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# THE 'NORMALIZATION' OF YOUNG PROTESTORS IN GREECE

"NORMALIZACJA" UCZESTNICTWA MŁODZIEŻY W PROTESTACH W GRECJI

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Abstract:	During the last decades, the number of demonstrations as well as of demonstrators has significantly increased in most Western European countries. Some scholars support that protesting has become so widespread leading to the 'normalization' of the demonstrators. Overall research examining the 'normalization thesis' of street youth protest by analyzing representative datasets is extremely scarce. The chapter by analyzing youth-over-sampled survey data collected as part of the EURYKA project examines key socioeconomic determinants in participating in demonstrations among Greek young adults aged 18–34 years old. Greece is an exceptionally interesting case study to examine the 'normalization thesis' of youth protesting as the recent recession and its severe socioeconomic impacts triggered an exceptional wave of protest mobilization where Greek youth was one of the main protest claimants. The findings indicate that socioeconomic determinants such as income and occupational class, do not play a significant role in predicting youth demonstrating in Greece. Such preliminary evidence partly supports the 'normalization thesis' and accords with related studies underscoring that during the massive anti-austerity protests Greek citizens from a broad range of social strata were mobilized in protest activities.
Keywords:	demonstrations, youth, Greece, normalization thesis, street protesting, economic crisis
Abstrakt:	W ciągu ostatnich dziesięcioleci liczba demonstracji, a także demonstrantów znacznie wzrosła w większości krajów Europy Zachodniej. Niektórzy uczeni twierdzą, że protesty stały się tak powszechne, że doprowadziło to do "normalizacji" udziału w demonstracjach. Ogólne badania badające "tezę o normalizacji" protestów ulicznych młodzieży poprzez analizę reprezentatywnych zbiorów danych są niezwykle rzadkie. Artykuł ten, analizując dane ankietowe przeprowadzone na próbie młodzieży zebrane w ramach projektu EURYKA, bada kluczowe społeczno-ekonomiczne determinanty uczestnictwa w demonstracjach wśród greckich młodych dorosłych w wieku 18–34 lat. Grecja jest wyjątkowo interesującym studium przypadku do zbadania "tezy o normalizacji" protestów młodzieży, ponieważ niedawna recesja i jej poważne skutki społeczno-ekonomiczne wywołały wyjątkową falę mobilizacji protestacyjnej, w której grecka młodzież była jednym z głównych protestujących sił. Wyniki wskazują, że badane determinanty społeczno-ekonomiczne, takie jak dochód i grupa zawodowa, nie odgrywają znaczącej roli w przewidywaniu demonstracji młodzieży w Grecji. Takie wstępne dowody częściowo potwierdzają "tezę o normalizacji" i są zgodne z powiązanymi badaniami podkreślającymi, że podczas masowych protestów przeciwko oszczędnościom greccy obywatele z szerokiego zakresu warstw społecznych byli mobilizowani do działań protestacyjnych.
Słowa kluczowe:	demonstracje, młodzież, Grecja, teza o normalizacji, protesty uliczne, kryzys gospodarczy

#### Introduction

While a stream of literature supports that young adults in established democracies have turned their back on institutionalized political participation<sup>1</sup> and electoral politics (Farthing, 2010; Fieldhouse et al. 2007; Mycock, Tonge, 2012; Soler-i-Martí, 2015), young people nowadays have directed themselves towards alternative political acts, mainly non-institutionalized ones<sup>2</sup>, including street protesting (Briggs, 2017; Earl et al. 2017; Epstein, 2015; Sloam, Henn, 2019; Spannring et al. 2008; Stolle, Hooghe, 2011).

The recent global economic crisis has stimulated citizens' political participation primarily related to the street protesting (Kriesi et al. 2020). Specifically, in countries most severely affected by the recent recession, such as Southern European ones, the austerity policies and the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions triggered a set of grievances motivating citizens to participate in massive anti-austerity protests in order to claim their rights. In these mobilizations, young people were among the core groups of protesters (della Porta, 2015; Loukakis, Portos, 2020).

Some scholars suggest that protesting has become so widespread leading to the 'normalization' of the demonstrators, meaning that the socioeconomic inequalities of participation increasingly fade away and the composition of those engaging more or less mirrors the composition of the general population (Norris et al. 2005; Sloam, 2013; Stolle, Hooghe, 2011; van Aelst, Walgrave, 2001). Nevertheless, research conducted in the United States shows that protesting in the general population is still dominated by socioeconomic determinants (Caren et al. 2010). Similarly, prior studies focusing on European citizens provide some contradicting evidence. For instance, research conducted in Europe suggests that the 'protest normalization thesis' is not entirely (Peterson et al., 2018) or is only partially supported by the general population (Quaranta, 2014; 2016). Overall research examining the 'normalization thesis' of street youth protest by analyzing representative datasets is extremely scarce.

The main rationale of the chapter is to examine the aforementioned key research question by investigating the main socioeconomic determinants of youth demonstrating in Greece. Greece is a particularly interesting case study as the specific country has a rich youth protest culture that is dated back to the student protests in 1973 which were decisive for the downfall of the dictatorship (Giovanopoulos, Dalakoglou, 2011; Kornetis, 2013). Moreover, Greece is an interesting case study to examine the 'normalization thesis' of youth protesting as the 2008 global financial crisis has more severely affected the Greek population and specifically young adults than their counterparts in other European countries (Gailbraith, 2016). The high number of bailout agreements and the accompanied severe austerity policies generated a set of grievances and political discontent that triggered massive protests in the country (Altiparmakis, Lorenzini, 2020; Kousis, 2023) where Greek young adults were one of the main protest claimants (Diani, Kousis, 2014; Karyotis, Rüdig, 2018).

The chapter by analyzing youth-over sampled survey data collected as part of the EURYKA project<sup>3</sup> examines key socioeconomic individual-level

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Institutionalized political actions include party membership, attending political meetings, contacting politicians, etc.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Non-institutionalized political actions include signing petitions, consumer politics, strikes, demonstrations, protests, etc.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Results presented in this chapter have been obtained within the project "Reinventing Democracy in Europe: Youth Doing Politics in Times of Increasing Inequalities" (EURYKA). This project was funded by the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 Programme (grant agreement no. 727025). The EURY-KA consortium was coordinated by the University of Geneva (Marco Giugni) and was formed, additionally, by the Scuola Normale Superiore (Lorenzo Bosi), Uppsala University (Katrin Uba), the University of Sheffield (Maria Grasso), the CEVIPOF-Sciences Po Paris (Manlio Cinalli), the University of Siegen (Christian

determinants in participating in demonstrations among Greek young adults aged 18–34 years old. Examining the main determinants of Greek youth demonstrating might shed important empirical light on the 'normalization thesis' at times of crisis.

The current chapter is structured as follows; in the next section two competing theoretical approaches, i.e. resource-based approaches and grievance-based theories are discussed leading to specific research hypotheses by taking into consideration the socio-political Greek context of youth protest. The next two sections present the methods and the findings, respectively. Finally, the last section discusses the main implications of the findings and suggests areas where further research could be conducted.

# Theoretical approaches and research hypotheses

Two of the most prominent theoretical approaches in examining the main determinants and consequently the potential inequality patterns in political participation including street protesting involve resource-based approaches and explanations associated with grievances and deprivation. The former theoretical approaches advocate that individuals with higher socioeconomic resources, in terms of higher educational attainment, income, and social class have adequate civic skills that make their participation in protests more likely (Milbrath, Goel, 1977; Verba, Nie, 1972; Verba et al. 1995). Under such a framework, the unequal distribution of the aforementioned resources provides different chances for citizens to be actively involved in different modes of political participation including street protesting.

One of the classic explanations of protesting derive from grievance-based theories. Citizens' dissatisfaction and discontent, provoked by different causes, such as declining economic conditions, high-income inequality, government corruption, and so on, motivate their participation in demonstrations and other forms of protesting (Gurr, 1970; Muller, 1985). Although the resource-based approach claims that street protesting is more likely to take place among individuals with relatively rich socioeconomic resources, the grievance and deprivation approaches assume that individuals experiencing economic hardship and being of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to demonstrate. These competing approaches have been frequently examined in related studies providing some support to both directions.

Nevertheless, some scholars argue that street protesting has become so widespread that demonstrators today have increasingly come from a cross-section of the general population (Norris et al. 2005; van Aelst, Walgrave, 2001). This trend has been known as the 'protest normalization thesis' which is the outcome of two related processes. The first one refers to the fact that demonstrating has increasingly become one of the most prevalent means of citizens' political engagement in expressing their preferences or grievances on different issues (Norris et al. 2005). The second is related to the socioeconomic and demographic composition of those participating in demonstrations which to a greater or a lesser extent mirrors the composition of the general population (van Aelst, Walgrave, 2001). Combining these two trends, Verhulst and Walgrave argue that 'the normalization of protest has brought on a normalization of protesters' (2009, p. 457).

Although in the past the patterns of inequality in non-institutionalized political participation in the general population were similar (e.g. men, highly educated, high-income earners were more likely to participate in politics), during the last decades' specific disparities have been closing or even inversing, which, in some cases,

Lahusen), the University of Crete (Maria Kousis), the Open University of Catalonia (Anna Clua), and the University of Warsaw (Marcin Sinczuch). More information for the project can be found at:

https://unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/home/

becomes evident specifically for participation to demonstrations (Gallego, 2007; Norris et al. 2005; Stolle, Hooghe, 2011; van Aelst, Walgrave, 2001) providing some inconclusive and preliminary support to the 'normalization thesis'. For instance, while social class, following resource-based approaches, is considered to be an important determinant of political participation (Verba et al. 1995), Gallego (2007) shows that demonstrating is similar across individuals of different social statuses, in terms of income and employment status. Moreover, Sloam (2013) found support for the grievance-based theories and showed that European young individuals from the poorest households are more active in demonstrating than their wealthier counterparts. Research focusing on Greek youth concludes that socioeconomic determinants are not so clearly associated with young adults' protest-oriented political participation (Kalogeraki, 2021).

Although some scholars support that educational attainment is one of the most consistent predictors of political participation including demonstrations (Dalton et al. 2003; Gallego, 2007; Marien et al. 2010; Stolle, Hooghe, 2011), others underline that educational biases in demonstrating are limited (Van Aelst, Walgrave, 2001). Specifically, in Greece, research on youth indicates that higher educational attainment is associated with young adults' participation in non-institutionalized protest-oriented acts, such as demonstrations, strikes and occupy movements (Kalogeraki, 2021). Gender has been long considered one of the key determinants of political participation, with men being more politically active than women (Verba et al. 1995), yet this gender gap has been closing for non-institutionalized political acts including demonstrating (Dalton, 2002; Stolle, Hooghe, 2011; Teorell et al. 2007). For instance, Stolle and Hooghe (2011) show that between 1974 and 2002 the gender gap for demonstrating declined drastically among men and women. Specifically, research conducted in Greece supports that young women and young men are similarly involved in demonstrations (Petousi et al. 2022).

The aforementioned evidence, primarily incorporating grievance-based and resource-based theoretical approaches provides some inconclusive evidence on the 'protest normalization thesis' among the general population and specifically among youth, as most of the above-mentioned studies derive from general population surveys. Nevertheless, taking into account the Greek rich youth protest culture (Giovanopoulos, Dalakoglou, 2011; Kalogeraki, Kousis, 2022; Kornetis, 2013) as well as research conducted in Greece during the economic crisis supporting that citizens from a broad range of social strata engaged in the massive protests to express their dissatisfaction and claim their rights (Kakepaki, 2013; Karyotis, Rüdig, 2018; Rudig, Karyotis, 2014; Simiti, 2014) the following hypotheses are examined:

H1. Greek young adults of higher socioeconomic status (in terms of higher educational background, income, and occupational class) will be similarly involved in demonstrations with their counterparts of lower socioeconomic status (in terms of lower educational background, income, and occupational class);

H2. Greek young men and women will be similarly involved in demonstrations, i.e. no gender biases are expected.

# Data and methods

Drawing on original survey data collected in 2018 the analysis uses a dataset of Greek respondents 18-35 years old (n=2035) (EURYKA, 2020). The Greek dataset consists of an oversample of young adults using quotas for age, gender, region, and education. Participation in demonstrations is measured with a question asking young respondents if they had attended a demonstration/march/rally. The aforementioned question is measured on a fivepoint scale including 'In the past 12 months', 'In the previous 5 years but not in the past 12 months', 'At some previous point in my life but not in the past 5 years', 'Never, but I could see myself doing this in the future', 'Never and I would never see myself doing this in the future'. The dependent variable contrasts Greek young adults who participated in demonstrations at least once in their lifetime and those who have never participated in such political actions.

The analysis uses specific independent variables including gender and measures of socioeconomic status, such as respondents' educational attainment, income, and occupational status. Educational attainment is assessed with three responses, including individuals with higher (i.e., university and above), intermediate (i.e., upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education), and lower (i.e., less than lower secondary education) education. Income is measured with a question asking respondents for their household monthly net income, after tax, and compulsory deductions on a scale ranging from 1 to 10 with higher values indicating higher income. Occupational class is measured with a recoded variable including a) higher occupational class (e.g., professional or higher technical work/ manager or senior administrator), b) middle occupational class (e.g., clerical, sales/services, foreman/supervisor of other workers, c) lower occupational class (e.g., skilled/ semi-skilled/unskilled manual work), and d) other occupational class (e.g., farming military). Furthermore, the analysis controls for additional individual characteristics affecting the probability of young adults' political participation, such as their left-right political orientation and their political engagement at school/university (Viola, 2020). Political orientation is measured with a scale ranging from 0 to 10, assessing left and right political orientation, respectively. Political involvement at school/university is assessed with a dichotomous variable measuring whether respondents participated in specific political acts (such as being members of a student council, participating in a protest movement at school, organizing a political event at school, etc.) while at school or university.

The analysis is based on descriptive techniques and logistic regression statistical analysis. The latter is used to predict young adults' lifetime participation in demonstrations based on a set of independent variables as previously described. The significance threshold was set at a=0.05.

## **Findings**

Figure 1 shows that slightly more than half of the Greek young adults have not participated in demonstrations in their lifetime (52.2%).

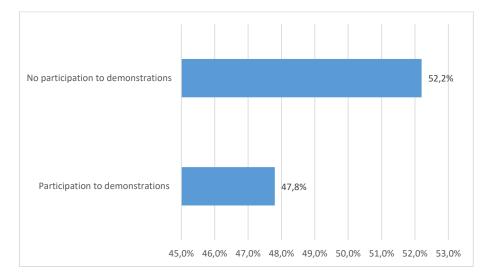


Figure 1. Lifetime participation to demonstrations among youth in Greece

#### Table 1

Binary logistic regression predicting young adults' lifetime participation in a demonstration in Greece (n=1615)

	В	S.E.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
				Lower	Upper
Constant	-0.176	0.194	0.838		
Left-right scale	-0.092***	0.023	0.912	0.871	0.955
Political engagement at school/university (Ref. No)	0.753***	0.111	2.123	1.709	2.637
Female (Ref. Male)	-0.328**	0.111	0.721	0.580	0.895
Educational attainment (Ref. Low)					
Intermediate	0.258*	0.121	1.295	1.021	1.641
High	0.758***	0.148	2.135	1.598	2.851
Income	-0.019	0.024	0.981	0.936	1.028
Occupational class (Ref. Low)					
High	0.217	0.179	1.243	0.874	1.766
Middle	-0.100	0.129	0.905	0.703	1.166
Other	0.136	0.194	1.146	0.783	1.677
Nagelkerke R2	0.093				

Notes: B: Logistic regression coefficient, SE: Standard Error, CI: Confidence Interval, \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05, Data weighted.

Table 1 presents the results from the binary logistic regressions predicting Greek young adults' participation in demonstrations in their lifetime. The analysis indicates that respondents' political orientation and their political engagement at school/university predict their participation in demonstrations. Moreover young women compared to young men and lower educated young people compared to higher educated ones are less likely to demonstrate. Partly supporting the 'normalization thesis' the findings indicate that none of the rest socioeconomic indicators under study, i.e., occupation class and income, are significant predictors for youth demonstrating in Greece.

#### Discussion

During the last decades, the number of demonstrations as well as of demonstrators has significantly increased in most Western European countries (Meyer, Tarrow, 1998; Norris, 2002; Tilly, 1983; Van Aelst, Walgrave, 2001). The increase indicates that street protesting has become so widespread that it has become a normalized political means for citizens to claim their rights and express their dissatisfaction with different issues. Although demonstrations have become normalized resulting in what Meyer and Tarrow (1998) call 'social movement societies', it is still unclear whether the normalization of demonstrations in Western European societies has led to the normalization of the demonstrator. As previously discussed related research provides some ambiguous evidence on the normalization of the protestors. Nevertheless, some scholars suggest that citizens' likelihood to participate in demonstrations depends less on their gender and socioeconomic background but more on the context of mobilization as well as on the issue of the demonstration (Van Aelst, Walgrave, 2001).

Greece is an exceptionally interesting case study to examine the 'normalization thesis' of youth protesting as the recent recession and its severe socioeconomic impacts triggered an exceptional wave of protest mobilization where Greek youth was one of the main protest claimants (Diani, Kousis, 2014; Kakepaki, 2013; Karyotis, Rüdig, 2018; Simiti, 2014). The rise of the massive anti-austerity protests mainly reflects the country's strong 'protest culture' traced back to the youth protests against the military junta (1967–1974) and the numerous student movements during the post-dictatorial period as well as the youth uprising during the events of December 2008 (Giovanopoulos, Dalakoglou 2011; Paschou, 2022).

The findings in the present chapter indicate that although gender and educational attainment are significant predictors, specific socioeconomic determinants, such as income and occupational class, do not play a significant role in predicting youth demonstrating in Greece. Such preliminary evidence partly supports the 'normalization thesis" and accords with related studies underscoring that during the massive anti-austerity protests citizens from a broad range of social strata were mobilized in protest activities (Karyotis, Rüdig, 2018; Simiti, 2014).

During hard economic times, Greek young adults of diverse economic and occupational backgrounds adopted protest repertoires to express their dissatisfaction and claim their rights against the severe austerity measures. While the chapter to some extent supports the 'normalization thesis', future research may examine whether similar evidence is reported at times of economic prosperity and socio-political stability.

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