



Can Christian Nationalism Explain Anti-Vaccination Attitudes Against COVID-19 in Greece?

Research Article

Dimitra Mareta

Adjunct Lecturer, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
dimitra.mareta@gmail.com

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Can Christian Nationalism Explain Anti-Vaccination Attitudes Against COVID-19 in Greece?

Dimitra Mareta*

Abstract

This paper examines the attitudes of the people participating in protests against COVID-19 (mandatory) vaccination in Athens, Greece. The central question is to examine whether the protesters adopt the main theses of Christian nationalism and opposition to science, as expressed and theorised in the United States, by examining an indicative sample of participants in these protests. The paper first examines the Greek context regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, it presents the theoretical context of Christian nationalism and, finally, it presents the questionnaire and the findings from field research conducted by the author during these Athens protests in summer 2021. As such, the paper contributes to the knowledge gap regarding Christian nationalism beyond the American context and introduces this topic for the first time with regard to Greece.

Keywords: Christian nationalism, Greece, anti-vaccination protests, COVID-19

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the deaths of millions of people, and even more have had their lives impacted by the virus and government reactions to it (i.e., lockdowns, etc.). Nevertheless, people still doubt that there is such thing as the SARS-COV-2 virus and the COVID-19 disease. These COVID-deniers, thus, oppose vaccination against it. Greece is among the countries with low participation in the vaccination programme and one of the first in the world to make COVID-19 vaccination mandatory for people over 60 years old by imposing a fine of €100/month for every month those people remain unvaccinated. The government chose to do so claiming that those over 60 years were the most vulnerable, if infected, and this was done to force them get vaccinated and to protect them. Greece is also one of the countries with anti-vaccination protests in several cities. As the pandemic, the developments around it, and its consequences will probably linger, it becomes more and more important to

* Dimitra Mareta holds a PhD in Political Science from the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences. She was an adjunct lecturer in Political Science at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki for the academic year 2020-2021, where she also was a postdoctoral researcher, and at the Hellenic Open University for the academic years 2018-2019 and 2020-2021. Her research and teaching interests include conservatism, nationalism, liberalism and women's and gender studies. She has published academic articles and has participated in national and international conferences.

investigate and learn what people participating in such protests believe and how they see the world around them. This paper contributes to the study of the attitudes of these COVID-deniers by focusing on the Greek case and, more specifically, on Greek anti-vaccination (anti-vax) protests.

Researchers in several countries have observed that opposition to COVID-19 vaccines or to measures against the spread of the virus stem from anti-science sentiment that extends to scientists who propose related public health measures.¹ In the Greek case,² this scepticism or downright opposition was unfortunately fuelled by the way the COVID-19 advisory committee handled the crisis, often making political statements and adjusting its proposals to the will and the demands of the government.³ This led to a blurring of the roles of

¹ Whitehead, Andrew L. and Samuel L. Perry. 2020. How Culture Wars Delay Herd Immunity: Christian Nationalism and Anti-Vaccine Attitudes. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 6, 1-12.

² No research has been done on Greece regarding this complex topic. On some other cases, see Degerman, Dan. 2020. The Political Is Medical Now: COVID-19, Medicalization and Political Theory. *Theory & Event* 23(4), 61–75; Devine, Daniel / Gaskell, Jennifer / Jennings, Will and Gerry Stoker. 2021. Trust and the Coronavirus Pandemic: What Are the Consequences of and for Trust – An Early Review of the Literature. *Political Studies Review* 19(2), 274-85; Faulkner, Paul. 2021. Lockdown: A Case Study in How to Lose Trust and Undermine Compliance. *Global Discourse* 11(3), 497–515; Kettell, Steven and Peter Kerr. 2022. ‘Guided by the Science’: (De)Politicising the UK Government’s Response to the Coronavirus Crisis. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 24(1), 11–30; Pettit, Petit. 2021. Lockdown, Breakdown and Trust: A Reply to Paul Faulkner. *Global Discourse* 11(3), 517–24.

³ There have been several statements by members of the committee which have fed this blurring of roles; here I cite only a few, which are the most indicative. First, the chief advisor of the government and head of the experts committee claimed that the passengers have to be careful, because “we cannot invest at this moment on more comfort in public transport”, see: athenstransport. 2020. Tsiordas: No Investments on Public Transports Can Be Made. Passengers Have to Avoid Overcrowding. *Athens Transport*, 27 October 2020. Who this “we” is the scientist did not clarify but it is obvious that he was speaking as government’s spokesperson. The same chief advisor defended the reopening of the schools after the first lockdown in the way it was made as a committee’s suggestion by saying also that children have an enzyme in their nose which protects them, see: Ta Nea Team. 2020. Tsiorda: Enzyme in the Nose ‘Armours’ Children from the Coronavirus. *Ta Nea*, 21 May 2020. While it was already admitted by the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs that the government alone decided what to do, see: Telloglou, Tassos. 2020. To Open or Not to Open Schools? *Inside Story*, 5 May 2020. Moreover, when things started going really bad for the country and the number of dead increased tragically, he disappeared without ever explaining why this happened. Second, another member of the committee used some tables to claim that, if we put less pupils in a classroom, it is more dangerous for them to get infected than if we put more pupils, as any gain by class with less pupils should be measured in relation to the cost of teaching in rotation (which demanded hiring more teachers, etc.), see: news247.gr. 2020. Mayiorkinis: Challenges the Gain from the Reduction of the Numbers of Pupils in Classrooms. *News24/7*, 29 August 2020. During the pandemic, it was known that the government did not wish to spend money on infrastructures to face the pandemic (for example, a minister stated that we do not have to build a luxury health system with more ICUs, because after the pandemic they will be useless) and hiring more teachers, doctors and nurses was part of the public spending deemed also useless. Third, when a journalist challenged the official data given by the Greek CDC arguing that there were two parallel systems of registration for the COVID-19 cases, she resigned indicting interventions by the government and her reportage was deleted, while her claims were never confirmed nor refuted by the Greek CDC, see: iEidiseis. 2020. Dimitra Kroustalli Resigned Indicting Suffocating Pressure from Maximou on the ‘Double Books.’ *IEidieis.gr*, 16 December 2020. There is also an article in the conservative newspaper *I Kathimerini* which portrays the intense relationship between the scientific committee and the government in the summer of 2020 (see Eptakoili, Tassoula. 2020. The Dilemmas and the Failures with the Virus. *I Kathimerini*, 24 August 2020), which presents how the government decided the measures against the spread of the SARS-COV-2 and then the committee had to function as the alibi for the government’s decisions.

scientists and politicians, but examining this topic in depth is beyond the scope of this article.

This resulted in a decrease of trust not only in the government, but also the larger political system and the scientific experts committee. Until the current pandemic era, no such massive challenge of scientific solutions has been traced stemming from religion, although the relationship the majority of Greeks with religion has been close. Even before the pandemic crisis, the rates that describe the relationship of the Greeks with religion do not sketch a smooth relationship and, on the contrary, they imply almost a more traditional or Central/Eastern European relationship.⁴ More specifically, 91.7% believe in God, in a scale from 1 to 10 (1: totally disagree; 10: totally agree)⁵ 60.8% choose the answers from 6 to 10 to the question that we rely too much on science and not enough on religious faith;⁶ 41.2% claim that the only acceptable religion is their religion, which in the Greek case is Orthodox Christian religion, and one in five Greeks (21.2%) believe that, when religion and science conflict, religion is always right.⁷ In a similar question, an overwhelming 74% believe that there is a conflict between science and religion.⁸ Hence, it is debatable whether Greek society went through a real Enlightenment leading to the revolution against the Ottoman Empire,⁹ whether Greek Enlightenment was mainly an outcome of the actions of Orthodox priests, episcopos, and monks,¹⁰ or whether Greece has never known Enlightenment because of the powerful position of the Church within Greece.¹¹ Moreover, Greek society has never known a Western European style liberalism that seriously reflected on the position of religion in the state and society or contemplated religion through science while continuing to be a non-secular state that recognises one prevailing religion.¹² Instead, the country is defined by a strong nationalism, which has been revived most recently by the opposition to the Prespa Agreement, which is briefly presented below, and its effect on domestic developments.

⁴ Lipka, Michael. 2018. Greek Attitudes toward Religion, Minorities Align More with Central and Eastern Europe than West, *Pew Research Center*, 31 October 2018.

⁵ Dianeosis. 2017. World Values Survey: Wave 7 (accessed: 12 April 2020), 1-555, 298.

⁶ Dianeosis, *World Values Survey*, 276.

⁷ Dianeosis, *World Values Survey*, 304.

⁸ Pew Research Center. 2017. Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe, *Pew Research Center*, 10 May 2017, 1-175, 124.

⁹ Dimaras, Konstantinos Th. 1989. *Neohellenic Enlightenment*. Athens: Ermis; Kitromilides, Paschalis. 2013. *Enlightenment and Revolution: The Making of Modern Greece*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Kordatos, Yanis. 1959. *Great History of Greece: 1453–1821, Volume 9*. Athens: 20th Century.

¹⁰ Babiniotis, Georgios. 2006. Thanking Address by the Dean Mr. Georgios Babiniotis, *Ekklessia* 6, 146-50.

¹¹ Gaveas, Dimosthenis. 2016. Ahrweiler: Greece Never Knew Enlightenment. Who Is to Blame? I Will Say It, the Church, *Huffington Post Greece*, 25 March 2016; see also for the opposition of the Church to the revolution against the Ottoman Empire in 1821, Papageorgiou, Menas. 2021. *The Black Bible of 1821: Gregorios E' and Other Patricates through their Counterrevolutionary Encyclicals*. Thessaloniki: iWrite.

¹² Foudedaki, Pinelopi. 2019. The Stillborn of the Constitutional Revision of the State-Church Relations in Greece, in *The Constitution in Progress*. Athens, Thessaloniki: Sakkoula, 581-616; Kamtsidou, Ifigenia. 2018. The Religious Symbols in Public Space. The Standpoint of Constitutional Law, (accessed: 8 July 2020); Kokosalakis, Nikos. 1987. The Political Significance of Popular Religion in Greece, *Archives de Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 64(1), 37–52; Papadopoulou, Lina. 2019. Religion and Constitution in Greece and Europe Today: Ten Brief Comments over Timely Issues, in *Religious Freedom – Timely Legal Issues*. Thessaloniki: Sakkoula, 63–87.

This paper presents the attitudes of people participating in anti-vax protests in Athens, while also taking into account basic demographic, political, and social characteristics correlated with the specific Greek context. By focusing on the Greek case, this paper provides a necessary contribution to the gap in 'knowledge of non-Anglophone cultures' stressed by Evans¹³ regarding Christian nationalism and opposition to science. Although the relationship of religion and nationalism in Greece has been investigated by several researchers, this investigation has been centred on some concepts or institutions, which are in general common in all this literature. For example, it explores the millet system and its influence on the formation and preservation of the Greek Orthodox Church and of the modern Greek state; the role of Orthodoxy in the symbolic formation of national identity of the Balkans; the role of Christianity and of the Greek Orthodox Church in Greek politics; the role of the Greek Orthodox Church in the religious freedoms in Greece; and the role of specific Archbishops in Greek politics and their relationship with populism. The relationship of religion and nationalism in Greece exhibits some peculiarities, but it also exhibits some commonalities with other cases and contexts, which so far have not been in the spotlight of the literature.

This paper suggests that we shift our attention to a different theoretical framework in order to enrich and widen our understanding of nationalism in Greece. Using Christian nationalism as a lens to interpret science scepticism or opposition is relevant to the Greek case because Christian nationalism can help us better understand the contemporary surge of anti-science perspectives in Greece. Christian nationalism, most widely known in the context of United States, generally refers to the Christian identity element in nationalism rather than to any specific dogma. Furthermore, Christian nationalism, as shown below, demonstrates the relationship of Christianity with science scepticism or opposition, an element understudied in the literature on Greek nationalism. So, employing this framework to approach the anti-science phenomenon in Greece can help us more deeply and clearly comprehend it. In this sense, this paper responds to the above-mentioned appeal by Evans to enrich the literature with non-Anglophone research (which also implies that Christian nationalism, although developed in the American context, is designed to apply to other Christian contexts too) and also offers an innovative insight into contemporary aspects of Greek nationalism in Greece. Hence, this paper aspires not only to be a contribution to the comprehension of the phenomenon of the anti-vaxxers but also to be a contribution to the theories used to comprehend nationalism in Greece enriching the relevant literature on the relationship between religion and nationalism, which has so far been centred around the specific schemes mentioned above. As such, this paper has a dual aim: first, that Greek academics working on nationalism will take up Christian nationalism in Greece as both a framework and an object of study that complements existing explanations of the relationship between Christianity and nationalism in Greece; and second, that it will be a useful tool for designing further relevant research and policies that can address the phenomenon of scepticism or opposition to science.

¹³ Evans, John Hyde. 2018. *Morals Not Knowledge: Recasting the Contemporary U.S. Conflict between Religion and Science*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 13.

Theorising Christian nationalism in the American and the Greek landscape

This research is a first attempt to examine whether Christian nationalism as a theoretical framework is a useful method of interpreting anti-vaccination attitudes related to COVID-19 and, if so, whether Christian nationalism can explain current Greek nationalism better than other approaches. Christian nationalism has been mainly investigated in the United States, especially after the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump. “Christian nationalism is a powerful cultural framework that is influential beyond traditional religious boundaries and is significantly associated with a host of consequential outcomes”¹⁴ and “an ideology that idealises and advocates a fusion of American civic life with a particular type of Christian identity and culture.”¹⁵ Additionally, and of special interest to this project, Whitehead and Perry have emphasised Christian nationalists’ views toward science, while Goldberg has highlighted the Christian nationalist belief that the role of government is to defend Christian interests and not the people’s interests more broadly. More specifically, Christian nationalism has been defined as “central to explaining Americans polarised views toward science and scientists. [...] Christian nationalism is a central cultural mechanism linking politics, religion, and opposition to science.”¹⁶ Perry, Whitehead, and Grubbs connect Christian nationalism and opposition to science with Americans’ behaviour during the coronavirus pandemic.¹⁷ Goldberg broadens this approach by arguing that for Christian nationalists “true Christianity must govern every aspect of public and private life, and that all—government, science, history, culture, and relationships—must be understood according to the dictates of scripture.”¹⁸ Within the specific U.S. context, Christian nationalism has been linked to minorities’ access to material resources, support for the death penalty and other authoritarian methods of social control,¹⁹ relative political tolerance for racists, opposition to interracial families, denial of police brutality toward Black people, negative attitudes toward immigrants²⁰ and religious minorities, opposition to gun control, support

¹⁴ Baker, Joseph O. / Perry, Samuel L. and Andrew L. Whitehead. 2020. Keep America Christian (and White): Christian Nationalism, Fear of Ethnoracial Outsiders, and Intention to Vote for Donald Trump in the 2020 Presidential Election. *Sociology of Religion* 81(3), 272-93, 275.

¹⁵ Whitehead, Andrew L. and Samuel L. Perry. 2020. *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, ix–x; Gorski, Philip. 2019. *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Gorski, Philip and Samuel L. Perry. 2022. *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

¹⁶ Whitehead and Perry, *How Culture Wars Delay Herd Immunity*, 3.

¹⁷ Perry, Samuel L. / Whitehead, Andrew L. and Joshua B. Grubbs. 2020. Culture Wars and COVID-19 Conduct: Christian Nationalism, Religiosity, and Americans’ Behavior during the Coronavirus Pandemic. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 59(3), 405–16.

¹⁸ Goldberg, Michelle. 2006. *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co, 5–6.

¹⁹ Davis, Joshua T. 2018. Enforcing Christian Nationalism: Examining the Link between Group Identity and Punitive Attitudes in the United States. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 57(2), 300–17.

²⁰ Grace, Breanne Leigh and Katie Heins. 2016. Redefining Refugee: White Christian Nationalism in State Politics and Beyond. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 44(4), 555–75; Perry, Samuel L. / Whitehead, Andrew L. and Joshua B. Grubbs. 2022. The Devil That You Know: Christian Nationalism and Intent to Change One’s Voting Behavior for or against Trump in 2020. *Politics and Religion* 15(2), 229–46; Davis, Joshua T. 2019. Funding God’s Policies, Defending Whiteness: Christian Nationalism and Whites’ Attitudes towards Racially-Coded Government Spending. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42(12)

for gender traditionalism, and negative attitudes toward sexual minorities.²¹ Whitehead and Perry argue that Christian America, an America conceived of and built according to the values of Christian nationalism, is a more patriarchal America.²² This is translated into a single-family model, which copies the biblical paradigm materialising God's command for gender roles. In the application of this model, the role of the woman as obedient, submissive and responsible for child rearing is crucial both in American religious nationalism and in Greek Orthodox nationalism.²³ In the Greek context, however, not all characteristics of Christian nationalism can be applied. Carrying guns, for example, is not permitted in Greece, and this debate opens when someone (usually a Greek) kills a burglar (especially when they are Roma or immigrant), though this is rare. The same happens regarding police brutality toward Black people, as in Greece police brutality can be directed toward anyone, though it is more commonly directed at Roma people, marginalised persons and protesters.²⁴ Finally, the death penalty is not used in Greece, though it is occasionally debated, usually when a so-called heinous crime is committed by non-Greeks, as in the case known as "the murder in Glyka Nera." That was a characteristic case of femicide where the (Greek) husband, also known in Greek mainstream media as 'the pilot with the charming personality', killed his wife and her dog and pretended that they all were attacked by burglars who killed them and who spoke Greek badly.²⁵ That led many to ask for death penalty restoration, until the police announced that the husband had suffocated his wife and hung her dog in front of their 11-month daughter.²⁶

Whitehead and Perry demonstrate that Christian nationalism is a strong indicator for anti-vaccination and scepticism attitudes, even though they examine this correlation in the pre-COVID era.²⁷ The current research tests this correlation related to the Athens anti-vax protests, though in a different political, social and religious environment. Regarding the comparison of the two cases, apart from obvious common points like the high percentages of religiosity and the importance of nationalism in domestic politics, there are several important differences. The United States is a country where race is highly salient, while Greece has been historically regarded as a racially and ethnically homogenous

2123–42; Al-Kire, Rosemary L. / Pasek, Michael H. / Tsang, Jo-Ann / Lemay, Joseph and Wade C. Rowatt. 2021. Protecting America's borders: Christian nationalism, Threat, and Attitudes toward Immigrants in the United States. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 25(2), 354–78.

²¹ As summarised by Baker and Whitehead, *Keep America Christian (and White)*, 275.

²² Whitehead, Andrew L. and Samuel L. Perry. 2019. Is a 'Christian America' a More Patriarchal America? Religion, Politics, and Traditionalist Gender Ideology. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie* 56(2) 151–77.

²³ Whitehead and Perry. *Is a 'Christian America' a More Patriarchal America?*

²⁴ Antonopoulos, Georgios A. 2006. Greece: Policing Racist Violence in the 'Fenceless Vineyard,' *Race & Class* 48(2), 92–100; Karamanidou, Lena. 2016. Violence against Migrants in Greece: Beyond the Golden Dawn. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39(11), 2002–21.

²⁵ Newsroom. 2020. [Glyka Nera: The First Details about the Burglary and the Murder - They Suffocated the 20-veras-old Woman with a Pillow](#). *Ethnos.gr*, 5 May 2020.

²⁶ For example, that was argued by a woman, friend of the murderer's mother, at the funeral of the victim (THETOC Team. 2022. [Glyka Nera: The Woman Who Delivered the Epitaph at Caroline's Funeral Defended Anagnostopoulos at the Court](#). *TheToc*, 16 May 2022.) and by the President of Elliniki Lisi (Greek Solution, a far-right party which is currently at the Greek Parliament: iEidiseis, 2021. [Velopoulos on Glyka Nera: Death Penalty for the Murderers. They Do Not Have a Right to Life](#). *IEidieis.gr*, 13 May 2021).

²⁷ Whitehead and Perry, *How Culture Wars Delay Herd Immunity*.

country—an element that has been changing across the last decade with increasing impact. The role of race and ethnicity in developing a sceptical or negative attitude toward science and medicine has been researched in the United States, though not with a definite or generally accepted outcome and explanation.²⁸ Moreover, the Greek nation is a highly centralist state wherein regions have no right to question state decisions about education or health or any other policies and are obliged to implement them. The United States, on the other hand, places many policy decisions in the hands of individual states via Constitutional provisions. COVID-19 pandemic management is an illustrative case. The United States never went into federal lockdown (though some jurisdictions did), whereas Greece had one of the more long-lasting lockdowns along with Australia (from March 2020 to June 2020 and then again from November 2020 to June 2021).

There is no research nor relevant literature on Christian nationalism in Greece because the relationship of religion and nationalism has been examined in a different context (as mentioned above) and Greek researchers on nationalism have not explored whether it could contribute theoretical richness to the examination of Greek nationalism. As this is the first attempt to examine the Greek context, this project is above all an exploratory analysis that seeks to outline basic trends. Further research is needed to more deeply analyse anti-science attitudes in the general population and in groups of specific interest, such as anti-vaxxers, and their interconnection with specific political parties.

As the Greek case is different—though still comparable with the American one—this research has focused on several associations but not all of them. More specifically, this project examines the opposition or scepticism to science (adopting the terms used in literature already), the attitude toward Christian nationalism, toward abortion and same-sex couples as indicators for patriarchy, and immigrants. How these points are correlated with the contemporary political status is explained below along with the presentation of the questionnaire.

In what follows, findings are first presented followed by an exploration of whether these protests and the anti-vax perspective underlying them can be interpreted through Christian nationalism. Wherever needed for better understanding of the Greek landscape, data is cited (when available) regarding the general population to serve as a point of comparison between protesters and the general population.

The contexts of the research and its questionnaire

Since July 2021, several protests took place in cities across Greece against COVID-19 vaccination.²⁹ These protests were fuelled and strengthened by the

²⁸ Scheitle, Christopher P. and Katie E. Corcoran. 2021. COVID-19 Skepticism in Relation to Other Forms of Science Skepticism. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 7, 1-12; Whitehead and Perry, *How Culture Wars Delay Herd Immunity*, 7–8.

²⁹ The protests ranged in time, space and form: some of them took place in Athens, others in other towns (from Thessaloniki, the second biggest town in Greece to other, smaller ones); they started in the summer of 2021 and lasted for several months (until next summer); most of them took place in public space, while very few were organised outside of Ministers' houses (such the one outside the house of the Minister of Health and outside the house of the Prime Minister). In general, they were

government's decision to impose mandatory vaccination first for those working in public hospitals and later for those over 60 years old, and relatedly made life difficult for unvaccinated people by restricting and/or making expensive their access to a wide range of activities.³⁰ The obligatory nature of COVID-19 vaccination not only reinforced these protests but also allowed protesters to claim they were not against vaccination but against *mandatory* vaccination. It is indicative that this was a typical answer in almost all interviews except for a couple who said they took to the street to protest on behalf of unvaccinated colleagues who were about to lose their job as a result of hospital suspensions unless vaccinated. For example, one interviewee said she was fully vaccinated and was at the protest for this reason. This attitude was usually correlated with a left or centre political position, according to interviewee self-identifications.

Interviews were conducted at three of the many protests that took place during the summer of 2021, on 14 July, 23 July and 29 August. All three protests took place in Athens. The protesters were polite, and even those who refused to participate in the survey did so politely. However, there was one case of sexual harassment by a man who told me I had to go out on a date and sleep with him and then he might think if he wanted to participate. This is not a bad rate for Greece given the fact that 85% of women in Greece have suffered sexual harassment in the workplace.³¹

All interviewees were over 18 years old, and I tried to keep a balance between male and female protesters and regarding age ranges. Despite clashes with police in two of the three protests, I completed 59 questionnaires.³² In general,

peaceful, and only in those in Athens there were clashes with the police (as mentioned in more detail below): AlertTV.gr. 2021. [Exclusive! Huge Protest for the Vaccine and People Working in Hospitals Now in Thessaloniki](#). *AlertTV.gr*, 12 December 2021; Astraparis. 2021. [Protest of Anti-Vaxxers at Vounakiou Square \(Chios\)](#). *Astraparis Chios News Online*, 5 December 2021; CNN newsroom. 2022. [Protest of Antivaxxers outside Plevris's House-"They Target My Family"](#). *CNN Greece*, 27 June 2022; Creta24.gr. 2021. [Protest of Anti-Vaxxers in Herakleion \(Photos\)](#). *Creta24.gr*, 14 July 2021; e-thessalia.gr. 2021. [Protest against the Mandatory Vaccination at the Seaside of Volos](#). *E-Thessalia.gr*, 14 July 2021; Makedonia. 2021. [The Antivaxxers Filled the Omonoia Square in Kavala \(Video and Photos\)](#). *Makedonia*, 21 July 2021; Newsroom Iefimerida.gr. 2021. [Protest against the Mandatory Vaccination at Megaro Moussikis \(Photos\)](#). *Iefimerida.gr*, 19 December 2021; Newsroom Iefimerida.gr. 2022. [Thessaloniki: \(Confronted\) with Protests at the Opening of DETH-Where Protests Will Take Place](#). *Iefimerida.gr*, 10 September 2022; Newsroom. 2021. [Thessaloniki: New Protest of Antivaxxers at the Centre of the Town](#). *Kathimerini*, 31 October 2021; Paliyianni, Dimitra. [The Anti-Vaxxers of the Town \(Are\) Unrepentant-New Protest at Lefkos Pyrgos \(Video and Photos\)](#). *Makedonia*, 27 June 2021; Peloponnisos Media. 2021. [Protest of Anti-Vaxxers 28/07/2021 Patras](#). *Peloponnisos Media*, 28 July 2021; Proinos Typos. 2021. [Protest of Anti-Vaxxers at Plateia Eleftherias in Drama](#). *Proinos Typos*, 14 July 2021; Serres24.gr. 2021. [Serres: Protest of Anti-Vaxxers on Wednesday 14 July](#). *Serres24.gr*, 13 July 2021; Tempo24. 2022. [Patras: Protest of Anti-Vaxxers- The Vaccine Is Toxic-The Mutations Are Constructed \(Photos-Video\)](#). *Tempo24.gr*, 9 January 2022; Karamitrou, Mina. 2022. [Protest of People Working in Hospitals outside Kyriakos Mitsotakis's House-35 Arrests](#). *CNN Greece*, 7 July 2022; Law & Order Newsroom. 2022. [Protest of Anti-Vaxxers at Lefkos Pyrgos on Sunday](#). *Law and Order*, 2 March 2022.

³⁰ I Efimerida ton Sintakton. 2021. [The Unvaccinated in Stranglehold since Fall](#). *I Efimerida Ton Sintakton*, 24 August 2021.

³¹ Act!onAid. 2020. [Research: This Is Not Our Job. Sexual Harassment against Women in Workplace: Examining the Case of Service and Tourism](#) (accessed: 25 February 2021).

³² Even though the sample might seem (and be) small, it should be stressed that this was not a research in the general population but, instead, a research conducted among a very specific population which had made a very specific choice: to take to the streets in order to march against the (mandatory) vaccination against COVID-19 holding Greek flags, singing the national anthem and

the presence of the police and, more specifically, of its units for order restoration (known in Greece with their acronym MAT and known also for the extreme violence they use against demonstrators diachronically) was obvious and intense.³³

Across all three protests, there was clear evidence that the protesters tend to adopt conspiracy theories. Anti-Masonry references were prevalent, for example: For example, there was the slogan with anti-Masonry references ‘scumbags, masons, no one can save you.’ and the slogans against this is a reference to the belief that some cabal, such as the New World Order (NWO) or Masons that is supposedly behind the pandemic. The belief that the masons are behind the pandemic is one of many conspiracy theories around COVID-19, as in the Greek context, this conspiracy theory is exacerbated since Masonry is regarded as a heresy hostile to Orthodoxy. The argument about the NWO was common enough among the interviewees, and it also is a common conspiracy belief in the conspiracy theories’ proponents worldwide, which in turn is common in right-wingers and nationalists. Several other examples also demonstrate anti-science viewpoints: Another example is when a protester asked me why I was wearing a face mask and told me that this meant that I was already enslaved—without clarifying to whom; or the slogan ‘hands off of our children’ as if someone were trying to damage their children. Together, these sorts of claims imply a deep and embedded distrust toward science. I suggest that more research should be done in Greece to better uncover and address so that the roots of this distrust are made clearer, specifically in the Greek context. Conspiracy theories are not a new phenomenon in Greece, and maybe one of the most infamous conspiracies claims that airplanes fly over the country to spray its residents with something. Of course, no one knows exactly what this is, there is debate about what exactly is being sprayed, but some options include keeping citizens calm, holding them in check, and preventing them from reacting against to unfair and burdensome policies. Nevertheless, limited research on conspiracy theories within the Greek context has been done, for example, the reasons why Greeks support them, the relationship of conspiracy theories with religion, nationalism, anti-vaccination attitude, the alt-right or violent extremism, or how these theories are created and spread, as is the case with other countries.³⁴ This limited research is made

chanting nationalist slogans. In any case, it would be useful to repeat it with a bigger sample, as already mentioned in the paper.

³³ Fili, Andriani. 2021. [The Violent Hellenic Police](#). *Border Crimilogies*, 25 March 2021; Stamatakou, Eleni. 2022. [Greek Police Clash Violently with Protesters Marking Teen’s Death](#). *Balkan Insight*, 7 December 2022; Stamouli, Nektaria. 2021. [Police Brutality on the Rise in Locked-down Greece](#). *Politico*, 11 January 2021; The Manifold and Solomon. 2021. [Police Violence and Impunity in Greece](#). *The Manifold Files*, 25 October 2021, only to mention some recent reports.

³⁴ Sobo, Elisa J. and Elżbieta Drażkiewicz. 2021. Rights, Responsibilities and Revelations: COVID-19 Conspiracy Theories and the State, in *Viral Loads: Anthropologies of Urgency in the Time of COVID-19*, edited by Manderson, Lenore / Burke, Nancy J. and Ayo Wahlberg. London: UCL Press, 67-88; Hellinger, Daniel C. 2018. *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theories in the Age of Trump*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan; Clarke, Steve. 2002. Conspiracy Theories and Conspiracy Theorizing. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 32(2), 131–50; Oliver, J. Eric and Thomas J. Wood. 2014. Conspiracy Theories and the Paranoid Style(s) of Mass Opinion. *American Journal of Political Science* 58(4), 952–66; Shahsavari, Shadi / Holur, Pavan / Wang, Tianyi / Tangherlini, Timothy R. and Vwani Roychowdhury. 2020. Conspiracy in the Time of Corona: Automatic Detection of Emerging COVID-19 Conspiracy Theories in Social Media and the News. *Journal of Computational Social Science* 3(2), 279–317; MacMillen, Sarah Louise and Timothy Rush. 2021. QAnon—Religious Roots, Religious Responses. *Critical Sociology* 48(6), 989–1004; Keeley, Brian L. 1999. Of Conspiracy Theories, *The*

within the theoretical framework of psychiatry or psychology, while literature on nationalism (which is our special interest in this paper) has not been involved with them.³⁵

In all protests there were many Greek flags, flags of the Greek Church and Orthodox Christian religion, and flags and banners of para-religious groups. There were also banners and flyers of right-wing parties with those of the two ex-members of Golden Dawn Giannis Lagos and Elias Kassidiaris' ELASYN and Greeks for the Homeland respectively being the most populous. The anti-government sentiment was intense in the protests and slogans against the government could often be heard. I cite, among others, the slogans "quit" or "down the Mitsotakis's dictatorship" and a slogan common among neo-Nazi and far-right circles in Greece, that is, "betrayers, rats, politicians," which is against all politicians of the mainstream parties, right and left, who are considered to be betrayers of the homeland—among others, they have betrayed Cyprus and so half of it is occupied by Turkey, and Macedonia by allowing North Macedonia to adopt this name instead of Skopje.³⁶

The interview questionnaire was based on the questionnaire used by Baker, Perry, and Whitehead,³⁷ which is also used in the Baylor Religion Survey and the Chapman University Survey of American Fears partially and by Baker, Perry, and Whitehead³⁸ and Whitehead, Perry, and Baker.³⁹ Some of the questionnaire is used verbatim to the original, while other questions have been adjusted to the Greek environment. More specifically, the variable dependents are the same as in Baker, Perry, and Whitehead, "We rely too much on science and not enough on faith"; "Most scientists are hostile to religion"; "Creationism should be taught in public schools"; "Science will eventually provide solutions to most of our problems"; and "Humans evolved from other primates over millions of years." Possible response options ranged from "strongly disagree" (0) to "strongly agree" (4), with "undecided" (2) as the middle category.⁴⁰ Some of the independent variables measuring Christian nationalism used by the same authors⁴⁰ are kept the same: "that the government should declare Greece a Christian nation?"; "that the government should advocate Christian values?"⁴¹ The Greek government already advocates Christian values; however, I chose to

Journal of Philosophy 96(3), 109-26, 109; Dentith, Matthew R. X. 2014. *The Philosophy of Conspiracy Theories*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan; Brotherton, Robert. 2015. *Suspicious Minds: Why We Believe Conspiracy Theories*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Sigma; Coady, David. (ed.). 2018. *Conspiracy Theories: The Philosophical Debate*. London, New York, NY: Routledge; Jolley, Daniel and Karen M. Douglas. 2014. The Effects of Anti-Vaccine Conspiracy Theories on Vaccination Intentions. *PLoS ONE* 9(2), 1-9.

³⁵ Ta Nea Team. 2021. [Research: Almost 16% of the Greeks Believe the Conspiracy Theory of 5G](#). *Ta Nea*, 24 July 2021; Gemenis, Kostas. 2020. Who Believes the Conspiracy Theories for the New Coronavirus?. *The Greek Review of Social Research* 154, 97-108, 97.

³⁶ See also Hemmer, Nicole. 2016. *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

³⁷ Baker, Joseph O. / Perry, Samuel L. and Andrew L. Whitehead. 2020. Crusading for Moral Authority: Christian Nationalism and Opposition to Science. *Sociological Forum* 35(3), 587-607.

³⁸ Baker / Perry and Whitehead. *Keep America Christian (and White)*.

³⁹ Whitehead, Andrew L. / Perry Samuel L and Joseph O. Baker. 2018. Make America Christian Again: Christian Nationalism and Voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election. *Sociology of Religion* 79(2), 147-71.

⁴⁰ Baker / Perry and Whitehead, *Crusading for Moral Authority*, 595-96.

⁴¹ Baker / Perry and Whitehead, *Crusading for Moral Authority*, 594.

keep it the same and measure the responses of the interviewees because they can be an indicator of how they see this topic and the government in relation to this. Remaining questions were modified from their original form. The third question asks, “that the government should keep the display of religious symbols in public spaces?” In Greece, religious symbols of the Orthodox Christian religion are displayed in public spaces. The possibility of abolishing such displays as a case of moderate state-church separation was used as a pending danger during the discussion of the constitutional revision under the previous government of Syriza and ANEL by the conservative government and opposition at that time. As a result of this reaction, it was never done. Similarly, the fourth question is also modified as ‘that the government should keep the prayer in public schools?’ because this already happens in Greece. The fifth question was modified to, “that the government should not enforce a strict separation of church and state?” because Greece is not a secular state and the moderate separation proposed by the previous government and mentioned above did not materialise since it had to be ratified by the current parliament and the new government rejected this amendment. This question was not reverse coded as in Baker, Perry, and Whitehead⁴² because it was modified as the government should not enforce it. Finally, the last question has been modified only regarding the state’s name for obvious reasons as “the success of Greece is part of God’s plan”.

Apart from these questions, some of which are also asked in the World Values survey and, thus, allow comparison with the U.S. case and with the general population in Greece, I also asked a few more questions to measure protester attitudes on topics related to Christian nationalism. That is, I asked:

1. “Do you go to church?” with possible answers: “a. never, b. once/week, c. once/month, d. only in the important holidays of Christianity”.
2. “In your opinion, abortions a. should be allowed only in case of danger for the pregnant woman’s life, b. continue under the current status, c. should never be allowed for whatever reason.

Abortions in Greece have been legal since 1987 and the second term of office of PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement). This status was not challenged until recently and, more specifically, since the current term of office of New Democracy, when various actors (the Church of Greece, New Right, a party created by ex-members of New Democracy and Failos Kranidiotis, the ex-counsellor of the former PM with New Democracy Antonis Samaras, MPs with the current government, the Panhellenic Doctors Association under the presidency of Giorgos Patoulis, party member of New Democracy, head of the Region of Attica and doctor himself, among others) try to open this topic and, subsequently, change this legal status.⁴³ This strategy is not new. It follows the current of almost all conservative and new-right parties in Europe and the United States, which object to abortions,⁴⁴ even when they do it in an undercover

⁴² Baker / Perry and Whitehead. *Keep America Christian (and White)*, 278.

⁴³ Mareta, Dimitra. 2022. New Right and Women’s Vote: Notes on the Current Conjunction. *Utopia*, 143-160, 139.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Durham, Martin. 1993. The New Right, Moral Crusades and the Politics of the Family: The New Right and the Politics of the Family. *Economy and Society* 22(2), 253–56; Pollack Petchesky, Rosalind. 1981. Antiabortion, Antifeminism, and the Rise of the New Right. *Feminist*

way as in the case of Marine Le Pen.⁴⁵ It is, therefore, important to measure the attitude of the participants in these protests regarding this crucial topic not only for Christian nationalists but also for conservative, new-right, far-right and neo-Nazi parties.

3. “In your opinion, should same-sex couples have the same rights with heterosexual couples or not?”

Like abortions, the rights of same-sex couples are an important topic in conservative and far-right circles. In Greece, these couples were invisible until the cohabitation agreement for same-sex couples was ratified in 2015, providing several rights to them but not the right to adoption. It also caused negative reactions from conservative and far-right circles, among them the New Democracy party, which officially did not vote for it and asked its MPs to vote according to their personal beliefs and attitudes guided, of course, by the Church.⁴⁶ This question is, therefore, one more ideological indicator for the protesters, while measuring also patriarchy.

4. ‘In your opinion, was the Prespa Agreement good, bad, treasonous, or it could be better?’

This question had to do with the Prespa Agreement and how the protesters assessed it. The Agreement ended a long-lasting dispute about the name of the state of North Macedonia, a topic causing big tension in Greece due to the inclusion of the word ‘Macedonia’ in the name, and it caused severe reactions from both mainstream and nationalist parties. These reactions contributed to the reinforcement of conspiracy theories and irrationalism in Greece.

Each of these answers reflects the attitudes of the political parties and/or ideological approaches toward the Agreement. The Agreement was “good” according to SYRIZA, which characterised it as a mutually beneficial agreement. KIN.AL (Kinima Allagis, meaning Movement for Change, the coalition party that succeeded PASOK and is currently using both names, that is, PASOK/KIN.AL.) stated the Agreement was bad and voted against it. The Agreement ‘could be better’ was the approach of Potami (the River), a typical liberal party, which was split over the vote about the Agreement with half of the party supporting it and half voting against it. Under the characterisation ‘treasonous,’ I classified the rest of the parties and political powers which opposed the Agreement, were part of the wide spectrum of (mainstream) right and extreme right in Greece and supported the rallies.

5. “Greece should a. not accept migrants and refugees at all and deport those who are already here; b. accept few of them to come; c. accept whoever wants to come here.”

Studies 7(2), 206-246, 206; Somerville, Jennifer. 1992. The New Right and Family Politics. *Economy and Society* 21(2), 93–128.

⁴⁵ Mayer, Nonna. 2015. The Closing of the Radical Right Gender Gap in France?. *French Politics* 13(4), 391-414, 400–401.

⁴⁶ Adamopoulos, Anastassios. 2015. Greek Parliament Ratifies Civil Union Agreement for Same-Sex Couples. *Greek Reporter*, 22 December 2015.

This question has to do with the debate going on in Greece about the refugee crisis and its management both by the previous and the current government. It also has to do with the fact that immigration is closely intertwined with nationalism. Immigration is connected with racial concerns by right-wingers and Christian nationalists⁴⁷, including debates around citizenship and belonging.⁴⁸ In Greece, this has a special significance given that Greece is the only country where an openly neo-Nazi party has had parliamentary representation from 2012 to 2019. Moreover, in Greece, the topic is openly connected with Greek politics since the current government criticised the former for its refugee policy, calling it an open borders policy. Instead, the current government has chosen to speak about the refugee crisis as a migration problem, arguing that there are no wars pushing people to leave their countries and travel to Europe. This administration has implemented a closed borders policy, including pushbacks, and has replaced refugee camps with closed facilities.⁴⁹ This shift in both rhetoric and policy has contributed to a shift in the attitudes of the population toward refugees and migrants, igniting increased anti-refugee, anti-migrant, and nationalist sentiments.

6. “Where would you put yourself in the political spectrum: a. far left, b. left, c. centre, d. right, d. far-right?”

This final question had to do with the self-identified political positions of protesters; however, several of the interviewees refused to answer and instead gave me their own explanations of ideology. In this field research, I did not ask which party they support but how they characterise themselves. Scheitle and Corcovan have measured the political ideology in the United States as from very liberal to very conservative.⁵⁰ This scale would not be appropriate for Greece, since in it the division of the left/right still covers the liberal/conservative division; nevertheless, there is an attempt from a part of the political system (mainly SYRIZA-Progressive Alliance and part of PASOK/KIN.AL.) to turn it into a clear progressive/conservative division. Nevertheless, it should be noted

⁴⁷ Zúquete, José Pedro. 2015. The New Frontlines of Right-Wing Nationalism. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 20(1), 69–85; Perry, Samuel L. and Andrew L. Whitehead. 2015. Christian Nationalism, Racial Separatism, and Family Formation: Attitudes toward Transracial Adoption as a Test Case. *Race and Social Problems* 7(2), 123–34; Gupta, Suman and Virdee, Satnam. 2018. Introduction: European Crises: Contemporary Nationalisms and the Language of ‘Race’. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41(10), 1747–64; Molina, Natalia. 2014. *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Yuval-Davis, Nira. 2011. *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations*. London: Sage; Stone, John and Polly Rizova. 2020. *From Obama to Trump: The Dialectics of Race and Nationalism in Contemporary America*, in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism*, edited by Stone, John / Rutledge, Dennis M. / Rizova, Polly S. and Xiaoshuo Hou. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 29–42; Molina, *How Race Is Made in America*; Joppke, Christian. 1999. *Immigration and the Nation-State: The United States, Germany, and Great Britain*. Oxford, New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Norocel, Ov Cristian / Hellström, Anders and Martin Bak Jørgensen. (eds.). 2020. *Nostalgia and Hope: Intersections between Politics of Culture, Welfare, and Migration in Europe*. Cham: Springer; Earnest, David C. 2008. *Old Nations, New Voters: Nationalism, Transnationalism, and Democracy in the Era of Global Migration*, Albany, GA: SUNY Press.

⁴⁹ Aggelidis, Dimitris. 2021. Refugees Deterrence, the Plan of Greece. *I Efimerida Ton Sintakton*, 17 August 2021; I Efimerida Ton Sintakton. 2019. Refugees under Persecution. *I Efimerida Ton Sintakton*, 1 October 2019; Koros, Dimitris. 2021. The Normalization of Pushbacks in Greece: Biopolitics and Racist State Crime. *State Crime Journal* 10(2), 238–56.

⁵⁰ Scheitle and Corcoran, *COVID-19 Skepticism*, 5.

that Greece is a traditionally conservative country with quite a conservative political system and quite a traditional view for women's position in society and in politics, as well as a generally negative view toward LGBTQI+ persons. For example, 33.3% would not like to have "homosexuals" (as is the term used in the survey) as neighbours.⁵¹

Basic demographic characteristics were also collected, such as sex ("man/woman"), age, and education. I use the terms 'sex/man/woman' based on the reactions of the protesters. Many of them did not give me much space to discuss gender, seeming surprised I would ask since I could supposedly see their sex for myself. I did not ask about income or employment, as it was a face-to-face procedure and I did not want to cause any discomfort to the interviewees. As mentioned previously, I tried to include as many people from different ages as possible, but it was not possible to have a perfect age stratification. After all, the purpose of this field research was to examine the attitudes of people participating in anti-vaccination protests through the lens of Christian nationalism and not to provide a complete picture of Christian nationalism in Greece. In the next section, I present the results of my research and discuss them in relation to my central working hypothesis about Christian nationalism and its basic features. The presentation is descriptive, no internal consistency has been made, and no statistical difference has been tested for this specific research (even though these tests have been run by those who created the questionnaire).

Results and discussion

I interviewed 59 persons, including 27 women and 32 men. Seventeen of them were between 20-29 years old, 17 between 30-39, 11 between 40-49, 11 between 50-59, and 3 were 61 or older. One of them had completed only the compulsory education (in Greece since 1964 compulsory schooling has been nine years, including 6 years primary school and 3 years in lower secondary school); 27 of them had completed 14 years of education with the 3 years of the upper secondary school; 6 of them were students at universities at the time of the interview; 21 had graduated from university; 3 held postgraduate degrees; and 1 held a PhD.

Regarding the views of the interviewees on the relation of religion and opposition to science, findings illustrate a clear tendency of opposition toward science accompanied by a strong support for a Christian state. If we exempt the question (for reasons explained below when examining the answers) on the effectiveness of science against human problems ('Science will eventually provide solutions to most of our problems') and the question about evolution ('Humans evolved from other primates over millions of years. '), all other questions show an overwhelming alignment with the basic premises of Christian nationalism. So, more specifically, on the first question, 'We rely too much on science and not enough on faith', 25.42% replied that they disagree (only one disagreeing totally, 1.69%, and the rest (23.73%) just disagreeing), while 50.85% said that they agree (22.03% just agreeing and 28.81% strongly agreeing, 13 and 17 persons respectively). The respective percentage in the general population in Greece is 66.4% for disagreement and 21.2% for agreement, as mentioned above. This finding demonstrates clear opposition to science in favour of religion.

⁵¹ Dianeosis, *World Values Survey*, 30.

On the second question, 'Most scientists are hostile to religion', 32.20% said that they disagree (either totally, 5.08%, or just disagree, 27.12%, while almost half of the interviewees agree: 25.42% just agree and 22.03% strongly agree, a total of 47.46%. This is an important finding since it points towards a hostility against scientists as part of the anti-vaccination attitudes. Additionally, however, several protesters stated they believe scientists in general are not hostile toward religion, which is why they "disagree" but that the scientists of the committee specifically are hostile toward religion. This implies suspiciousness toward the COVID-19 scientific committee in Greece, stemming either from its choices and subsequent diminished trust or from the fact that interviewees did not trust these scientists in particular and believe that their actual goal is to diminish Christianity in Greece. One protester, for example, said she does trust scientists in general but was never going to take the COVID-19 vaccine because it is poison—neither was she going to let her children, who were with her in the protests, take it. Another protester told me they trust scientists in general but not those in the scientific committee against COVID-19. So, even though almost half of the interviewees agree scientists are hostile to religion, which shows a clear anti-science trend amongst protesters, the fact that a considerable percentage (20.34%) did not express a solid opinion (neither agree nor disagree) and 32.20% disagree, suggests there is room left for interventions, so that this tendency does not consolidate.

The third question about creationism ('Creationism should be taught in public schools') has the highest percentage of agreement. More than 76% of participants either agree or strongly agree with this statement, which means the most fundamental premise of Christianity is embedded in points of view about the world for people participating in these anti-vax protests. Accepting creationism and advocating that it be an essential part of school curricula indicates a fundamentally non-scientific way of thinking.

On the contrary, the next question, 'Science will eventually provide solutions to most of our problems', is one of two questions with the most balanced answers. Here, 42.27% disagree (20.34% disagree totally and 22.80% just disagree), while 38.98% agree (32.20% just agreeing and 6.78% strongly agreeing)⁵². Similarly, related to the fifth question, ('Humans evolved from other primates over millions of years'), was also relatively balanced with 37.29% disagreeing (27.12% totally disagree and 10.17% just disagree) and 40.68% agreeing (20.34% just agree and 20.34% strongly agree). There is no exact point of comparison between these findings and the general population, however.

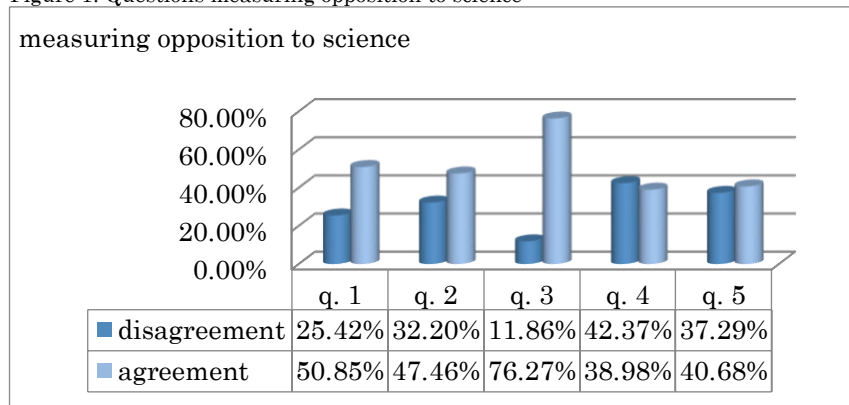
On the first question of this research, the closest question (asked to the general population) is whether science will eventually explain everything, in which 30% say that it will and 66% say that science will never explain everything⁵³. There is a significant difference between these findings but perhaps the most striking

⁵² Believing that science will not eventually provide solutions to most of our problems might be also something non-believers or atheists claim; this is not something we exclusively meet among religious people. However, as this question was in the questionnaire used in the survey it is also kept here but it is useful to stress that this question can also outline scepticism or acknowledgement if the limitations science might have and not necessarily opposition to science.

⁵³ Pew Research Center, *Religious Belief*, 125.

is the one that says that science will not explain everything in the general Greek population. On the question about evolution, 66% say that humans and other living things have evolved over time, 29% of respondents said humans have existed in our present state since the beginning of time, 46% of them say that they have evolved due to natural selection, while 17% under guidance of a supreme being.⁵⁴ Several interviewees' first reactions when hearing this question was something similar to 'Darwinism! Ooh, no!' and explain that this viewpoint is against their religion. One interviewee even told me he disagrees with evolution and those who argue in favour of it will have to explain why monkeys stopped turning into human beings. This, in his opinion, is clear proof that Darwin was wrong and human beings did not evolve from other primates because they would continue to do so today—because they are not, humans were instead created by God.

Figure 1. Questions measuring opposition to science

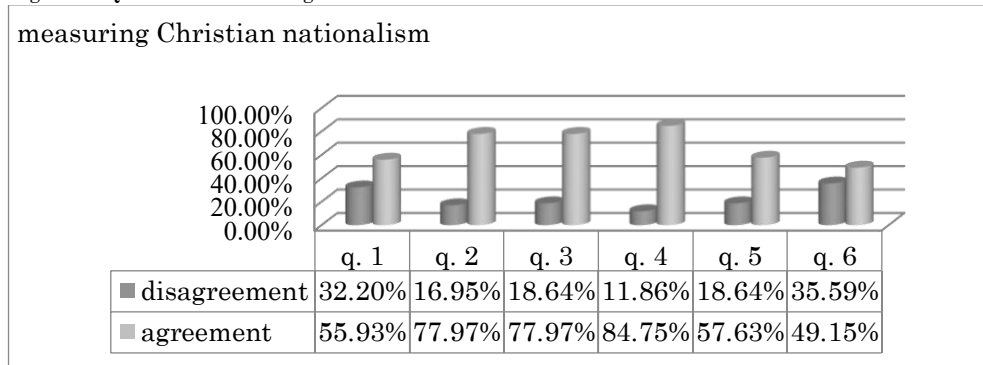


- q. 1: We rely too much on science and not enough on faith
- q. 2: Most scientists are hostile to religion
- q. 3: Creationism should be taught in public schools
- q. 4: Science will eventually provide solutions to most of our problems
- q. 5: Humans evolved from other primates over millions of years

Responses from protester-participants thus far indicate a clear tendency to doubt science and its interpretation about our world. This provides support to previous findings from the United States related to science opposition in favour of religion. This as a central feature of Christian nationalism, which strongly reinforces its relevance as a theoretical lens for Greek nationalism, if we add to the findings so far the findings from the five questions measuring Christian nationalism.

⁵⁴ Pew Research Center, *Religious Belief*, 122–23.

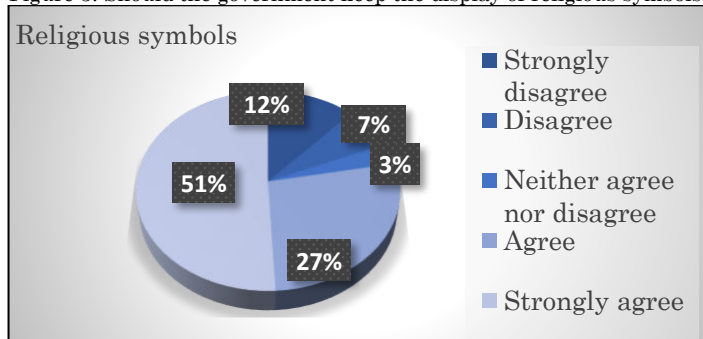
Figure 2. Questions measuring Christian nationalism.



More specifically, on the first question (‘that the government should declare Greece a Christian nation’), the majority of interviewees agree. Almost 56% agree, with 27.12% just agreeing and 28.81% strongly agreeing. In contrast, 32.20% replied that they disagreed: 13.56% totally and 18.64% just disagreeing. This is an interesting finding because Greece is a Christian state that recognises one prevailing religion (Christian Orthodoxy) and one prevailing Church, the Church of Greece, in its Constitution. So, even though the majority agree with this statement, the interesting finding here is that one out of the three Greek citizens disagree with the current state of religiosity in the country. The following three statements are the ones with the highest percentages of agreement in the whole questionnaire. On the question of whether the government should advocate Christian values, an overwhelming majority of 77.97% agree (22.03% just agree and 55.93% strongly agree). Only a scarce 16.95% disagree (5.08% totally and 11.86% just disagree) with this statement. This, worryingly, hints at the belief that a Greek state should include only white and Orthodox Christians, excluding everyone else, and that it exists to the service and defence of religion. This takes us back to the approach of Goldberg about Christian nationalism while also confirming a central dimension of Greek politics—that of the intertwining of religion and politics.⁵⁵

This is also confirmed by the answers to the eighth question about whether or not the government should keep the display of religious symbols in public spaces.

Figure 3. Should the government keep the display of religious symbols in public spaces?



⁵⁵ Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming*.

Here also the majority of 77.97% agree (though with a slight difference in the percentages of plain or strong agreement: 27.12% and 50.85% respectively), while 18.64% disagree (11.64% totally and 6.78 just disagree). The ninth question about whether the government should keep prayer in public schools has the highest rate of agreement: only 11.86% of respondents replied that they disagree (and all of them totally) and 84.75% (either 30.51% just or 54.24% strongly) agree. This points to an exclusionary, instead of an inclusionary, state with high levels of nationalism seeking to function as its archetype. In other words, this ideology separates and excludes some from belonging to the group that nationalism has framed as homogeneous according to specific criteria. In the case of Greece, the principal criterion was religion due to the specific conditions out of which the modern Greek state was created—as an Orthodox nation claiming its liberty against the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁶ Greece has been a country of reception for immigrants over the last 30 years and also during the ongoing refugee crisis since 2015—though it has been limited since the E.U.-Turkey Agreement. Nevertheless, thousands of refugees, mainly Muslims, live in the country, and their children might attend school. However, not all refugee children go to school for a variety of reasons. These reasons include the reactions of local societies, bureaucratic problems, the digital divide during the online pandemic learning environment (lack of technology and/or internet), and racist and xenophobic government policies.⁵⁷ A state that defends Christian values, keeps religious symbols in public spaces and encourages group prayer in school—every morning all pupils gather and one of them leads the prayer—is a state that conceives of its citizens as only those who comply with its religious programme. These practices separate insiders from outsiders⁵⁸ and exacerbate racial separatism⁵⁹ and support for white nationalism.⁶⁰ This points to race as a critical parameter of the formation of the current Greek national(ist) identity, which is currently understudied and should be further explored. To date, there is little research that accounts for race related to the Greek nationalist identity, and it

⁵⁶ Hobsbawm, Eric J. 2000. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁷ Fotopoulos, Nikos. 2022. Fascist Attacks against Refugee Children-Pupils. *I Efimerida Ton Sintakton*, 29 January 2022; I Efimerida Ton Sintakton, Refugees under persecution; Margaritidou, Stellina. 2020. Cores of Racism in Intercultural Schools. *I Efimerida Ton Sintakton*, 27 September 2020; Pagoudis, Giorgos. 2021. 20,000 Refugee Children (Are) out of Education. *I Efimerida Ton Sintakton*, 16 September 2021; Refugee Support Aegean. 2021. Excluded and Segregated. The Vanishing Education of Refugee Children in Greece. *Refugee Support Aegean*, 13 April 2021; Vergou, Pinelopi. 2019. Living with Difference: Refugee Education and School Segregation Processes in Greece. *Urban Studies* 56(15), 3162–77. For a general picture of these politics, see also Koros, *The Normalization of Pushbacks in Greece*.

⁵⁸ Baker / Perry and Whitehead, *Crusading for Moral Authority*, 591.

⁵⁹ Graham, Amanda / Cullen, Francis T. / Butler, Leah C. / Burton, Alexander L. and Velmer S. Burton, Jr. 2021. Who Wears the MAGA Hat? Racial Beliefs and Faith in Trump. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 7, 1-16; Perry and Whitehead, *Christian Nationalism*.

⁶⁰ Berry, Damon T. 2017. *Blood and Faith: Christianity in American White Nationalism*. Syracuse, New York, NY: Syracuse University Press; Blum, Edward J. 2005. *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-198*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press; Delehanty, Jack / Edgell, Penny and Evan Stewart. 2019. Christian America? Secularized Evangelical Discourse and the Boundaries of National Belonging. *Social Forces* 97(3), 1283–306; Shortle, Allyson F. and Ronald Keith Gaddie. 2015. Religious Nationalism and Perceptions of Muslims and Islam. *Politics and Religion* 8(3), 435–57; Stroope, Samuel / Rackin, Heather M. and Paul Froese. 2021. Christian Nationalism and Views of Immigrants in the United States: Is the Relationship Stronger for the Religiously Inactive?. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 7, 1-14.

is from the point of view of ethnography, while political science has mainly ignored it, especially regarding the developments since 2015 and the refugee crisis.⁶¹

The replies to the question regarding the separation of state and church ('the government should not enforce a strict separation of church and state') show significant opposition to separation. 18.64% disagree (either totally, 10.17%, or just disagree, 8.47%) and 57.63% agree (27.12% just disagree and 30.51% strongly disagree) with the rest 23.73% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. This rate is high for a Western European country.⁶² On the other hand, it is not surprising to find support for integration of state and church amongst U.S. Christians either (Pew Research Center, 2021). In Greece, in the general population, 66% believe religious leaders should 'have either "not too much influence" in political matters or "no influence at all"⁶³, indicating the majority of Greeks support separation of state and church. The percentage of protesters (57.63%) opposing this separation is, then, quite high compared to the rate in the general population (34%).⁶⁴

Figure 4: The government should not enforce a strict separation of church and state

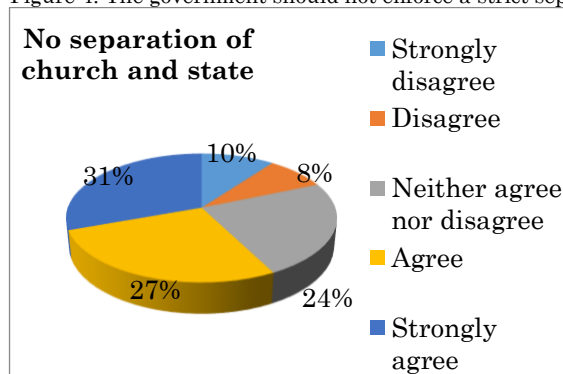


Figure 5: Replies whether state and church should be separated correlated with political position

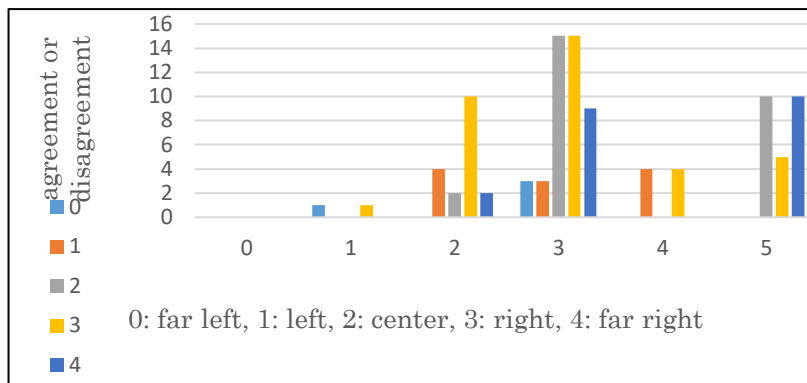
⁶¹ Papadantonakis, Max. 2020. Black Athenians: Making and Resisting Racialized Symbolic Boundaries in the Greek Street Market. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 49(3), 291–317.

⁶² Fahmy, Dalia. 2019. In Western Europe, Most People Back Church-State Separation Even While Many Willingly Pay Church Tax. *Paw Research Center*, 28 May 2019.

⁶³ Sahgal, Neha and Alan Cooperman. 2017. Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe. *Paw Research Center*, 10 May 2017.

⁶⁴ Sahgal, *Religious Belief*.

Can Christian nationalism explain anti-vaccination attitudes against COVID-19 in Greece?



The final question of those measuring Christian nationalism (‘the success of Greece is part of God’s plan’) was treated by several interviewees with cynicism, as they commented that Greece is not a success story. Hence, 35.59% replied that they disagree with this statement (18.64% totally and 16.95% just disagree) and 49.15% agree (23.73% just agree and 25.42% strongly agree). Despite the cynicism toward this question, half of the interviewees interpret the country’s success as planned by God.

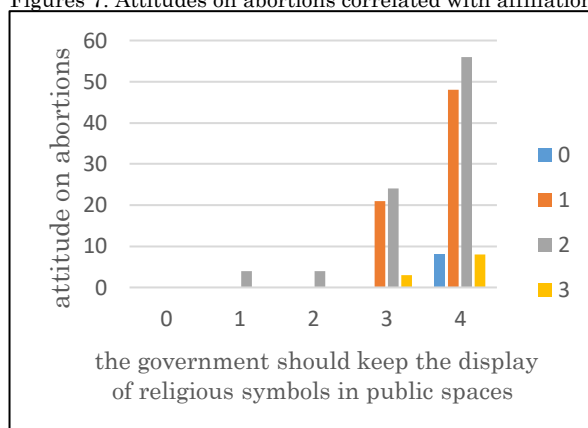
The question measuring attitudes toward the Prespa Agreement is useful in drawing some conclusions about the extent to which opposition to the Agreement and the rhetoric about it is correlated with anti-vax attitudes. A total of 2 out of 59 interviewees replied that it was a good agreement (3.39%), 3 (5.08%) that it was bad, 44 (74.58%) that it was a betrayal, and 8 (13.56%) that it could be better, while 2 refused to reply. Therefore, an overwhelming majority of respondents viewed the Agreement through the extreme right and nationalist rhetoric. If we add to them the second negative answer choice (i.e., the Agreement was ‘bad’), 80 percent of interviewed participants in the anti-vax protests have a negative opinion of the Prespa Agreement. Unsurprisingly, these answers echo nationalist discourse even more than two years after its conclusion. Notably, only two of the interviewees assessed it as a good agreement, which reflects the attitude of the left. That means that the conviction that the Prespa Agreement was treasonous is deeply embedded. The fact that the current government, which was part of the rallies against it as opposition, keeps an unclear stance toward it—by not obstructing its implementation internally while also reprimanding North Macedonia for not abiding by the Agreement internationally—probably fuels these attitudes. However, it is clear that a very high percentage of those who regard the Agreement as a betrayal were participating in these anti-vax protests.

This assessment of the Prespa Agreement by Greek anti-vax protesters connects them with global anti-vax attitudes correlated with the extreme right. The anti-vax movements all around the world, and pandemic denial as well, are organised and supported by far-right parties and organisations. Greece is not an exception. The Greek anti-vax movement has helped the extreme right return to the central political scene and be a significant factor in domestic politics after the electoral decline of Golden Dawn. If this return is going to be successful, it depends on more things than just the developments brought about by pandemic

management. Nevertheless, anti-vax protests give nationalist parties and organisations an opportunity to rally support and potentially cause backsliding in people’s freedom and rights. As such, the Greek case lends support to the suggestion that most voices against the management of the pandemic and associated restrictions come from a far-right and nationalist motivation (see, for example, the cases of Austria, Holland, Germany, the United States, and Australia), which may imply a further reinforcement of nationalism worldwide. Regarding the remaining questions measuring the relationship with the church, patriarchy, and attitudes toward migration, 22 of the interviewees (6 women and 16 men) replied that abortion should be allowed only if the life of the pregnant woman was in danger; 32 (19 women and 13 men) replied that it should continue as it is (allowed and legal), 3 (1 woman and 2 men) replied that it should not be allowed in any case, and 2 replied it should be allowed only in cases of rape. This shows significant support—among these protesters—for women’s rights to reproductive freedom. On the other hand, it also shows that a significant percentage (42.37%) does not recognise abortion as a woman’s right, either denying it at all (5.08%) or accepting it only in order for the woman’s life to be saved (37.29% or 40.68%, if we add those two who recognise it only in cases of rape). This implies a contradiction for people participating in a protest against compulsory medical action and in favour of a person’s free will, as they in general claim. It also shows a clear trend in far-right and nationalist circles against women’s rights with opposition to abortion being the flagship of this trend. As such, the argument promoted by those opposed to the COVID-19 vaccine that compulsory vaccination violates a person’s free will can be easily doubted.⁶⁵

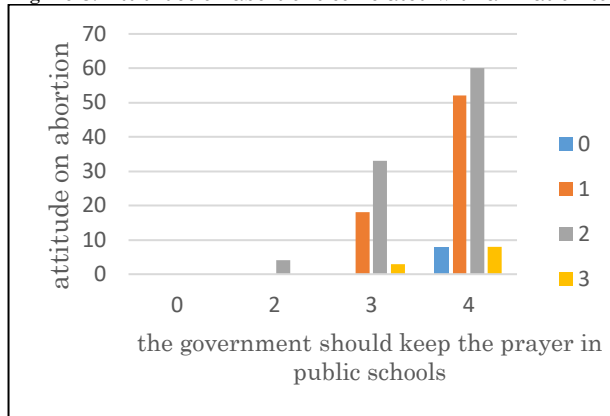
However, as we see in the next graphs, those who score high on the question about whether the government should keep the display of religious symbols in public spaces and on the question whether the government should keep prayer in public schools are also in favour of keeping abortion as a woman’s right. This is an unexpected finding, and it needs to be further researched to be confirmed or refuted. However, it might reflect the strongly enough embedded belief that abortion is a woman’s right after so many years of legalised practice in Greece.

Figures 7: Attitudes on abortions correlated with affiliation to Christian nationalism.



⁶⁵ Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right*.

Figure 8: Attitudes on abortions correlated with affiliation to Christian nationalism



Moreover, 27 of the interviewees (45.76%, 14 women and 13 men) replied that same-sex couples should have the same rights as heterosexuals, while 31 (52.54%, 13 women and 18 men) replied that they should not. Only one person refused to reply to this question. Some of the interviewees, in off-the-record chats, said ‘no’ because they opposed adoption by same-sex couples. These answers show a strong patriarchal conception about genders roles, confirming research by Whitehead and Perry and aligning with findings in the United States where ‘[w]omen still score lower on the gender traditionalism scale compared to men’⁶⁶. In other words, women are positioned more positively toward women’s and same-sex couples’ rights in both of these questions. The answers on the question about immigrants and refugees, on the other hand, show a demand to reduce their presence in the country. Eleven persons (18.64%) said they should all be deported, 32 (54.24%) that Greece should accept only few, and 8 (13.56%) replied Greece should accept whoever wants to come to the country. So, even though a minority of interviewees took the most extreme position demanding deportations for all, this is a typical thesis for right-wing and extreme right parties. Instead, the majority of respondents wanted only a few immigrants and refugees to live in the country. This could be interpreted as an extreme thesis, given the fact that we are still going through a major refugee crisis. In fact, Europe has experienced this crisis since the end of the Second World War, so saying only few refugees should come to Greece implies anti-migration and anti-refugee attitudes. More research is needed to determine whether this is correlated with Islamophobia or xenophobia or with fears about ethno-racial outsiders, as has been examined in the American case.⁶⁷

Almost half of interviewees (29 of them, 13 women and 16 men, 49.15%) stated they are not regular churchgoers but do attend church on important Orthodox holidays. This is a higher proportion than in the general population (34.9%).⁶⁸ Only 6 (3 women and 3 men, 10.17%) replied that they go to the church once/week (the percentage in the general population is 18.1%), while 15 (8 women and 7 men, 25.42%) go once/month (in general population 22.8%), and 9 (3 women and

⁶⁶ Whitehead and Perry, *Is a ‘Christian America’ a More Patriarchal America?*, 169.

⁶⁷ Baker / Perry and Whitehead. *Keep America Christian (and White)*, 284.

⁶⁸ Dianeosis, *World Values Survey*, 308.

6 men, 15.25%) replied that they never go to church (in general population 5.2%). This finding also suggests a need for more research. On the surface, it seems interviewees do not have a close relationship with the church as an official institution and the frequency at which they attend religious ceremonies is even lower than in the general population. However, this makes anecdotal sense given that several interviewees spoke pejoratively about the Church and its priests. Thus, these findings likely reflect negative perceptions of the Church as an institution and not their individual religiosity. These findings also imply that religious service attendance does not significantly impact views about immigrants, as they reply almost the same no matter how often they go to church.⁶⁹

Figure 9: attitude on migration by churchgoers or not

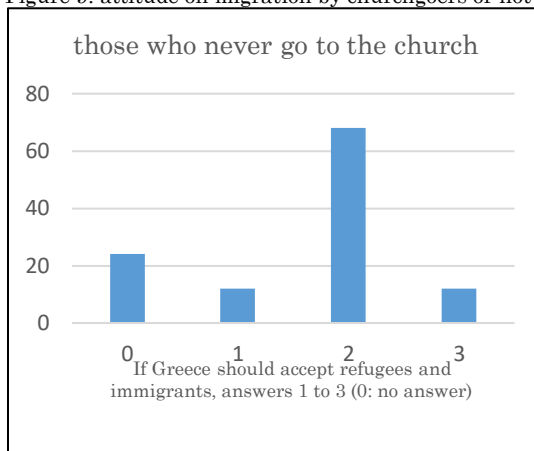
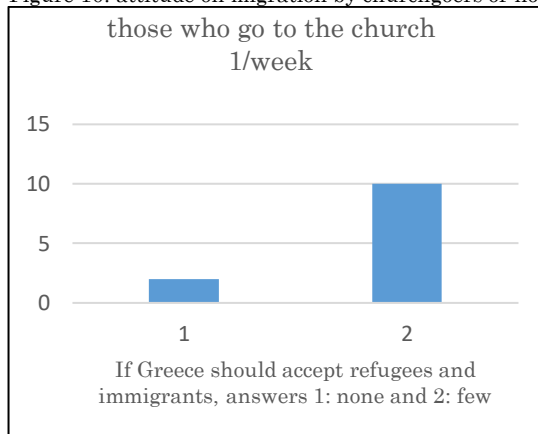


Figure 10: attitude on migration by churchgoers or not



Gender, when considered as the only parameter, does not generally seem to play a crucial role in the responses of the interviewees. Nevertheless, there are several exceptions, including whether scientists are hostile to religion, whether

⁶⁹ On this in the United States, see Stroope / Rackin and Froese, *Christian Nationalism*.

science will provide solutions to our problems, the success of Greece as a plan of God, abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, and the Prespa Agreement.

To the first of these exceptions, more women believe scientists are hostile to religion compared to men (16 and 12 respectively), while more men disagree with that statement (12) compared to women (7). More women (14) than men (11) disagree that science will provide solutions to most of our problems, while more men (14) agree with that statement compared to women (9). Together, these questions indicate a bigger lack of trust and opposition toward science from women than from men. On the question about abortion, women tend to have a more positive and tolerant attitude with 6 of them stating abortion should only be permitted in cases where a pregnant woman's life is endangered, while 16 men agreed. More women (19) than men (13) stated they are in favour of abortion as a woman's right, while only 3 (1 woman and 2 men) people took the most extreme opposition to abortion. On the question about same-sex rights, women and men are equally in favour (13 women and 13 men), but men seem to be less tolerant overall with 18 replying 'no' and slightly fewer women (13) replying 'no'. Finally, there is an important difference between women and men regarding the Prespa Agreement, which overall is among the questions with the firmest attitude (46 interviewees regard it as bad or traitorous). Eighteen women said it was traitorous, while 26 men replied the same, which is an increase of 69% for men compared to women. These findings imply a more patriarchal attitude from men than from women and a stronger opposition to science from women than from men. The first finding confirms Whitehead and Perry's suggestion that '[w]omen still score lower on the gender traditionalism scale compared to men'.⁷⁰ The second finding contributes to the relevant research as a first trend which needs additional research to be confirmed or refuted.

Finally, the question regarding interviewees' political leanings netted the most refusals to reply. Nevertheless, 2 persons replied they would position themselves in the extreme left (3.39%), 9 in the left (15.25%), 15 in the centre (25.42%), 2 in the right (3.39%), and 5 in the extreme right (8.47%). Seven refused to answer this question, while 6 replied as 'Greek; Greece; betrayer or Greek', and 20 replied 'nowhere'. These replies make it difficult to draw any firm conclusion, but it should be noted that replies such as 'Greek; Greece; betrayer or Greek' and 'nowhere' are characteristic of nationalists and extreme rightists when they wish to keep a neutral profile so their actions are presented as of the people.

Conclusion

This field research is a first attempt to trace Christian nationalism in Greece and its impact on attitudes toward science and its relationship with religion. It is an attempt to better comprehend what fuels anti-vax attitudes among Greeks and contribute to better understandings of the mechanisms of scepticism or opposition to science in a context different than the American one, which is the most explored and most often correlated with Christian nationalism.

This research confirms the fundamental characteristics of Christian nationalism as outlined by relevant research and offers a base upon which further research

⁷⁰ Whitehead and Perry, *Is a 'Christian America' a More Patriarchal America?*, 169.

could be conducted on the Greek case. Even though findings indicate the presence of Christian nationalist ideology, they need to be confirmed via research with more participants who are explicitly anti-vax rather than vaccine-hesitant or just afraid. Additionally, more research should be conducted in a more neutral period since all interviews were conducted at protests during a highly debated period in Greece—when the government was announcing and imposing mandatory vaccination and suspension of work for around 7,000 people working in hospitals because of their refusal to get vaccinated. Nevertheless, as already presented, Christian nationalism correlates its support with scepticism or opposition to science, and as such is appropriate to interpret the current state of nationalistic mentality in Greece. This phenomenon, which took place as a kind of movement and not as individual or isolated reactions for the first time within the COVID-19 pandemic, needs to be further examined to better understand its dimension and depth. This understanding will then allow us to more effectively address it in the public sphere and in policies since it will be known whether we are faced with a clear opposition to science or a hesitation, which need to be treated in different ways.

If the findings of this research are confirmed, then we could suggest that nationalism in Greece could be interpreted through Christian nationalism—at least at its current phase. Although religion has been an integral component of Greek nationalism ever since its foundation and several theories have been proposed to describe this relationship, I suggest based on this research that Christian nationalism could be a more appropriate framework to understand anti-science viewpoints in Greece. This approach allows us to contemplate the relationship of religion and society, as well as of the Church and state within a new context. As these relationships have been examined in different contexts, this research also contributes to the investigation of the relationship between religion and science/health but also to questions about the non-secular Greek state. As the questions measuring the affiliation of the interviewees with the values of Christian nationalism refer to what are already official state policies, these questions provide a new point of view regarding the relationship of the Greek state to the Christian Orthodox religion, with Christian Orthodox nationalism, and its attitude toward secularism.

Finally, as Christian nationalism, even if it might be above all an effort to assert social dominance and status politics, it remains a point of view which seeks to interpret and rule the world through a reference to religion and challenging of science.⁷¹ This means that it brings within it the irrational, an indispensable element of nationalism, which might have broader implications and consequences for contemporary societies. Dominance of the irrational in favour of religion and race can cause a critical calamity to social cohesion, equality and freedom. Hence, the irrationalism which characterises Christian nationalism and the dispute about science vs. religion should be further examined.

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⁷¹ Baker / Perry and Whitehead, *Crusading for Moral Authority*, 603–4.

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