Crisis of participation and participation during the crisis: Factors that facilitate or discourage civic and political participation in Greece and the distinctive role of surveillance perceptions

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Abstract

Civic and political participation patterns are changing rapidly across Europe and, in particular, in the crisis-hit country of Greece. In recent European and national surveys, Greek respondents appeared to have the lowest levels of trust in formal institutions across the continent. Meanwhile, traditional political participation declines and is being replaced, to an extent, by various new forms of civic engagement. Furthermore, the eruption of revelations regarding the securitization of the electronic communication environment and the worldwide surveillance practices, modify citizens’ level of awareness, understanding and perceptions around privacy, data protection and security. This, in turn, complicates even further the social and political attitudes and behaviours of individuals. Yet, only a number of U.S.-based studies have tried so far to understand the relationship between surveillance perceptions and political participation and the small amount of literature that is available on the subject contains sometimes opposing and mixed views. This PhD research is an interdisciplinary, mixed method study that examines a range of contextual, social and psychological factors that facilitate or discourage civic and political participation, by placing a distinctive focus on the processes through which state surveillance exerts its effects on contemporary citizenship. Drawing on a national survey and a series of focus groups and interviews that recruited participants from the whole political spectrum, this paper discusses the results of this study.

Keywords: state surveillance, online political participation, perceptions, Greece, social-political control

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Introduction

In political but also in media and communication sciences, there has been an on-going debate regarding the nature, characteristics and capabilities of the recent information and communication technologies in regards with democratic participation. A growing body of literature suggests that there is, without doubt, an emergence of new, online forms of political participation and that, such technologies, can be important tools for the support of democratisation processes (Oser and colleagues 2012; Anduiza and colleagues 2009). Various techno-optimists (Castells 2009; Coleman and Blumler 2009; Dahlgren 2009; Shirky 2008; Shirky 2011) point out the various positive elements of new information and communication technologies and their impact on public sphere, politics and democracy. However, scholarship hasn’t still reached to an agreement on the nature and consequences of electronic participation. The distinction between the mobilisation and reinforcement theses, still characterise the current debate on the consequences of the ICTs (Norris 2000). According to the first, information and communication technologies can increase the potentials of participation to individuals and groups that were disengaged, an argument known as the mobilisation thesis (Norris 2000).

On the other hand, other commentators claim that these new technological affordances cannot modify the existing levels of participation but, instead, may increase the gap of participation between the advantaged and disadvantaged parts of the population, an argument known as the reinforcement thesis (Norris 2000). For example, in an empirical research on participatory democracy and the value of online community networks, Cullen and Sommer (2011: 6) showed that the Internet does not seem to change dramatically political participation, as it was heavily assumed in the past. As they note, “there is no evidence of increased youth participation, or a wider range of voices” and in fact, very frequently “strident or […] anti-democratic views” are being expressed online, especially in forums without some sort of moderation. Most importantly, there is the concern that information and communication technologies may even potentially harm the democratisation processes by providing ever more power of social control and repression over those who are dominated and excluded, by using for instance, means of electronic surveillance (Zittrain 2008; Fuchs 2008; Solove 2008; Morozov 2010; Fuchs 2013).

Due to the work of researchers, journalists, hactivists, advocacy groups and individual leakers, the latter argument seems to be gaining significant substance. As such, Edward Snowden, with the collaboration of the Guardian, the Washington Post, Der Spiegel and a number of other media outlets revealed – and most importantly attested – the extent of the American, British and other intelligence agencies surveillance activities. These activities include mass online, mobile and landline telephone surveillance, covering nearly all-possible communicative transactions. Such efforts of individual whistle-blowers and organisations towards transparency and public accountability have been met with vigorous oppression; Chelsea Manning (previously known as Bradley Manning) was recently sentenced to 35 years of imprisonment for leaking US classified information, while others, such as Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, Laura Poitras and Glenn Greenwald have been chased and/or prosecuted by the US and British governments, in an effort to curtail disclosures and prevent others from proceeding to similar activities. Moreover, in a concerted intimidation effort, the British government recently asked the Guardian newspaper to appear before a parliamentary committee under the accusation that the newspaper has threatened national security (Hopkins and Taylor 2013).
Another recent, notorious electronic surveillance case that was communicated in the public sphere concerns the software Finfisher that is marketed internationally to law enforcement agencies by the corporation Gamma International UK Ltd, as "Governmental IT Intrusion and Remote Solution" (Marquis-Boire 2012: 1). Finfisher, also known as Finspy, is a sophisticated surveillance tool, compatible with most common computer and mobile operating systems and able to be installed remotely by the law enforcement agencies (polices or national intelligent services), without the user's consent on his/her devices, and to collect almost all kind of information (Marquis-Boire 2012: 16). A report by researchers from the Citizen Lab revealed that the software has been even sold to governments with a questionable democratic state and long history of political repression and criminalisation of speech. On a more recent report, the Citizen Lab published evidence that at least 36 governments have purchased FinFischer, with 12 of them being European-based (Marquis-Boire et al. 2013). Against the corporation's claims that this software is being used only against illegal activities, the evidence suggests that in certain countries, it has been used against political activists, with no criminal records (Marquis-Boire 2012; Marquis-Boire et al 2013).

Such stories around contemporary surveillance are being covered by different kinds of mainstream and alternative media and play a significant role in modifying citizens' level of awareness, understanding and perceptions around privacy, data protection, security and surveillance (Coleman & Sim, 2000; Doyle, 2003; Nellis, 2007). There is the concern that citizens may feel that their privacy is being violated, which can lead to a kind of self-censorship, known as chilling effect (Taipale 2004/05). The existence of a private sphere is important for democratic processes such as the creation of associations and constructive ideas and the raising of criticism (Habermas 1989, Solove 2007, Mitrou 2008, Haggerty and Samatas, 2010).

Surveillance is thus becoming potentially damaging to democracy. In this context, the broader question this paper seeks to answer is how and to what extend does electronic surveillance perceptions modify citizens’ willingness and behaviour in the context of electronic political participation. This study uses Greece as a case study and all empirical data are collected from respondents who currently live there. The first section provides with contextual background regarding the history and the presence of state surveillance in Greece and sheds light on the repression environment under which past and current citizenship exercise its rights in the country. Following this, existing theoretical and empirical approaches are being discussed and research questions are being formulated. Then, the research methods that were used for this study are explained, some main findings are being presented and some implications of this research are being discussed.

Contextual framework: political and economic surveillance in Greece

Greece has been a prominent example with a long legacy of state surveillance, which has been exercised as a mechanism of sociopolitical control (Samatas 2004). According to Samatas (2005), Greece’s post war history can be categorised in four distinct surveillance periods. The first is the post-civil war repressive anti-communist surveillance, which started since the end of the Second World War and took place until the end of the military dictatorship in 1974. During this period, the police, military and security agencies were exercising surveillance by using a network of informers spread throughout the country. Every individual and their family had a record that was called a dossier (fakeloi in Greek) that contained information about their
‘national loyalty’, as well as about their ideological and political preferences (Samatas 1986). The second period began after the end of the Greek military dictatorship in 1974 when Parliamentary democracy was recovered and the Greek Communist Party (K.K.E) was legalised (Samatas 2005). Surveillance during these years continued to be intense, although more discreet, and was focused on the newly formed left parties that were opposing the right-wing state positioning. The period lasted until 1981 when the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PA.SO.K.) came into power. From 1981 and until 1996, when Greece had mainly PA.SO.K administrations (1981-1989 and 1994-1998) with the exception of the period 1989 to 1993 when New Democracy political party came into power, ‘populist’ and ‘Machiavellian’ surveillance was exercised (Samatas 2005: 184). During this period, the two main parties that were interchanging positions in power were organising their own networks of wire-tapping. The fourth and final period started in 1996 until today, when ‘new surveillance’ practices were put into place. During that period Greece entered the European Monetary Union and became a member of the Schengen Treaty. The ‘new’ Greek surveillance is characterised by Samatas (2005: 185) as “[…] a galaxy of electronic surveillance systems deployed by the state, supra states, public and private institutions and individuals”. It is exercised “with or without individual consent, for legitimate and illegitimate purposes, including security, profit […].”

An infamous example of political surveillance in Greece from the latter surveillance period is the so-called Greek Olympic phone tapping scandal that took place in 2004 (Samatas 2010). This concerns the monitoring of the mobile phones of the Greek prime minister, his government, and top military and security officials, a case that has been unresolved until today. What is exceptional with this case is that, although traditionally the Greek state has been the main source of surveillance usually against the opposition and political activists, this was the first time when the Greek state and its high officials were the target of surveillance (Samatas 2010). Shortly, spy software was installed at the telecommunications infrastructure of Vodafone Greece (one of the largest mobile telephony providers in Greece) that “allowed calls from and to the tapped numbers to monitored and recorded by other cell phones” (Samatas 2010: 214). It is still unclear whether Vodafone and/or Ericsson (the latter was responsible for Vodafone’s technical infrastructure) were aware about the tapping. What is known is that, two days after the discovery of the spy software and one day before Vodafone inform the Greek government, one software engineer was found dead, allegedly by committing suicide. The magnitude of these revelations became the main topic of discussion in the Greek press at that time and continued to be discussed sporadically until today. The political and psychological consequences for the broader public were imprinted in various surveys and opinion polls of that time and as Samatas depicts: “If a prime minister, his top ministers and officials, and telecom corporation like Vodafone or Ericsson could not protect the privacy of their cellular-phone communications, it is not surprising that ordinary people feel almost defenceless against comparable breaches” (Samatas 2010: 223).

Furthermore, in most recent years, the Greek society has been experiencing an unprecedented economic, social, political and humanitarian crisis. The economy is under recession for the sixth consecutive year (Eurostat 2014), while the unemployment rate has been facing a steady increase, climbing to 27.4% in the last quarter of 2013 for the general population and 54.8% for those aged under 25 for the same period (Eurostat 2014b). Since the beginning of the Greek crisis, a period characterised by uncertainty, depression, corruption, high levels of distrust in public and political institutions and actors, very frequently one can find stories in the media about the state’s ubiquitous financial surveillance, targeting any organisation, corporation or citizen that may be involved to any sort of financial misconduct – such as tax evasion.
Following surveillance, arrests of citizens are presented in a dramaturgical way in the mainstream media, along with blatant details of how the Greek Financial Crime Unit (SDOE) unit managed to arrest the suspected tax evaders, after they had been put under surveillance. As with other nations' crises since 2008 and onwards, so with the Greek crisis, it seems that “the continuous extension and intensification of surveillance may be interpreted as a reactive attempt to manage such crises” (Fuchs 2012: 684). The high urgency that the crisis creates and the fear for unintended consequences, such as the country’s bankruptcy, have also generated the necessary political legitimacy for the increase of surveillance.

Another type of government surveillance that has been also frequently communicated via the media during the period of the crisis, concerns surveillance of political elites or activists, mainly from the far-left and far-right side of the political spectrum, usually on the grounds of their potential relation to terrorist groups and organised crime. A recent example is that of the surveillance of members of the main opposition, as well as civil society organisations and activists who participated in the anti-gold mining movement and protests, which have been taking place in the gold-mining area, Skouries, in north Greece (Apostolakis 2013; Ravanos 2013). A more well-known case that was also heavily discussed in the Greek mediated public sphere, as well as in the Greek Parliament, is the electronic surveillance of the members of the far-right wing political party – including parliamentarians - by the Greek National Intelligent Service (NIS) and the so-called Special Suppressive Counter-Terrorism Unit (in Greek E.K.A.M.). In this case, the government was forced to publicly announce that a warrant from a judge had been issued and the members of the Golden Dawn party had been officially under surveillance, after the public outcry that followed the assassination of an anti-fascist activist in Athens by members of the Golden Dawn party. Soon after the assassination, the Greek government stated that important clues have now been found, which connect the members of the Golden Dawn with the assassination but also with other criminal activities. The provoking aspect of this case was brought into public attention by an MP of the ruling party: “How is it possible the tapping of the NIS to have recorded incriminating conversations of Golden Dawn MPs before the murder took place in Athens?” (Katrougalos 2013). As Katrougalos (2013: Eleftherotypia) exemplifies, the above aspect means that “[...] the National Intelligent Service is conducting unconstitutional, mass, pre-emptive, surveillance, comparable to the ones [surveillance practices] that Snowden revealed in the US”.

Christian Fuch’s definition on surveillance, which includes both economic and political aspects, seems to be useful for a better understanding of the framework under which surveillance impacts its effects on modern citizenship in Greece. According to the Fuchs (2012: 685):

“Surveillance operates with threats and fear; it is a form of psychological and structural violence that can turn into physical violence. Surveillance is a specific kind of information gathering, storage, processing and assessment, and its use involves potential or actual harm, coercion, violence, asymmetric power relations, control, manipulation, domination and disciplinary power. It is an instrument and a means for trying to derive and accumulate benefits for certain groups or individuals at the expense of other groups or individuals. It tries to bring about or prevent certain behaviours of groups or individuals by gathering, storing, processing, diffusing, assessing and using data so that potential or actual physical, ideological or structural violence can be directed against humans in order to control and steer their behaviour. This influence is brought about by coercive means”
Greece’s legacy in state surveillance as a mean of social control reflects in public opinion surveys around issues of data protection and privacy. To begin with, the European Commission conducted the Special Eurobarometer 359 (2011) that explored national attitudes on data protection and electronic identity in the European Union, for which the fieldwork was conducted in June 2011. Greek population appeared in this research to have the lowest level of trust in most institutions and the highest levels of concerns in most examined categories. In particular, 83% of them stated that the government asks more and more personal information, which was the highest figure among all countries, while 77% consider the disclosing of personal information a big issue. Regarding concerns about tracking via mobile phone or mobile Internet, Greek respondents had once again the highest concerns, with a 65% of the population holding this opinion. Very importantly, Greece was the only country where more than half of the respondents appeared to be concerned that their behaviour is being recorded in a public space (54%). Interviewees from Czech Republic (72%), Germany (69%), Greece (68%) and Latvia (67%) said that they feel uncomfortable with Internet profiling. Greece also stands out with the lowest percentage (14%) of interviews that trust phone companies, mobile phone companies and Internet service providers, followed by Germany (20%). In overall, Greeks appeared to have the lowest level of trust in all institutions and companies.

In Flash Eurobarometer 225 survey on Data Protection in the European Union, conducted in 2008, Greece was situated more often than any other country at the lower end of the scale, regarding trust in organisations. Greek respondents were the most likely to argue that personal data protection was low in Greece (71%) and at the same time the most likely to say that are worried about leaving personal information on the Internet (82%). Furthermore, Greeks appeared to have the lowest level (37%) of trust in police in the appropriate handling of personal data. Very importantly for the scope of this research, the vast majority of the Greek population (92%) said that transmitting personal data was not sufficiently secure, which was, unsurprisingly, the highest percentage among all countries.

There is the concern that in such surveillance states, social interactions may be decreased or chilled, as citizens might not feel comfortable to share their opinion and to produce political discourse in public or even in private environments. So far, only a limited number of U.S. based empirical researches have tried to explore the relationship between surveillance perceptions and political participation. Moreover, despite the well-known theoretical and empirical connection between surveillance and individual non-political behaviour, research on political participation rarely incorporates government surveillance into individual-level empirical models (Best and Krueger 2011). The small amount of literature that is available on the subject contains sometimes opposing and mixed views, when it comes to state surveillance. The next section discusses some of the key available, interdisciplinary literature.

Towards an integrated model of the relation between surveillance and participation

Despite the radical increase of state sponsored surveillance, especially since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Cunningham and Noakes (2008: 176) argue that “political surveillance, infiltration, counter-intelligence, and the work of agents provocateurs, remain a neglected category of sociological research”, apart from some notable exceptions. What is more, the two authors indicate that the current literature regarding the effects of known or secret forms of social control
on social movements focuses mainly at the organisations' level but it doesn't provide with insights on the experience of surveillance by political activists.

In his classic article “Thoughts on a Neglected Category of Social Movement Participant: The Agent Provocateur and the Informant”, Gary Marx (1974: 408), emphasised the tremendous negative impact that “undercover agents” can have “to the life of a social movement”. Marx (1974: 428) argued that sometimes a revelation about the existence of covert surveillance among political activists can actually “help perpetuate a protest group by offering the kinds of resources and moral support that are often in short supply […]”. Still, as Marx (1974: 428) explains, the potential negative implications are much more alarming. The discovery of police surveillance within a political organisation, or just even the idea about such possibility, […] may lead to feelings of demoralisation, helplessness, cynicism and immobilizing paranoia, and can serve to disintegrate a movement […]”.

Following the important work of Marx in the 1970s on the dynamics of repression, Bert Klandermans and Dirk Oegema (1987) presented empirical support from research on mobilisation and participation. The authors investigated the effort of Dutch peace activists to mobilize individuals to attend a forthcoming protest and found out that, while 74 % of the local population agreed with the rationale of the demonstration, only the one-sixth actually intended to attend the demonstration. From this one-sixth, only the three-fifths actually attended the demonstration. From this one-sixth, only the three-fifths did eventually go. The most usual factors of non-attendance were entailed to the way citizens perceived the event and in particular, those who didn't eventually attend the event believed that it consisted of certain costs and/or risks. Cunningham and Noams (2008: 179) point out the importance of the insight provided by this particular research. Political activists or ordinary citizens that belong to the mainstream political process, did both calculate the same way the potential costs and benefits before they come into a conclusion of participation or non-participation: “Forms of state repression […] can be understood as having an impact on social movements through their effect on the cost-benefit calculus undergone by activists or potential participants”.

Cunningham and Noakes (2008) argue out that although such literature on the direct and measurable costs of covert social control are important, still, for the full understanding of the effects of covert social control, one must take into account “the psychological and relational costs of repression […]”, that is the “[…] indirect costs imposed by covert forms of social control on the personal emotions of social movement participants and the collective emotions of social movement organisations” (Cunningham and Noakes 2008: 186). Scholarship has faced a long series of epistemological debates regarding the incorporation of emotions within a scientific framework of research. In their effort to avoid what was considered to be irrational in social movements’ analysis, scholars failed in the past to consider the dynamics of this very important aspect (Cunningham and Noakes 2008). For that reason, the role of emotions in explaining the relationship between social control and participation has been particularly underresearched.

Calhoun (2004: 46) explains that the main reason why such “resistances” exist is the very fact that emotions are by their nature “unobservable inner states” and they depend on interpretation. In his criticism to this “implicit behaviourism” that dominates many scientists, he singles out that all kinds of knowledge rely upon interpretation. Calhoun (2004: 46-47) prompts for a sociological analysis of emotions and provides with three “commitments” one should make when is taking this task. Researchers should study emotions sociologically because emotions are by definition shaped by various social and cultural influences. A failure to do so will lead to a loss of certain aspects of emotions. Second, sociological study of emotion will avoid the undesirable “compartmentalisation” but as he points out, sociology of emotions is not adequate.
What we need is "an integration of emotions into sociological understanding, explanation, observation, and theory more generally". Third, scientists need to deal with emotions in a critical way, to visit and appreciate the history of thought behind them and to be aware of the subjectivity of the language that is embedded to them.

This epistemological turn has not left unaffected political science; a number of political scientists have conducted serious attempts to incorporate emotions to their analysis of political phenomena. In this respect, Samuel Best and Brian Krueger tried to connect the emotions about government surveillance perceptions and political participation. In one of their works, “Government Monitoring and Political Participation in the United States: The Distinct Roles of Anger and Anxiety” (Best and Krueger 2011), the two authors suggested a theoretical model where anger and anxiety about state surveillance influence political engagement positively and negatively respectively. Based on a random sampling that collected more than 1000 responses, they tested a number of hypotheses that would potentially contribute to the understanding of association between government monitoring and political participation. The key dependent variable in their model was political participation, as measured by combining different participation activities into a participation category. The main independent variables were the emotions of anxiety and anger about the possibility of U.S. government surveillance.

Best and Krueger demonstrated that the level of anger among the respondents was found to be much higher than that of anxiety. Their data confirmed something that was already found across a number of previous studies. When state surveillance generates higher level of anger to an individual, this leads to higher levels of political participation. In contrast, when an individual has higher levels of anxiety due to surveillance, political participation is chilled. Interestingly, anger and positive engagement prevails in the findings. They two authors argue that this can be possibly understood as a cycle. When a citizen participates politically, this generates expectations for government surveillance, which in turn provokes higher level of anger. In contrast, the more individuals participates, the more desensitised they become about the potential concerns, and thus less anxious for potential government surveillance. Best and Krueger conclude that the relationship between government surveillance and political participation cannot be explained solely by emotions about government surveillance and that future research should test hypothesis that will take into account different variables in relation to this model.

Following the terrorist attacks in New York, London and Madrid, surveillance practices have seen a revival, especially in the era of anti-terrorism, for example with policies such as the Data Retention Directive in Europe and the US Patriot Act in the US (Sarikakis and Tsapogas 2012). In the context of a constant possibility for a new terrorist attack, it is not surprising that surveillance gained legitimacy and approval part of the population. In that sense, surveillance comprises the positive element of the so-called Security-Liberty balance (Xu and Dinev 2012: 48). The two authors call this as the “Perceived Need for Government Surveillance (PNGS)”, that is a theoretical construct “[…] intended to capture beneficial element of government surveillance and to highlight the importance of the security interests in the Security –Liberty balance” (p. 49) On the other hand, many citizens are concerned about surveillance practices, as the ones discussed earlier, with further impact on important civil liberties, which in turn is the negative surveillance element in the Security-Liberty trade off. The second important theoretical construct for the Security-Liberty trade-off is the “Government Intrusion Concerns (GIC)”, which aims to: […] capture cost element of government surveillance and reflect individuals’ negative perceptions of government surveillance (p. 50).

By using a two-fold construct, developed earlier by Dinev and colleagues (2006, 2008), the
two authors assessed the Security-Liberty proposition empirically. By drawing on the social cognitive theory, they hypothesised that internet self-efficacy\(^2\) and social awareness\(^3\) will affect the PNGS and the GIC. The analysis of the data, collected from 422 US based respondents by a distributed printed survey, suggested that internet self-efficacy was found to be negatively related to the PNGS and positively related to the GIC. Because of their confidence that they can protect themselves online from external threats, savvy internet users’ perceived need for government-initiated security through surveillance will be significantly lower. Accordingly, the same users by being more knowledgeable regarding online dangers appeared to be more concerned about government intrusion. On the other hand, social awareness was found to be statistically related to the PNGS but not to the GIC, meaning that active and well-informed citizens about social and political affairs appeared to have higher need for government surveillance.

**Research questions**

The broader research question is:

**How and to what extend does electronic surveillance perceptions modify citizens’ willingness and behaviour in the context of electronic political participation?**

In order to answer the main question, the following subquestions are addressed:

- What constitutes political participation for the participants of this study?
- What constitutes online political participation for the participants of this study?
- What are the concerns of the participants of this study regarding state surveillance?
- What is the relation between emotions and state surveillance?

**Methods and description of samples**

Due to the complexity of the central problem, a mixed-method research has been designed and operationalised. This included the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, through a national survey on the one hand and a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews and focus groups on the other. According to Jick (1979 in Creswell and Clark 2011), mixed methods research can help the researcher tackle the weaknesses that are embedded in both quantitative and qualitative research. Such problems can be frequently found in interdisciplinary areas of study, as for instance within privacy scholarship, which has grown significantly over the last few

\(^2\) Internet self-efficacy was defined for the purposes of that research as “an individual’s belief in his or her own capacity to use the internet and various internet-related applications to accomplish various online activities” (Xu and Dinev 2012: 51).

\(^3\) Social awareness was defined by Xu and Dinev (2012: 52) as “the citizen’s behaviour with respect to following and being actively involved in communities’ and government policies and initiatives, including those related to the technology and the internet”.
Jeff Smith, Tamara Dinev and Heng Xu conducted and published in 2011 an extensive interdisciplinary review of privacy-related research outputs with a sample of 320 privacy articles and 128 books and book sections. The authors found out that academic scholarship on privacy hasn't yet exploited the theoretical advancements that have been developed in normative and descriptive studies. Therefore, as they conclude, future research could gain great value from:

“rigorous empirically descriptive studies that either trace processes associated with, or test implied assertions from [...]. Although some possibilities for surveys do exist, the most helpful studies will likely be grounded in direct observation of the group members and their interactions. This suggests a long-term research agenda that will rely heavily on access to group settings in a variety of domains. It will be almost impossible to examine these processes without direct observation or participation (i.e., through action research)”

(Smith et al 2011: p. 1005 and 1007)

Due to the complicated nature of the relationship between surveillance and political participation and the existence of a large number of directly or indirectly related publications, across a variety of disciplines, an exhaustive review of the literature and empirical researches was firstly conducted. Following this, two sets of informal focus groups with universities students were conducted, as well as a number of informal, unstructured interviews with university students, activists and experts. The survey questionnaire was largely based on a number of pre-existing related studies, mainly those of Best and Krueger, and Dinev and colleagues. Moreover, a number of questions were borrowed from the fifth round of the European Social Survey, the Pew Research Internet Project and various Eurobarometers. We assessed the non-response bias by confirming that the respondent’s demographics of this sample with current internet offline and online populations, as reported in the fifth round of the European Social Survey the Special Eurobarometer 359 (2011) and the Flash Eurobarometer 225 (2008), are comparable.

After developing the survey questionnaire in English, two expert reviews were conducted in Vienna. The questionnaire was then translated to Greek and a pilot survey was conducted with 30 Greek respondents to test the interview length. The pilot sample was as high as the 3.6% of final survey sample size (N=799). After the assessment of the pilot survey results, minor modifications of the questionnaire were deployed, mainly in regards with wording and structure. The survey used two modes for collecting the data. Initially, 300 printed questionnaires were administered to a broad sample of individuals in Athens. The survey was offered to broad range of individuals in companies, public organisations, shops and neighbourhoods. The respondents returned a completed survey at the indicated collection points or by using a prepaid mail. Out of the total questionnaires administered, 145 were collected. Meanwhile, the second survey mode, an online questionnaire, was set up by the use of online survey software. Invitations to survey participation were send out via emails to Greek universities, to various mainstream and alternative media, online websites and forums across the whole political spectrum, as well as to a large number of groups in Facebook, which again, belonged to the whole political spectrum.

After the survey, a series of semi-structured interviews with experts (academics, members of the parliament, members of the national security agency, police officers and IT managers) and focus groups with participants from the whole political spectrum. In particular, the focus groups were conducted individually with the following categories: far-left, left-wing, right-wing, far-
right, as well as with apolitical citizens and university students. The focus group research extended the depth of understanding gained by the survey and explored how these different political (and apolitical) groups cope with surveillance in the context of electronic political participation. For the purposes of this paper, data from three specific focus groups are being analysed, namely the far-left, left-wing and the apolitical groups.

**Results and discussion**

Although a convenience sampling technique was deployed for the survey, the demographic distribution of the 799 respondents indicates a fairly diverse sample of individuals, which allow us to gain important insights for our sample. In particular, male respondents represent 70% of the sample, with female occupying 30%. 92% of the respondents are accessing the Internet on a daily basis and further 6% access it once or a few times a week. Among the activities they perform online, sending/receiving emails was the most common (87%). 86% stated that they read or download online news, newspapers or news magazine, 85% that find information about goods and services and 67% that use social networking. The respondents appear to be highly educated, with 37% of them stating that they have a bachelor’s degree, 20% a master’s degree, 6% a PhD, while 21% have graduated high school. Regarding employment, 32% of the respondents are working in the private sector, 23% are self-employed, 14% are working for the public sector, 12% are unemployed, 6% are higher education students, while 2% are pensionists. As for the main address of the respondents, 60% of them indicated that they live in the Attica region (the broader geographical area surrounding Athens that has a population of around 4 million people out of the 11 million of Greece general population). From the rest of the respondents, 19% have their main address in North Greece, 13% in Central Greece and 8% are living on the islands.

As graph 1 (below) reveals, the respondents of the survey are spread across the whole political spectrum. In addition, its distribution is comparable to a large extent to the political partisanship state in Greece at the time of the data collection, namely in the 3rd and 4th quarter of 2013.

*Table 1. Self-positioning of respondents on the political spectrum*
Overall, respondents of the survey seem to be particularly interested in politics. On a 0-10 scale regarding the interest in country’s political affairs (with the 0 being not interested at all and 10 extremely interested), 70% of the respondents stated that they are very much or extremely interested in the political affairs (8,9,10 numbers on the scale). Amongst them, 27% state that they discuss politics offline every day, 58% once or a few times a week, while only the 3% stated that they don’t discuss at all. As graph 2 depicts, the most common political activity among the respondents was that of signing a paper petition (49%), with second being the attendance to a public demonstration or march (43%). Furthermore, 36% of the people have attended a political speech or discussion and 29% have participated in strikes.

*Figure 2. Offline political participation activities*
As it became clear from the focus groups analysis, Greek citizens have very different perceptions among each other, when it comes to political participation. Speaking about political participation, Giannis, from the far-left group of individuals, provided his definition of the concept:

“[Political participation] is to care about the life around you, for your life, how society is and to decide to turn your thoughts into actions. To do what you are considering doing, whatever positive [action] you can do for yourself but also for the people around you, who live in the same city. This is politics (πολιτική in greek), to care about life in the city and to be a citizen”

Andreas from the same group of participants, said:

“You are an active part of society; you are actively caring in anything that relates to you and the rest of the society. You are fighting in order decisions not to be taken for you without you, not only in regards with governments, but also against the so-called logic of ‘assignment’, meaning that for whatever concerns you, you are personally participating, actively, in solidarity, without vertical hierarchies”

Giorgos, also from the far-left group, points out that participation is not just about being
interested:

“For our point of view, political participation is the active involvement and not just to be interested. Being interested may be the starting point but you may be interested and do nothing, apart from being interested. What is important is the offering, the action, the collective action and also the action without ‘assignment’ [to others]. For us, the politics in the parliament, for instance, is the death of politics, the political comma, basically”

For the traditional left-wing participants, political participation was perceived to a large extent in a similar way. The only difference among these groups is the involvement with political parties and institutional syndicalism. For instance, Marina, exemplifies her own version of political participation:

“[Political participation] is anything that has to do with my life, […] the fact that I do something in my neighbourhood in the context of democracy. The fact that I question, for instance, a government of the parliament. That I do not let others to decide for me, which means political disobedience. For example, participation in a collective organisation, a trade union, which will attempt a public intervention and will challenge, in generally, the social, political and economic situation”

On the other hand, for the apolitical participants of the study, political participation is largely confined to voting in national elections every four years and to becoming a member of a political party. As Irene says:

“One indication of political participation is voting, okay, I am doing this, I am not aloof, I don't say that I am not going to vote. I believe that I can potentially change certain things. Other times, I may feel that I cannot change [things] with my vote because sometimes I think that many things are aforethought. Now, regarding the definition [of political participation], apart from voting, maybe I could participate actively politically, by joining a party […]”

Thomas, an individual who had been unemployed for more than two years and, in generally, heavily affected by the financial crisis, states:

“How much interested am I… Okay, I cannot say that I am very much interested… I would say barely [interested]. Also, I do not participate. It may happen sometimes to read something that caught my interest, but that's all”

Giannis, another individual who had been also heavily hit by the crisis, similarly says:

“First of all, I believe that being member of a party is not a right thing. I am politically active; I believe in democracy, I vote… Beyond this, being a member of a party means that you look after your personal interest against the others, which is for me wrong […]”

On a similar rational, Zoe states her unwillingness to participate but also raises the important issue of (dis)trust:
“Beyond discussions in which I participate in, with groups of friends [...], I do not participate in any other way. The reason is a complete nihilism and depreciation of politicians, personally speaking. I do not believe anybody”

**Online participation**

In regards with online political activities, the levels of participation are significantly reduced. 26% of the respondents noted that they do not discuss at all politics online, 20% discuss less than every 2-3 weeks, while only 12% discusses on a daily basis and 33% discuss politics online once or a few times a week. As the graph 3 presents, a majority of the respondents (73%) stated that they have gotten information regarding the political affairs of the country. Also, 46% of them said that they have posted their own thoughts, comments or pictures on a website, blog or social networking site about a political or social issue and a quite large percentage of 44% claimed that they have posted links or articles related to the political affairs of the country for other to read on a social networking sites or other online forum.

**Figure 3. Online political participation activities**

To explore further the perceptions of citizens regarding the potential of new forms of political participation, the participants of the focus group study were asked whether such thing as
electronic or online political participation exists. Grigoris, a mid-thirty far-left wing activist said:

“It does exist, I think. Since opinions exist on the Internet and they affect people offline, clearly it exists”

Another participant, Lefteris, from the same group explained further:

“It exists, at the level of getting informed […] but as we discussed, it is important not only to be interested and only to get informed – because indeed you get informed – but also to participate. Therefore, in a sense, yes it exists, but it is nothing special. It is like a theoretical discussion that stays only at the level of getting information and nothing further. More in the sense of social commentary, not so much [in the sense] of politics, which may also include political commentary”

Lastly from the far-left group, Giorgos discusses the potentials of ICTs for influencing the public sphere:

“Life is the pursuit of aims. So, we develop technologies in order to achieve aims. In this sense, technologies extend some human capabilities for achieving the aims that are set each time […]. Regarding politics, it is important that they expand the possibilities for an almost equal, all-to-all simultaneous communication. In this sense, this opens up new possibilities for a transformation of the public sphere, towards the direction we want. Therefore, for me, anything that has to do with the exchange of ideas is political. In particular, what happens may not be participation, but certainly, it is an improvement of the public sphere we knew, which was [before comprised of] a passive receiver, with a centralised sender”

Jenny, from the left-wing group, is raising the issue of slaktivism:

“Sometimes, when you are very active with social networking sites, you believe that by uploading there a post that will gain popularity, you will have fulfilled your duty as a person, and you will ‘rest’ in a way”

From the apolitical group, the majority of the participants agreed that there is no such thing as online or electronic political participation. As Irene puts it:

“Participating politically electronically… no […] this is only a tool for expression and communication. Participation is something that has more substance… I think”

**Concerns about state surveillance**

Survey data reveal an important level of concern of the Greek participants regarding electronic state surveillance. In particular, as graph 4 reveals 43% of the respondents are quite or very much concerned about the ability the Greek state authorities have to monitor internet activities, such as the email and the social networking sites. The 37% says that they are only a little concerned on this issue, while 20% claim that they are not concerned at all.
Figure 4. Concerns about Internet surveillance

Are you concerned about the ability the state authorities have to monitor Internet activities (e.g. email, social networking sites etc.)?

N = 792 (excluded responses Don't know / Don't want to answer)

Figure 5. Concerns about mobile surveillance

Are you concerned about the ability the state authorities have to monitor mobile phone calls and sms?

N = 792 (excluded responses Don’t know / Don’t want to answer)
As graph 5 depicts, slightly higher is the percentage of those who appear to be concerned about the ability of the state authorities to monitor phone calls and SMS, which is the case for the 48% of the sample. This is not surprising, taking into consideration the very frequent news coverage about phone surveillance, as discussed in a previous section. On the other hand, 33% states that they are little concerned, while 19% says that they are not concerned at all.

Furthermore, respondents of the survey appear to have slightly less concerns regarding usage of CCTV surveillance by state authorities. In particular, as graph 6 shows, 43% of them are quite or very much concerned about CCTV surveillance, while 30% says that they are only a little concerned and 26% not at all concerned.

**Figure 6. Concerns about CCTV surveillance**

![Bar chart showing concerns about CCTV surveillance](image)

Interestingly enough, next graph (7) shows that almost half of the study’s respondents (49%) are very much concerned that foreign, transnational authorities also have the above abilities to monitor citizens of Greece. Another 29% shows that they are also quite concerned for the same issue. Combined together, a total 78% of the sample appears to be quite or very much concerned. On the other hand, 17% appears to be a little concerned and only 6% is not concerned at all. This magnitude of these percentages can be possibly explained by the fact that the survey sampling took place a few months after Edward Snowden’s revelations on the extent of US and British electronic surveillance practices.

**Figure 7. Concerns about surveillance by foreign, transnational authorities**
Concerns about state surveillance were also prevalent in the interviews and focus groups data. A participant from the far-left wing group, Aris, says:

“I know that electronic surveillance takes place, because after the revelations about Prism, we know. The things we were imagining and describing as impossible, we now know that they take place. Whoever has a Gmail, whoever has Facebook [or] whoever communicates with somebody that has Gmail”

Another participant, Markos, from the left-wing group, explains that although he is aware of the dangers and he has certain concerns, he has chosen to share openly his ideas and political identity online, as he does anyway offline:

“[…] If somebody at this moment acquires access to my Facebook account, either because he/she is my friend and can see the information I disclose there, or because he/she has gained access without being a friend, that person can identify my political ideology. That I am left, that I am a communist etc. In that sense, exactly because this kind of identification can be done by any other person who sees me offline in my daily life, because I participate, for example, in demonstrations, in trade unions etc… Because anyway these are things for which I am not hiding and I share them openly [offline], this kind of information I also share online”

A participant from the left-wing group, Panos, reflects on the legal perspectives of surveillance, which are not clear, according to him:
“The legal framework - what is legal and what is not - is not actually clear. There are some crucial moments, in which certain things must not be shared. I may not be [a member] of a terrorist organisation but many of the things that you could possibly do, do not fall within the framework of civil legality […] Some of them may be more extreme, some others not. In any case, in order for these things to be achieved […] what I mean is that, if you want to make a surprise party to a friend of yours, in order for the party to be successful, the surprise element is crucial […] In that sense, I think this is the limit, what can the other [the government] use against you legally or practically in order to obstruct you. It is the trade-off between lawfulness and usefulness. If somebody can use a certain information [against me], even if not legally, in that case I wouldn’t use the internet, not even the phone”

Apart from the legal framework and understanding, another important factor we found frequently within the data, was the perception about the quality of democracy in one’s country. As Markos explains, although he has chosen to share openly his political identity online, this would not have been the case if he would live in another country:

“Let’s say that we were at this moment in China or in Turkey, in a regime that is enforcing a much higher control over social networking sites and the media […] In this example, if I would like to organise a mobilisation of the Tibetan people, it should be taken for granted that this effort would be suppressed by the Chinese government. Although it may have been clear on Facebook that I support Tibet - because I would have posted pictures of bold people with pink clothes - however, if I wanted to organise such a mobilisation, I would not have done it, neither via Facebook nor via email”

In the apolitical group, although participants were the least informed about recent developments in surveillance, their (imaginative) understanding of surveillance was the murkier of all. Zoe, for instance, takes for granted that:

“Everybody is being surveilled. The phones and movements of all of us. They can at any time track you, see anything, what you said, what you did, with whom you were, were you were […] I believe that when I speak on the phone with anybody, with my mother, my friends, my colleagues, all of these are being surveilled at any particular moment”

Another participant of the same group, Giannis, is certain that the content of every single phone call of all citizens of the country is being recorded and stored:

“I believe that when we speak on the phone, everything is being recorded in the databases of the [telecommunication] companies. Therefore, when the police want to search, for me for example, they ask for this data [from the telecommunication companies] and they find what they want”

Thomas, also from the apolitical group, explains that he doesn’t care about surveillance because he has nothing to hide:
“Personally speaking, it is not of my concern even if I am under surveillance 24 hours a day, I don’t care, I have nothing to hide or to be afraid of”

**Emotions about state surveillance**

From simple descriptive statistics, we test the levels of anxiety and anger of the survey respondents. As the table below shows, around 65% of the respondents stated that they feel quite or very much angry when they think about the possibility that a state authority is monitoring their electronic communication, such as their Internet activities or phone calls. Moreover, another 20% of the respondents appear to feel a little angry about state surveillance and only 14% feels not angry at all. On the other hand, only 18% of the participants stated feeling quite or very much anxious about state surveillance. Around 36% feels a little angry while almost half of the respondents (46%) appear not to feel anxious at all about state surveillance.

Moreover, the levels of angry and anxiety are compatible with Best and Krueger (2011) findings, which showed that around 44% of the American citizens feel quite or very much angry, while only 29% feel quite or very much anxious. In addition, the Greek respondents’ levels of anger are significantly higher than those of the US based respondents (65% instead of 44% respectively), while the levels of anxiety are lower than the US sample but not significantly lower (18% instead of 22% respectively). The significantly high level of anger of the Greek respondents is likely explained by the long legacy of state surveillance in Greece (Samatas 2004), in combination with the current social-political situation in Greece due to the on-going crisis.

**Figure 8. Frequency Percentages for Anxiety and Anger about State Surveillance**

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Quite</th>
<th>Very much</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety about state</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>799</td>
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<td>surveillance</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger about state</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>799</td>
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<tr>
<td>surveillance</td>
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**Some conclusions and implications**

**Political participation and democratic perceptions**

The high level of distrust in politicians, political parties, and other public institutions is noticed in various countries, and in particularly, in Greece. In both methods’ data, we also observed particularly low levels of trust in almost anything that has to do, directly or indirectly, with the political affairs and the governance of the country. Many of these participants perceived as the main political participation activities, voting and membership to a political party. In fact, during the focus group discussions, frequently the participants asked the interviewers to provide them with more information on the subject. Very importantly, for many of the study participants, a feeling of powerlessness was apparent. Individuals are convinced, in many cases, that there is
nothing they can personally do to influence society and the political life. Therefore, even if new media and ICT’s indeed contribute towards an increase in participation in the social and political life, it seems that a large part of the citizens are not and will not be aware of those potentials.

In addition, many of the individuals of the same, mostly apolitical, groups were not aware about the dangers that are entailed in unlawful, undemocratic and repressive forms of state surveillance while for the left-wing participants, personal political ideology, was an important factor that shaped to a large extent their online communication and participation behaviour.

**Legal framework perceptions**

Another issue that appeared frequently in our qualitative research was that of the knowledge and/or understanding of the legal framework under which surveillance operates. To begin with, a number of participants who were exceptionally knowledgeable in these topics due to their professional capacity (lawyers and law experts), claimed that data that have been acquired by a state authority illegally, cannot be used against them. Therefore, they argued, they have nothing to be afraid off and that’s why they are using all sorts of communication without restricting themselves in any sense. However, this was not the case for a lot of other participants of the study. The lack of knowledge or understanding of the legal framework was the reason that many individuals felt frustrated and insecure with their electronic communication practices. Most importantly, in most cases, this very frustration was a factor that contributed to an individual’s decision to give up in advance any effort of self-protection.

**Technical perceptions**

An important factor that seems to modify citizens’ perceptions on the explored topics is the level of the technical understanding of electronic surveillance technologies and practices. The lack of knowledge on this matter and the uncertainty that follows regarding personal privacy and data protection, were contributing similarly towards an individual’s apathy. Because of this frustration, many individuals abandon in advance the idea of protecting their privacy, as they are convinced that there is nothing they can do against the state surveillance actors and the telecommunication companies, with which they co-operate.

Another interesting finding is that, although certain apolitical and less politically active participants had limited or no knowledge regarding technologies and practices of contemporary surveillance, they described surveillance to be much more intrusive and darker, than other, more knowledgeable participants, as well as than it is in reality. This has two broad implications. Firstly, the simple raising of awareness of individuals does not suffice in triggering a mobilisation. The reason is that, even if these individuals would read in detail Snowden’s, for instance, revelations, they would just confirm their a priori imagination and perception of surveillance. Second, even if new media and ICT’s do offer new capabilities of political participation, this kind of dark imaginative perception of surveillance seems enough to chill in advance any potential willingness for participation.
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