The Paradoxes and Mixed Record of Culture Wars in Contemporary Greece

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Outline of the presentation
Main research question

- Research question: «What types of culture wars have erupted in Greece and to what extent and how do Greeks identify with warring sides?"
- Conceptual framework
- Research topic and hypotheses
- Data collection and research techniques
- Results of available social value surveys
- Results of focus groups
- Political parties and state actors in culture wars
- Conclusions
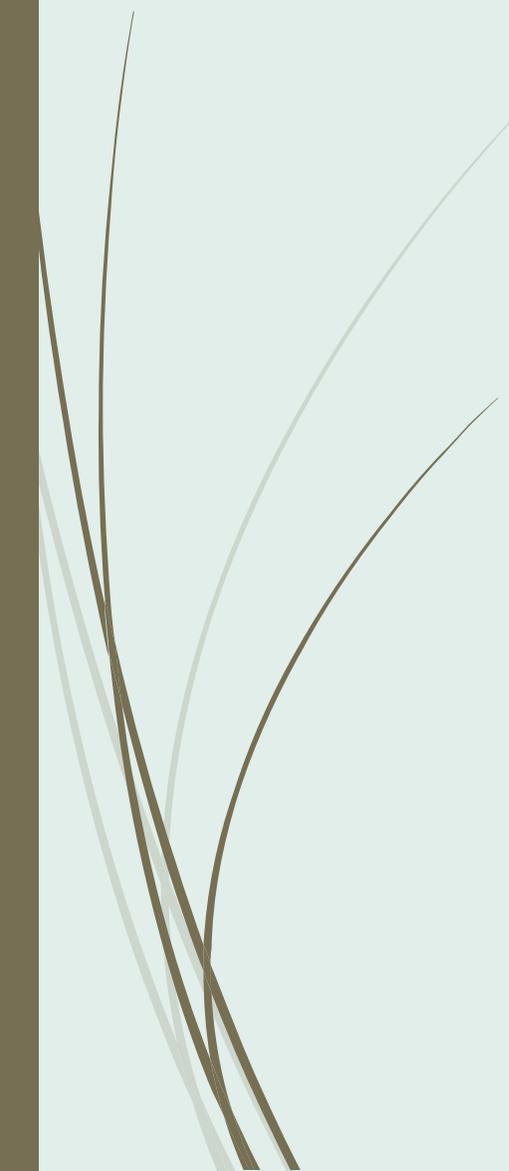
Conceptual framework (I)

- Culture war: when two identifiable cultures perceive each other as antithetical, pursue their own understanding of right and wrong and establish borders of opposing moral communities (Hunter 1991).

- Identity formation: Individuals perceive their situation to be similar with that of others and close ranks (Lianos 2019).

- National identity: a group sharing common language, sentiments, political entity, and symbolic features.

Conceptual framework (II)

- Causes of past wars: cleavages over religion vs. "laicité"; traditional vs. modern ethical codes; and the role of media.

- Today: national cultures vs. cultural globalization; multiplication of freedoms; and emergence of self-reflective identity and own life path (Giddens 1991).

- Value systems: Materialist, Mixed and Post-materialist.

- Inter-personal distrust; solid identity vs. pragmatist views.

Research topic: four culture wars in Greece

- wars over vaccination against Covid-19;

- challenges to Greek identity by the inflow of migrants and refugees;

- emerging non-conventional family relations and gender identities which have provoked reactions; and

- national identity challenges posed by Greece's foreign relations, including the 2018 Prespes Agreement.

- The topics correspond to four focus groups organized in Athens in the first half of 2022.

Research hypotheses

- In Greece cleavages still mapped on the political party competition rather than on cultural poles. But paradox:

- Culture wars provoked not because of challenges from social actors but after the Greek state's policy shifts, such as new policies in religion or human rights. Culture war participants: state institutions (courts, the Church).

- Mixed record of solid identities and pragmatist views.

- In Greece there are culture tensions, not culture wars.

Data collection and research techniques

- Minutes of debates in the Greek parliament

- Articles from 2 Athens dailies: *Kathimerini, Efimerida ton Syntakton*

- Available social surveys

- Secondary academic literature

- Four focus groups: anti-vaccinationists, believers in restrictions on immigration, traditionalists on issues of family and gender roles, nationalists.

The changing mix of materialist, mixed and post-materialist value-systems in Greece

Table A ─ Post-Materialist index 4-item 2017 & 2008, Greece – Crosstabulation				
Materialist	Mixed	Post-materialist	Total	
N %	N %	N %	N %	
465 39.4	633 56.6	82 6.9	1180 100,0	2017, **WVS-7**
406 27.6	827 56.3	234 15.9	1467 100,0	2008, **EVS-4**

Source: EVS-4 stands for the 4th wave of EVS, while WVS-7 for the 7th wave of WVS.

The value context (WVS 2017):
Acute distrust towards others

Table B – (Q57) Attitudes regarding trust towards other people

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Most people can be trusted	101	8,4
Need to be very careful	1088	90,6
DK	10	0,8
NR	2	0,1
Total	1200	100,0

The value context (WVS 2017):
Very high trust towards own family

Table C – (Q58) Trust in people from various groups - Your family

	Frequency	*Valid Percent*
Trust completely	1099	91,5
Trust somewhat	96	8,0
Do not trust very much	4	0,3
Do not trust at all	1	0,1
NR	1	0,1
Total	1200	100,0

The anti-vaccinationists

- "The side effects of vaccines are not known"; "the vaccines were produced too fast"; "vaccine control mechanisms were by-passed."

- "People attach annoying labels; I respect equally vaccinated and non-vaccinated people".

- "Lockdowns are *not* necessary", but "I wear a mask".

- A mixed record for anti-vaccinationists: Mistrust towards institutions, including the scientific community, but pragmatism too.

The supporters of restrictions on immigration

- It may be migrants and refugees who resist living side-by-side with Greeks rather than the other way around.

- Muslims and particularly radical Islamists would be difficult to integrate in Greek society. Tolerance towards them should be limited. The same holds for African migrants and refugees, as their lifestyle is too different from the Greek one.

- The issue is a "real situation and as such cannot be treated ideologically". "Realism is the only way to approach" the issue. "The issue should be addressed by looking only at its practical side".

- A mixed record here too: the cultures of migrants and refugees may be incompatible with the Greek one, but pragmatism should prevail.

The traditionalists on issues of family and gender roles

- "In a couple, the functions that the woman has and the man has are different from their very creation. We just cannot nullify nature".

- "Same-sex couples must have their rights secured".

- "I have the feeling that the symbolic and ancient element that every human being comes from two parents disappears from the child's horizon", if single-parent families or homosexual parents increase.

- "In terms of parenting and how children grow up ..., if one of the two parents is gone, there is a piece that is missing".

Mixed record: non-traditional families are disapproved, but tolerated.

The nationalists

- Greek national identity denotes a belief in and devotion to national language and customs as well as historical and religious traditions, separate from European ones. "We have underestimated the Greek elements of identity and overestimated the European ones".

- Nationalism as an ideology unites Greeks across social class barriers. After the rise of the Golden Dawn party in the 2010s, however, nationalism started bearing negative connotations in Greece.

- "The Prespes Agreement should be honoured by the Greek side. Greece does not have to fear a threat to its national identity".

- Mixed record: despite the long nationalist legacy, the Macedonian question is probably closed, if not entirely resolved.

Political parties and culture wars: Ideological cleavages or government/opposition status?

In 2015 on the issues of granting rights to foreign migrants and their dependents and building a mosque in central Athens, New Democracy (ND), the Golden Dawn (GD) and the Independent Greeks voted against. By contrast, PASOK, the River party, Syriza and KKE, voted in favour.

In 2019 on the Prespes agreement, only the governing party (Syriza) and non-aligned MPs voted in favour. The opposition, incl. ND and KKE, voted against.

State, not social, actors as protagonists of culture wars

In 1999: the government's decision to abolish the citizens' church affiliation registered on the police-issued identity card. Opposed by the Greek Orthodox Church.

In 2010: the government's decision to grant rights to foreign migrants and their dependents. Opposed by the highest administrative court ("Council of the State").

In 2017: the government's decision to grant the right of self-determination of gender identity. Opposed by the Greek Orthodox Church (and Golden Dawn and KKE too).

Conclusions (I)

- A cultural mix: Greeks hold materialist and post-materialist values.

- Cross-cleavages: Greeks may be "progressives" on one count, e.g., on same-sex marriage, but "conservatives" or "traditionalists" on another count, e.g., on the dispute over the name of Macedonia.

- While Greeks today take sides on cultural issues, they do not necessarily engage in conflict among corresponding identity groups. Regarding culture wars, they use the lens of a pragmatist.

- Cultural disputes become part of the political arena. A political party's stance may depend on its ideological profile, but it often depends on the party's position in government or in opposition.

Conclusions (II)

- Culture wars in Greece are often started or waged not so much by social actors (identity groups), as by state institutions.

- People involved in cultural disputes behave as pragmatists who may hold on to their views, but do not join delimited cultural camps.

- There are not any consolidated cultural camps engaging in culture wars, although there are discernible sides.

- Explanations and themes for further research on the emergence of culture *tensions* rather than *wars*: 1) endurance of ideological conflict (Left vs. Right); 2) democratization and spread of democratic culture; 3) secularization of Greek society.