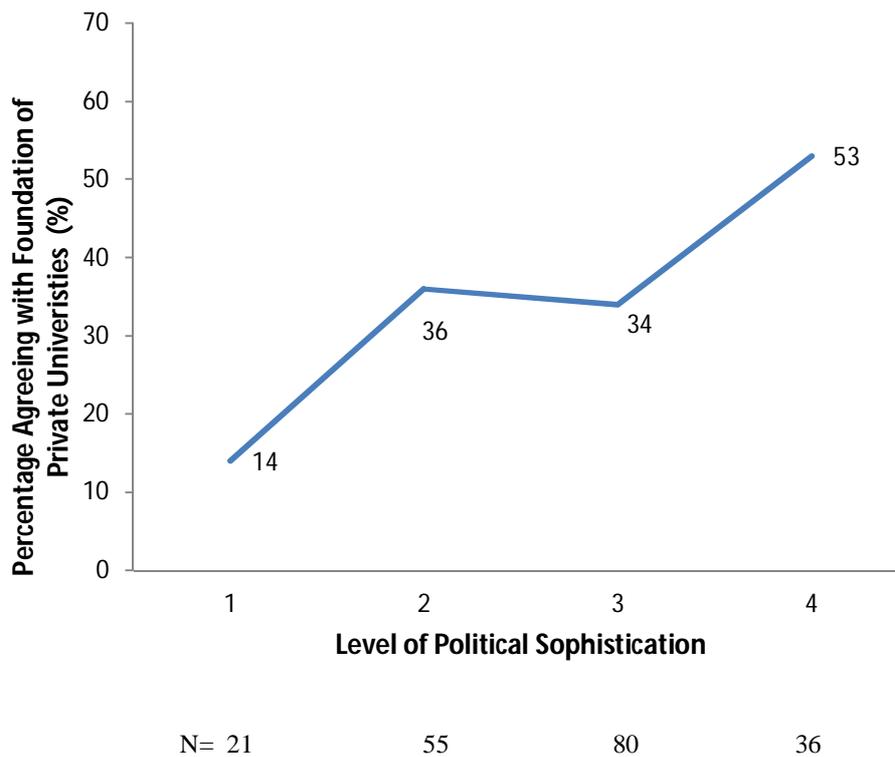


In order to address this question, we turn to the assessment of the impact of political sophistication on the association between political values and attitudes. For the evaluation of the second hypothesis the sample was divided into four groups in accordance with the obtained score in the political knowledge questionnaire⁶⁷. Figure 3 reports the percentage of economic libertarian respondents agreeing with the foundation of private universities for every level of political sophistication. Results show a positive and significant association between the four point scale of political sophistication and value- attitude cohesion. Less than one in five economic liberals categorized in the lowest sophistication group stood in support for the government's proposed constitutional amendment. As we move from the lowest levels

⁶⁷ Unfortunately our data do not allow a respective analysis for respondents holding socialist values due to the very small number of cases of unsophisticated socialist respondents (N =7). The small-N- problem remains even with alternative coding of levels of sophistication into three groups (N =13).

of sophistication upward, the percentage increases and reaches its peak (53 percent) for the highest sophistication group (tau b = 0.156, p < 0.05).

Figure 6-2: Political Sophistication and Value-Attitude cohesion among economic libertarian respondents



Overall, results confirm the second hypothesis: there is a positive relation between political sophistication and value- attitude cohesion. It appears that for the issue of the foundation of private universities the less politically aware fell short to translate their values into support for the government’s proposed reform, compared to politically sophisticated respondents. This finding indicates that general economic left-right value orientations may have little meaning for the politically unsophisticated. We further explore this possibility in the next section.

6.8 The Role of Political Sophistication on Individuals' Decision-making Criteria

We employ logistic regression in order to assess the impact of a series of common decision criteria on the attitudes toward the foundation of private universities in accordance with respondents' level of political sophistication. Along with a number of standard demographics⁶⁸, the list of independent variables includes citizens' evaluations of parliamentary party leaders⁶⁹, party identification⁷⁰, ideological self-positioning⁷¹ and political values (see Appendix). According to hypotheses 3 and 4 we expect the more unsophisticated layers of the public to base their judgments on less demanding cognitive heuristics and the politically sophisticated to rely more on the heuristic of ideology and political values. We built three logistic regression models in order to assess the impact of party identification and ideological self-placement separately. The reason for this choice is that in most European political systems left-right orientations have often been described more as the product of party affiliations than vice versa (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976), a finding that has been also highlighted for the Greek case (Vernardakis 2011). Thus, along with a set of sociodemographic characteristics, Model A measures the impact of political values, ideological self positioning and feeling thermometers toward parliamentary party leaders. In model B, left-right placement is replaced by party identification while model C evaluates the impact of both. Before we

⁶⁸ Namely age, gender and level of education.

⁶⁹ Measured in a ten point scale where '1' designates an extreme negative and '10' an extreme positive evaluation.

⁷⁰ The question asks: Do you see yourself being close to any party? If yes, which party is that?. The variable has been recoded, integrating the two main left parties into one category due to a small number of cases. Respondents who fell close to parties outside parliament and the right wing populist LAOS have been recoded as 'other', again due to their underrepresentation in the sample.

⁷¹ Ideological self positioning is measured through the standard 11 point scale where '0' denotes the extreme left position and '10' the extreme right. It was recoded so as following: positions 1-4 are coded 'left', 5 'center' and 6-10 'right'.

move on to the results of the analysis, it is important to note that models A and C simultaneously assess the impact of core economic left right values and ideology. Thus, the values that lie in the center of left-right ideological cleavages are measured apart from their ideological labels⁷². In this sense, we expect the impact of ideological self-positioning to denote affect driven identifications rather than functioning as the epitome of value laden differences.

All models contrast positive with negative attitudes⁷³ toward the establishment of private universities among the highest and lowest level of political sophistication. Exp (b) values higher than 1 indicate an increase in the probability of agreeing with the foundation of private universities, while respectively exp (b) lower than 1 indicate decrease. To overcome the relatively small number of unsophisticated respondents in the sample that would occur if we coded groups in conjunction with the number of correct responses in the questionnaire, levels of political sophistication have been recoded into three groups so as to include a roughly equal number of cases. Thus, under the label 'politically sophisticated' we have included the most knowledgeable third of the sample and under the label 'unsophisticated' we have included the least knowledgeable third respectively⁷⁴.

Table 6-2: Political Sophistication and Citizens' Decision-making Criteria toward the Foundation of Private Universities (Regression Analyses)

⁷² Multicollinearity tests were performed with the use of Variance Inflation Factor. No multicollinearity was found among the examined variables.

⁷³ The Likert scale gave the option 'neither agree nor disagree'. Respondents who chose this option were excluded from the analysis.

⁷⁴ Due to the uneven distribution of the political sophistication variable, respondents who have answered correctly between 0 and 15 items fall into the lowest third, respondents having answered between 15 and 19 questions fall into the middle third and the highest third consists of respondents who have answered correctly between 20 and 30 items. As a result, I chose to focus on the differences between the highest and lowest sophistication groups since the middle group is not efficiently differentiated from the other groups in terms of their absolute sophistication score

	Low Sophistication			High Sophistication		
	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model A	Model B	Model C
Political Leaders Evaluation v						
PM	1.15** (0.06)	1.14** (0.06)	1.16** (0.07)	1.07 (0.07)	1.05 (0.07)	1.02 (0.08)
Leader of PASOK (major opposition)	1.11 (0.06)	1.08 (0.06)	1.11 (0.07)	1.01 (0.07)	1.02 (0.08)	1.03 (0.09)
Leader of Communist Party	0.91 (0.07)	0.96 (0.07)	0.92 (0.08)	0.99 (0.07)	0.96 (0.07)	0.98 (0.08)
Leader of Left Party	0.88** (0.06)	0.91* (0.06)	0.88** (0.06)	0.98 (0.07)	1.01 (0.06)	1.00 (0.07)
Leader of LAOS (right wing populist party)	0.97 (0.07)	0.92 (0.06)	0.94 (0.07)	1.01 (0.07)	1.09 (0.07)	1.04 (0.08)
Ideology⁷⁵						
Left	1.30 (0.66)		1.83 (0.79)	0.18*** (0.54)		0.25 (0.87)
Center	0.69 (0.46)		0.64 (0.52)	0.24** (0.43)		0.39 (0.64)
Values⁷⁶						
Laissez Faire	0.83 (0.46)	1.08 (0.42)	0.87 (0.47)	4.14*** (0.54)	2.84** (0.51)	4.40*** (0.57)
Middle	0.63 (0.41)	0.82 (0.37)	0.64 (0.42)	2.45** (0.43)	2.36** (0.40)	2.39** (0.45)
Party Id⁷⁷						
ND		1.17 (0.44)	0.72 (0.55)		5.57*** (0.58)	7.57*** (0.73)
PASOK		1.05 (0.44)	0.75 (0.49)		1.11 (0.57)	2.72 (0.71)
Left Parties		0.92 (0.61)	0.37 (0.80)		1.04 (0.56)	3.15 (0.75)
Other		4.14 (1.02)	2.99 (1.07)		1.81 (0.70)	3.00 (0.95)
Nagelkerke R ²	0.16	0.13	0.18	0.32	0.30	0.37
N	252	299	252	226	249	226

*Table entries are exponentials of the b coefficient (with standard errors in parentheses). *p < 0.1 **p < 0.05 ***p < 0.001 All regressions include controls for gender, age and education. a: Reference group = Right, b: Reference group = socialist, c: reference group = No identification*

Results are presented in Table 1. Focusing first on model A, our regression results for the examined variables suggest that, from all variables included in the model, politically unsophisticated individuals form their judgments solely on the basis of evaluations toward the two political leaders that became particularly engaged in the confrontation: positive opinions toward the prime minister are associated with a higher probability of agreeing with the government reform, while holding a positive opinion toward the president of the SYRIZA (the party that capitalized on the turmoil caused by the government's reform proposal) is associated with a lower probability of agreeing. On the contrary, neither ideological self positioning nor political values appear to have a statistically significant impact on the decision-making of the unsophisticated group. Turning to the politically sophisticated, the decisional criteria appear reversed: the more knowledgeable citizens base their judgments on both ideology and political values. All relations appear to be in the expected direction: citizens who hold laissez-faire or mixed economic values are more likely to support the reform proposal compared with the socialist group of respondents. What is more, citizens who place themselves on the left and central positions of the ten-point scale, have an increased probability to disagree with the reform compared to the reference category. On the contrary, attitudes toward political leaders do not appear to be associated with opinions over the issue of article 16 reform.

In model B, ideological self placement is replaced by party identification. According to the regression analysis, politically unaware citizens tend to form their preferences based on their evaluations of party leaders, while the impact of party identification fails to reach statistical significance. On the contrary, the impact of party identification is significant for politically sophisticates as members of this group who feel

close to the conservative party are significantly more likely to support the government reform compared to politically aware respondents who do not identify with any party. Moving on to the cumulative model C, results suggest that the simultaneous measurement of party identification and ideological self placement does not alter the decision criteria for the unsophisticated group as these variables fall once more short of reaching statistical significance. As for the highest sophistication group, it appears that party identification continues to yield a statistically significant effect while the impact of ideological self-positioning is eroded.

Overall, according to the analysis, politically unsophisticated citizens tend to form their opinions on the issue of the foundation of private universities on the basis of the heuristic of party leaders. It appears that the intensity of the confrontation between the government and the left parties allowed the politically inattentive members of the public to make a clear connection between party leaders and policy proposals and use it to adjust their attitudes on the issue. As was anticipated, unsophisticated respondents' ideological affiliation and political values do not exert a significant influence on decision-making and political judgment. Still, it is interesting that the politically unsophisticated do not appear to make use of the heuristic of party identification. Perhaps, given their low levels of political awareness, party identification for these groups of respondents is rather superficial and habitual and is not expressed with the anchoring of particular policy preferences. It should be noted that the low values of Nagelkerke R^2 , indicating a poor fit of the models for the unsophisticated group suggests that variance of responses for these respondents is based on unexamined factors.

With regards to the political sophisticates, our results appear in alignment with the hypotheses developed by Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock (1991) and Lau and Redlawsk (2001). Even though the institutional setting in Greece, its political culture and the public's general awareness over politics is quite different in comparison with the United States, decision-making among political sophisticates appears to conform to a similar pattern: It is only among the most politically attentive layers of the public that political values, ideology and party identification have an impact on political preferences.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to shed light on the differential decision criteria employed by voters in order to make political judgments on the issue of the foundation of private universities in Greece, an issue that was highly ranked in the political agenda for several months. The overall results point to the conclusion that political sophistication has an important influence on the use of political values and the employment of distinct cognitive heuristics for making political decisions. In particular, this chapter provided further empirical evidence from a European political system with a different form of party competition to the hypothesis over the positive impact of political sophistication on the correspondence of deeply held core values with the articulation of particular policy preferences. Despite the fact that political values are considered to be an important predictor of specific attitudes, this study demonstrated that their mediating effect is rather modest as their use as proxies for choosing sides on political issues is dependent on the level of political sophistication.

What is more, this chapter considered the influence of political sophistication on the employment of particular cognitive heuristics. According to the regression analysis, from all examined variables, the politically unsophisticated appear to form their preferences on the basis of their evaluations toward the political leaders that came to the center of attention during the confrontation of the government with left parties and student unions. Meanwhile, differences in ideological self placement, political values and partisanship made no impact on decisions. On the contrary, politically aware individuals were the only group that thought of the issue of article 16 reform in terms of ideology, in both of its dimensions, as a cognitive heuristic and as an interacting set of political values. Overall, these findings are in alignment with previous research over differences in the choice of heuristics between political experts and novices (Sniderman et al. 1991, Lau and Redlawsk 2001). Moreover, politically experts were the only group that anchored their party identification in their choices. This finding should be attributed to the particularities of party identification in Greece and in particular with the material dimension of party identification as discussed in Chapter 4. Finally, in regard with the increase of the public's competence by relying on cognitive heuristics, the analysis points to the conclusion that in cases where political leaders propose policies which are against politically unaware citizens' values, the least sophisticated members of the public often wind up supporting policies that oppose their value predispositions. In this sense, information shortcuts fall short to indicate correct political decisions among the least politically sophisticated members of the public. Overall, the meaning of this analysis is that despite the mediating function fulfilled by political values and cognitive heuristics, the quality of public decisions is heavily dependent on levels of political sophistication.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation examined the concept of political sophistication from a threefold perspective, focusing on and extending some key theoretical, methodological and empirical questions. Overall, the dissertation brings evidence in support of the theoretical position according to which political sophistication matters and that the sophisticated and unsophisticated differ in the quality of their political decisions. Whereas political sophisticates are able to draw on their values and ideological predispositions to make informed political preferences, the unsophisticated rely on heuristics that tend to fall short of providing them with the choice they would make under the light of full information. On a second level, the conclusions of this research deviate significantly from the usual assumption that mass publics are somehow destined to be under-informed regarding political affairs. In this final chapter I will attempt to recapitulate the key findings and suggest possible avenues for future research focusing on a) the impact of the highly selective new media environment on political knowledge and b) on a possible comparative analysis on the distribution of political knowledge and the investigation of systemic and structural factors that exert an influence on political sophistication at the national level.

7.1 Summary of Key Findings

In Chapter 3 I attempted an appraisal on the methodological challenges that the measurement of political sophistication entails. In most occasions, the pressure of limited space in political survey questionnaires, usually under the burden of high cost, leads researchers to tap levels of political knowledge with a few convenience items based by and large on their taste and intuition without a theoretically justifying their choice. In most cases where researchers compare the decision-making processes between the sophisticated and the unsophisticated layers of the public, the choice of items does not undermine the robustness of results. This is because current methodology literature offers a broad selection of scale adjustment techniques for maximizing validity and reliability of knowledge scales in post-hoc analyses, allowing researchers to effectively differentiate the sophisticated and unsophisticated members of the public even when knowledge items are chosen on the basis of convenience. Yet at the same time, the appraisal of knowledge items in comparative surveys that include country cases where the aggregate distribution of sophistication has not been previously assessed, the data-driven selection of knowledge items according to their degree of difficulty and differentiation is based on a fallacious assumption that can potentially undermine validity. This assumption that is partly based on the premises of rational choice theory is that the distribution of political knowledge across countries will replicate the distribution observed in the United States: low mean with a high variance (Converse 1990, Elff 2009). In the chapter I showed that this assumption cannot be taken for granted and argued in defense of a theoretically driven inclusion of items in political sophistication questionnaires in exploratory surveys based on previous works by Barber (1973), Neuman (1986) and Delli Carpini and Keeter

(1996). My main argument for the defense of the theoretically driven inclusion of items was that we have indications that political knowledge levels in different political systems differ significantly according to distinct systemic characteristics.

In Chapter 4 I further built on this argument by offering a theoretical framework for the conceptualization of political sophistication at the aggregate level based on Luskin's (1987) ability, opportunity, motivation trichotomy that was developed for the analysis of individual level variation in levels of political sophistication. According to my theoretical scheme, opportunity at the aggregate level is translated into media freedom and technological advancements concerning the diffusion of information. Ability refers to levels of inherent ability or simply put intelligence. Finally aggregate motivation in obtaining political information is subject to macro, meso and micro time level factors where a) The macro level refers to the longstanding cultural norms and the macrohistorical socioeconomic developments that shape the character of a political system b) The meso level refers to motivational differences stemming from political socialization processes that differ between generations. c) The micro level refers to temporal and ephemeral changes in motivation to follow political affairs. I argued that we have no indication that inherent ability will differ between advanced democracies. On the other hand, while recent research suggests that we may distinguish different levels of opportunity between different media systems (Norris 2010) these will be of secondary importance as the technological advancements during the last two decades and particularly the internet revolution provide citizens with the opportunity to acquire a wealth of political information at a low cost in time and effort (Bimber 2003). What is more, freedom of speech is an uncontested issue in advanced modern democracies. In

this sense, we do not anticipate that varying levels of opportunity will dramatically affect the aggregate distribution of political sophistication in mass publics. Consequently if we are to find any decisive variation in national political knowledge this will be due to motivational factors.

In the second part of the chapter I applied this theoretical scheme in the case of Greece and brought empirical evidence demonstrating that, contrary to the ideal type of the rationally ignorant voter, the Greek public appears relatively informed over political affairs. As I argued the main explanation behind this –at first site- paradoxical pattern lies in two characteristics of the Greek political system: The first concerns the macrohistorical and persistent clientelistic character of the Greek political system that increases the expected utility for acquiring political information. 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. The second concerns the deep and prolonged ideological cleavage of the civil war and post-civil war state that cultivated increased and persistent political interest for the older generations of voters, as demonstrated through an age-period-cohort analysis of political interest.

Still, as we showed in Chapter 5, 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 increased among the “usual suspects” (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, p.

179), namely men, people from higher socioeconomic classes and those who are middle aged or older. It is noteworthy that these social characteristics continue to exert a significant influence on political sophistication even after controlling for a series of motivational and information exposure variables.

Apart from the demographic and socioeconomic correlates of political sophistication, in Chapter 5 we explored the ways by which media preferences condition political learning. Past research has yielded conflicting conclusions particularly with regard to whether following news on television has a positive or negative impact on sophistication. This study addressed the unresolved question of media choice and political learning, extending current evidence from a different media system. Results showed that contrary to the frequently cited hypothesis over the negative effects of Greek television in political learning, following the news on TV is associated with a significant increase in political knowledge even after we control for other motivational, socioeconomic and media exposure factors. In fact the sophistication equation suggests that television contributes more to political sophistication than print media readership. Another interesting finding of Chapter 5 was that contrary to the expectations of the knowledge gap hypothesis, education does not appear to interact with media exposure. This means that different educational strata absorb political information at the same rate from the media. This finding contradicts recent findings regarding the role of the media in political sophistication (Prior 2007, Norris 2010) and should be attributed to the paradox of the increased expected utility of political information for all socioeconomic strata in Greece that we analyzed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 6 was concerned with the impact of political sophistication on the quality of the public's political decision-making. The aim was to bring evidence from the European context to address the key question of whether political sophistication affects the quality of the public's decision-making or citizens can make up for their lack of information by employing information shortcuts such as party identification or attitudes toward political leaders. I investigated which of the two rival theories can explain attitudes toward the nationally sensitive issue of the foundation of private universities, a prominent issue in the Greek political agenda that brought a serious political clash between the conservative government and the parties of the left. Results showed that decision criteria differed significantly between the more and the less informed voters, as the sophisticates adjusted their opinions on their values and ideological predispositions while the unsophisticated judged on the basis of whether they liked or disliked the political leaders that supported each of the policy alternatives. On top of that, the politically novices were significantly more likely to make 'wrong' political choices in the sense that their general value predispositions came in contrast with their expressed opinions. This is was not found to be the case with the politically sophisticated, who exhibited strong value-attitude cohesion. Overall the analysis carried out in this chapter brings support for one of Zaller's (1992) major conclusions, namely that the unsophisticated citizens lack the contextual information needed to form a link between their deeper held political values and support for particular policies.

7.2 Directions for Future Research

Future research based on the findings of this dissertation could extend in the directions of a) investigating the effects of the emerging high choice new media system (Prior 2007) on citizens levels of political knowledge and in turn the future of democratic participation and b) comparing overall levels of political sophistication in different national contexts and evaluating the impact of sophistication with regard to the characteristics of the political system.

7.2.1 The Changing Media Environment and Political Learning

During the last decade, the internet has revolutionized the opportunity of exposure to political information, making a wealth of political information available to the user at every moment of the day at a low cost in time and effort (Bimber 2003). At a first glance, it seems plausible to anticipate that the reduction of information costs should contribute to the increase of political knowledge. People now have the option to become informed over politics at the time and place that is more convenient for them, and on top of this they can follow news online without paying. As we discussed in Chapter 4 the internet revolution has by and large brought the convergence of advanced democracies in the opportunity of becoming politically informed: citizens have now access to a wealth of political information for the first time in democratic history. Yet the inexhaustible potential of the internet in political learning is not utilized by all segments of society at the same rate. The internet brings a selective exposure to politics, in the sense that citizens have the choice not to expose themselves at all to political information (Prior 2007, Gibson and McAllister 2011) or they unwittingly expose themselves to biased,

false or misleading information (Kaye and Johnson 2002). Consequently, as we discussed in Chapter 5, the internet revolution may potentially lead to a sharp increase of knowledge gaps between the educated segments of the public, who will take full advantage of the beneficial aspects of continuous information exposure and the least educated who will either pay no attention at all or will receive poor quality information. The effects of the internet in political learning a question that has been, to this point, largely under-investigated (but see Grönlund 2007, Xenos and Moy 2007, Gibson and McAllister 2011).

An aspect that hinders the generalization potential of the studies of previous decades on the effects of the internet in political knowledge is the distinct socioeconomic composition of early internet users (Delli Carpini and Keeter 2003, Neuman et al. 2011). This was also demonstrated for the case of Greece in Chapter 5, where only a small and demographically atypical minority of the Greek population followed news online. As we move into an era where the internet is no longer a habit of the affluent and highly educated the assessment of the role of the internet in political information and democracy needs to be reexamined.

7.2.2 A Comparative Assessment of Levels of Political Sophistication: Bringing Context into Question

As we extensively discussed in the first two chapters, the concept of political sophistication was created, developed and validated empirically almost exclusively in the United States. In Chapter 4 I made an effort to approach the concept from a global

perspective where I argued that it is theoretically plausible to suggest that overall levels of political sophistication will differ significantly from country to country in regard to the macro, meso and micro time level context and to a lesser degree in regard with the extent to which the media system facilitates or hinders citizens' opportunity in becoming informed over political affairs. The examination of cross-national differences in levels of political sophistication is a new question in the context of public opinion research. Resolving this issue would add to our understanding of contextual factors in the acquisition of political information, adding conceptual plurality to political sophistication and opening heterogeneous routes for future research. On top of that, understanding how the political environment affects political cognition can contribute to the development of reforms that could ameliorate citizens' competence in participating in politics, improving the quality of democracy. In this section, I draw on the key aspects of the theory developed in Chapter 4 to propose a threefold investigation of cross-national variation in political cognition focusing on the role of the media system, the political system and political culture.

A comparative assessment of media effects in political knowledge could draw on the substantial differences in degree of commercialization, pluralism and political parallelism between national media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004). As we discussed in Chapter 4, it is reasonable to anticipate that different patterns in the media environment will bear an influence in the exposure of political information and the acquisition of political knowledge. In a recent comparative survey Iyengar et al. (2010) argued that the commercialization of the American broadcast system has had a negative influence on the public's levels of political information as it increased the cost of acquiring political

information making the American public significantly less politically sophisticated in comparison with Scandinavian countries where public media dominate. Further comparative research involving more countries should be conducted in order to confirm this finding as well as question other substantial differences between media systems.

A second research hypothesis could include the examination of the impact of differences attributed to the political system, such as the degree of polarization and stability of ideological conflict. As we discussed in Chapters 1 and 4, several scholars have shown that the public's levels of sophistication in the United States fluctuate with regard to the ideological tone of the period in question: in politically intense periods political sophistication tends to increase, while in times of political calmness it tends to decrease (e.g. Nie et al. 1979, Bafumi and Shapiro 2009). Two additional surveys from the European context have implied that the degree of ideological polarization affects the public's levels of political cognition. For the case of Sweden, Kumlin (2001) showed that the ideological clarity and persistence of the party conflict in the national party system has led to an increased use of the ideology schema in policy evaluations. More recently, Lachat (2008) used data from the 1999 European Election study to argue that increased ideological polarization reduces the cognitive cost of sophisticated political decision-making. These works offer ground to anticipate that the aggregate distribution of political sophistication in a country may be influenced by political system characteristics: in cases where there is a deep and prolonged ideological cleavage between left and right we might expect that citizens will tend to be more aware over party positions and able to draw on this information to make informed political choices. For example, in France, a country with a deep ideological cleavage between left and right, voters have been

repeatedly found to illustrate a strong correlation between values, ideology and party choice (e.g. Fleury and Lewis-Beck 1993, Nadeau et al. 2012), the incoherence of which was the starting point for the developers of the early political sophistication theories of the 1960s. Alternatively, one could extend Kumlin's findings by investigating whether some political and media systems favor the employment of certain more complex heuristics (such as the ideology heuristic) by the unsophisticated layers of the public in a comparative perspective.

On top of media system characteristics and degree of ideological cleavages of the political system, the investigation of aggregate level variation in political sophistication could examine the impact of macrohistorical development of institutions and social organization on the motivation to become politically informed. One of the main findings of this dissertation was that the Greek public appears to be highly informed over political affairs. I argued that the explanation behind this 'paradoxical' pattern, that comes in contrast with the assumptions of rational choice theory and the empirical findings in the United States, lies in the clientelistic nature of political representation in Greece that increases the expected utility of acquiring political information. Coming up with a typology of historical experience for empirical analysis is a demanding task due to the inescapable simplification of theories and meanings in order to fit to a quantitative empirical model. Having said that, nonetheless, one should keep in mind the diversity of the meaning of political representation in different national contexts that as, this study showed, may potentially affect the motivation of becoming politically sophisticated. One of the main findings of this study is that the homogenization of political behavior in political systems that have been forged under different historical circumstances can lead

to erroneous assumptions as we showed in regard with the problems associated with the universality of the rationally ignorant voter. Further comparative research should be conducted to explore the link between macrohistorical aspects of national political cultures and political sophistication, coming up with an empirically testable categorization of different political systems. Such a research question, for example, could include the investigation of the relation between clientelism and political sophistication in a comparative perspective by holding parameters such as economic development and level of education constant.

A common problem with the empirical validation of such a hypothesis is the fact that data regarding comparative levels of political knowledge are scarce while (as we showed in Chapter 3) it is notoriously difficult to come up with a valid and reliable set of knowledge items that can be used in a comparative assessment of citizens' level and organization of political cognition. Nonetheless two notable efforts have been made during recent years. The first comes from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) that asks respondents from 39 countries to answer three items of varying difficulty that tap political knowledge over domestic affairs. More recently, the European Election Study included a number of political knowledge items on the European Union and national issues, with an effort to standardize the items by roughly asking the same questions in all countries. Although these are promising first attempts, some scholars are skeptic over the validity and cross national equivalence of obtaining knowledge scores (Elff 2009). Based on the conclusions of Chapter 3 on the need for a theoretically driven inclusion of knowledge items in exploratory political sophistication surveys, I believe that future comparative political knowledge research should invest more on the use of

party placement and understanding of major party positions. These two types of questions touch on the core of the organization of political cognition: placing the major parties on a left-right scale give the epitome of large chunks of information on current affairs and political history, while understanding party differences in the important issues of the day taps media attentiveness and understanding.

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