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Accessing Foreign Policy Information in the Digital Age: Evidence from Greece

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Abstract
The digitalization of governance and media has increased the visibility and accessibility of foreign policy, reshaping how citizens engage with international affairs. However, limited research exists on how digital platforms influence the way foreign policy information is accessed and evaluated in specific national contexts. This study addresses this gap by examining the case of Greece. Drawing on a nationwide online survey conducted in February 2024 (N = 800), this analysis investigates citizens' source preferences, perceptions of credibility, and engagement patterns across socio-demographic groups. The findings reveal that digital platforms have emerged as the dominant sources of foreign policy information. Nevertheless, traditional dynamics of political polarization, selective trust, and fragmented media consumption remain prevalent. These results underscore the constraints of digitalization in expanding democratic participation and highlight the need for foreign policy research and practice to pay greater attention to public opinion and societal dynamics.

Keywords
Digitalization; Foreign Policy; Public Opinion; Greece; Media; Political Polarization; Democratic Participation

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, foreign policy has gained greater public visibility due to the digitalization of governance and the growing use of digital platforms by citizens to access and discuss political issues. While the extent and pace of digitalization have varied across countries, the overall process has led to greater public access, the proliferation of publicly available content, and the emergence of new actors and mediums (Adesina 2017; Bjola and Manor 2022). According to Baum and Potter (2008, 2019), these developments can be characterized as structural transformations towards a digitalized "foreign policy market," where outcomes are increasingly shaped by the distribution of information among decision-makers, traditional and social media, and the public. In this context, information functions as a strategic commodity, influencing policy by shaping public awareness, guiding media agendas and framing interactions between political actors and society (Rhee, Crabtree, and Horiuchi 2024).

This transformation has also reshaped information environments across the Balkans. Between 2020 and 2023, internet penetration in the region increased significantly, ranging from 75% to 96%, depending on the country (BIRN 2023, 6). In Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo, internet usage now exceeds 90%, with the majority of citizens using digital platforms to access news and political content (Tintor et al. 2022, 10). In Bulgaria, internet usage reached 84% of the population by early 2024, while in the same year, 87% of the population in North Macedonia was online (Kemp 2024).

On the one hand, these statistics suggest that digitalization has become a progressively influential factor in regional politics, reshaping how national foreign policy markets operate. On the other hand, they also demonstrate regional potential for realizing the theoretical benefits of digitalization by promoting more balanced information structures, characterized by the dissemination of factual information, active public scrutiny, elite competition, and greater citizen influence (Kemp 2024). By contrast, however, most Balkan countries failed to achieve these ideal outcomes, instead developing more asymmetric configurations in which political polarization, media fragmentation and information manipulation granted policymakers greater flexibility to shape foreign policy agendas (Valchanov et al. 2022; Ilić and Markov 2024; Tzifakis and Vasdoka 2025).

Although Greece has undergone distinct historical developments compared to its Balkan neighbors, its information environment has traditionally followed asymmetric patterns (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Papathanassopoulos 2013; Tsirigotis 2023). The Greek media system has been characterized by political parallelism, clientelism, weak regulatory oversight, and limited journalistic independence (Iosifidis and Boucas 2015; Kalogeropoulos, Rori, and Dimitrakopoulou 2021). These general frameworks have also shaped foreign policy coverage, which has reflected political divisions and instrumentalized public concerns, particularly over regional disputes involving the Aegean Sea, Cyprus, North Macedonia and Albania. Debates in the traditional Greek foreign policy market have thus reflected domestic political dynamics and tended to disregard balanced reporting and evidence-based analysis, ultimately resulting in a credibility deficit and widespread public distrust (Frangonikolopoulos 2007; Pleios and Frangonikolopoulos 2013). Digitalization, despite its democratic potential, has been unable to alter these underlying trends. While it has broadened the range of accessible sources and diminished the influence of traditional media gatekeepers, it has also exacerbated structural shortcomings in the Greek information landscape. According to recent studies, digital platforms have replicated existing political divisions, created online echo chambers, and limited meaningful engagement with foreign policy through user-generated and algorithm-driven content (Kalogeropoulos and Dimitrakopoulou 2021; Avraam, Veglis, and Dimoulas 2022).

As the digital space plays an increasingly significant role in shaping public opinion and decision-making, research must examine how citizens obtain information about international affairs. This objective is particularly relevant in the Greek context, where existing studies have provided findings on how foreign policy was framed and disseminated in the traditional media environment (Frangonikolopoulos 2007; Pleios and Frangonikolopoulos 2013), but have drawn limited conclusions regarding the impact of digitalization.

This paper seeks to address this gap by examining how the Greek public acquires information on foreign policy, with particular emphasis on the role of digitalization. The analysis is structured around three principal research questions. First (Q1), what are the primary and most contemporary sources of foreign policy information for the Greek public? Second (Q2), to what extent has digitalization transformed traditional patterns of information consumption? Third (Q3), how do socio-demographic variables shape these patterns?

To address these questions, the paper first outlines relevant theoretical frameworks and examines traditional patterns of foreign policy information gathering in Greece. These sections provide the contextual background for the presentation of the empirical findings, which are based on an N = 800 opinion poll conducted between February 2 and 14, 2024, designed to

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map the public's engagement with foreign policy information. The results are then analyzed in the discussion section, which maps the Greek public's patterns of information gathering on foreign policy figures, thereby providing answers to the research questions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION-GATHERING IN FOREIGN POLICY

To guide the following stages of the analysis, the theoretical section aims to conceptualize two key aspects of public engagement with foreign policy: public interest in international affairs and the shift in information-gathering patterns from traditional offline channels to digital media. Starting with public interest, the literature presents different perspectives on the extent to which individuals and the broader public are engaged or concerned with international affairs. The division is well illustrated by the split between liberal and realist theories of international relations, with the former arguing for greater public interest and influence in international relations and the latter seeing the state as a unitary entity in which only the elites are concerned and responsible for shaping foreign policy (Waltz 2000; Walt 1998). Radical and constructivist theories also hold different views. While the former argues that the economic order limits the influence of public opinion, constructivism argues that leaders' views on foreign policy reflect domestically embedded social principles (Flockhart 2016).

These contradictory ideas are also reflected in the relevant foreign policy literature. At the beginning of the Cold War, mainstream theories generally followed the realist argument, viewing the public as a marginal aspect of international relations, primarily preoccupied with domestic concerns (Kertzer 2023). The concept was articulated by the Almond-Lippmann consensus, which argued that most voters neither understood nor cared about international developments (Almond 1956, 1960; Holsti 1992; Lippmann 1955). This traditional view was gradually challenged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when mass protests over foreign policy issues in the United States, France and Czechoslovakia began to shift theoretical principles. The growing influence of transnationalism became a central element of the neoliberal argument, which argued that emerging globalization was integrating new actors into the mainstream of international processes who not only had larger capacities but also a greater interest in understanding and influencing foreign affairs (Nye and Keohane 1971; Rosenau 1980; Burton 1972). The argument was also supported by empirical studies that began to contradict the Almond-Lippmann consensus. These findings suggested that the public is more interested in foreign policy than previously thought and has relatively stable and rational views on foreign affairs (Holsti 1992; Page and Shapiro 1992; Verba et al. 1967).

Public interest in foreign policy has received renewed attention with the emergence of digital foreign policy and diplomacy (Adesina 2017; Bjola 2016; Sotiriu 2015). While the literature recognized that digitalization offered a new abundance of information sources and broader opportunities for engagement, opinions differed on how online platforms affected public interest. Several case studies have demonstrated that digitalization consistently leads to increased political attention, resulting in more informed societies, particularly among those with lower levels of political interest (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Bimber et al. 2015). Others argued that broader engagement opportunities have not increased participation, as information overload, misinformation and the overwhelming nature of digital content have instead led to

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disengagement from digitalised political news (Aalberg, van Aelst, and Curran 2010; Değirmenci 2020). Accordingly, the intermediate proposition emphasized the context-specific character, i.e., it acknowledged that digitalization does not necessarily lead to increased political and foreign policy interests; rather, its impact largely depends on specific societal, community, and individual properties (David 2022; Manor 2019).

Another crucial theoretical question related to public interest is how voters gather information about foreign policy. As in the previous cases, the literature is divided on the issue.

One perspective, rooted in the realist tradition, suggested a top-down model, in which foreign policy views of the public are primarily shaped by political leaders, economic elites, religious and academic figures, media institutions and even external actors (Eichenberg 2016; Efimova and Strebkov 2020). In this view, elites control the framing and dissemination of foreign policy narratives, using their agenda-setting power to shape public understanding (Almond 1956; Lippmann 1955). This power, however, is primarily influenced by the specific context of national political systems. In democratic and pluralistic societies, competing narratives create a more dynamic political environment, while in authoritarian systems, the political leadership can exercise a near monopoly on the dissemination of foreign policy information (Tang 2005; Zimmerman 2002).

In contrast to the top-down model, bottom-up approaches emphasized the role of societal dynamics in the information-gathering process. The model, associated with liberal and constructivist theories, posits that various sources of foreign policy information are available to the public, all of which play a significant role in shaping individuals' perceptions. This pluralist argument proposes that, rather than passively adopting elite-driven narratives, individuals selectively engage with foreign policy information, filtering it through their personal experiences, ideological beliefs, and socio-economic backgrounds (Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017). While elite narratives remain central to this filtering process, individuals do not simply accept all messages conveyed (Zaller 1992). Instead, their receptivity is shaped by pre-existing attitudes and values, such as education, social status, political affiliation and ideological orientation, which contribute to the diversity of ways in which foreign policy information is gathered and understood (Holsti 1992; Kertzer 2023).

Top-down and bottom-up approaches have had a significant impact on how the literature has viewed digital changes in information-gathering patterns. As noted earlier, Baum and Potter (2008, 2019) viewed the transformation as a significant shift in the foreign policy market. Traditionally, the market was characterized by supply and demand mechanisms for information, which served as a key commodity distributed among decision-makers, media actors and the public. In the offline foreign policy market, information access favored the political elite, who had direct oversight over policy details and were thus able to manipulate the flow of information to the media and the public. As a result, the media acted as a "conveyor belt" that transmitted elite views to the public, enabling decision-makers to influence media narratives (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston 2006; Jentleson 1992). Compared to this gatekeeping role, the public entered the foreign policy market with varying degrees of informational disadvantage, gathering information that was framed and distributed by elites and the media (Druckman 2001). In such an offline setting, foreign policy narratives tended to be vertically structured, even in democratic and competitive media environments, where alternative and critical narratives were also shaped by either opposing elites or the press.

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Digitalization has fundamentally altered these traditional patterns by horizontalizing access to news sources and reducing elite control over narratives (Baum and Potter 2019). However, despite initial expectations, this horizontalization did not automatically democratize the information environment. Instead, it has contributed to greater fragmentation and polarization by enabling the proliferation of ideologically driven and politically motivated news sources (Kubin and von Sikorski 2021). This hyper-fragmentation has reinforced selective exposure, limiting citizens' engagement with one-sided perspectives and making public opinion more volatile (Stroud 2011; Prior 2005). Social media algorithms have further exacerbated these trends by amplifying emotionally charged content and reducing incidental exposure to opposing views, thereby fostering ideological isolation (Santos, Lelkes, and Levin 2021; Huszár et al. 2022). As a result, public oversight of foreign policy has weakened, allowing leaders greater flexibility in shaping narratives while reducing democratic accountability. Rather than fostering informed debate, digitalization has made public opinion more fragmented and volatile, reshaping the relationship between the media, public engagement, and foreign policy decision-making (Baum and Potter 2019).

RECENT PATTERNS IN ACCESSING FOREIGN POLICY INFORMATION IN GREECE

Understanding how the Greek public gathers information about foreign policy requires examining both historical traditions and more recent developments. As a starting point, it is essential to note that Greeks have traditionally demonstrated a moderate level of interest in international affairs, but have expressed relatively high concerns regarding regional issues (Balta and Grigoriadis 2024; Triantaphyllou 2018). Bilateral conflicts involving Cyprus, Turkey, North Macedonia, and Albania have not only dominated political discourse (Raptopoulos 2017; Karafotia 2023) but have also been framed as matters of national identity and sovereignty, ensuring their frequent recurrence in media coverage and public debate (Karafotia 2023; Frangonikolopoulos 2007; Pleios and Frangonikolopoulos 2013).

Beyond the immediate neighborhood, persistent domestic debates on security, economic policy and ideological orientation have also maintained public interest in key global actors, including the US, NATO, the Soviet Union/Russia and the EU (Skouroliakou 2012; Iosifidis and Boucas 2015). In recent years, emerging geopolitical developments have extended this interest to countries such as China, Ukraine, Israel, and Libya (Avraam, Veglis, and Dimoulas 2022; Grigoriadis and Tsourapas 2024; Skarpa, Simoglou, and Garoufallou 2023). With these new areas, Greek public interest in foreign affairs can be characterized as multi-layered but focused on regional affairs. To comprehend the foundations of this multi-layered societal interest, it is necessary to examine how foreign policy information is distributed to the public. Historically, the Greek information environment was structured through a top-down configuration in which narratives were generated by the political elite and transmitted to the public through the media system.

Between 1974 and 2009, the political divide between "New Democracy" and "PASOK" played a central role in this process as both parties routinely instrumentalized foreign policy as a means of electoral mobilization and political distraction (Kalogeropoulos, Rori, and Dimitrakopoulou 2021). Both governments and opposition forces frequently employed bilateral disputes to appeal to nationalist sentiments, deflect criticism, and project strength during

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periods of political competition or internal instability. This instrumental use of foreign policy was facilitated by a centralized foreign policy apparatus dominated by the executive branch and reinforced by weak institutional checks and balances (Frangonikolopoulos 2007; Skouroliakou 2012).

In the traditional, offline foreign policy market, these narratives were distributed through the media. As a textbook example of the polarized pluralist model (Hallin and Mancini 2004), the Greek media landscape has been characterized by high levels of political parallelism, intense partisan polarization and limited journalistic autonomy (Papathanassopoulos 2013).

Since 1974, most media outlets have maintained close ties with political parties or business interests, which have influenced editorial positions and the way political and foreign policy issues are presented to the public. These relationships were mutually beneficial: political elites supported media outlets through access to information and state advertising, while the media reproduced elite narratives and shaped public opinion in line with the interests of the parties. However, dissemination was driven not only by political objectives but also by commercial pressures and profit motives (Iosifidis and Boucas 2015). In a relatively small media market, the large number of outlets treated news as a commodity, pursuing profit through sensationalized coverage of bilateral conflicts and the commercial exploitation of national grievances and fears (Kalogeropoulos, Rori, and Dimitrakopoulou 2021). As a result, as Pleios and Frangonikolopoulos (2021) noted, foreign policy coverage often lacked critical analysis and objectivity, focusing instead on ethnocentric narratives that highlighted national victimhood and external threats to boost ratings and serve political interests.

Under the combined influence of political elites and media actors, the public occupied a largely passive and structurally disadvantaged position within the traditional foreign policy information environment. This structure reflected what Baum and Potter (2008) described as a vertically organized system, in which elites and their media allies dominated the flow of information, while information commodities (e.g., foreign policy narratives) were filtered through clientelist channels. Consequently, citizens had limited opportunities to assess or critically influence foreign policy debates. Thus, despite sustained public interest in regional affairs, the structures of traditional foreign policy markets constrained societal participation and kept the information flow insulated from democratic accountability (Druckman 2001; Jentleson 1992).

The vertical structures of the offline foreign policy market have been significantly disrupted by the rise of digital media, which has transformed the way political information is accessed, distributed, and interpreted. According to recent studies, over the past 10–15 years, the Greek information environment has also undergone digitalization, adding new virtual intermediaries such as social media platforms, citizen journalists, and algorithm-driven content to the original triad of political elites, media, and the public (Kacziba, Gibárti, and Lechner 2025; Baum and Potter 2019). While this environment could ideally broaden access to diverse perspectives and reduce elite control over narratives, the Greek case has largely reproduced the limitations of the offline context. As a result, the digital information environment continues to reflect the long-standing structural asymmetries of Greek political communication: it is shaped by political parallelism, limited journalistic autonomy, and entrenched clientelist media networks, which contribute to new forms of fragmentation, public distrust, and algorithmic bias (Iosifidis and Boucas 2015; Kalogeropoulos et al. 2021).

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Despite these well-documented general trends, research remains limited on how digitalization has influenced foreign policy information-gathering patterns and how Greek citizens access and engage with such content online.

The few existing studies on digital foreign policy communication have primarily focused on specific events, such as the Prespa Agreement, the war in Ukraine, or Greek-Turkish tensions, analyzing media framing or political rhetoric rather than patterns of public consumption (Karafotia 2023; Avraam et al. 2022). Their findings indicate that foreign policy content remains emotionally charged and nationalistic, frequently disseminated through unverified or ideologically driven digital channels. Coverage often lacks critical engagement and tends to favor narratives of threat and victimhood, while public exposure is influenced by algorithmic personalization and a fragmented media environment (Pleios and Frangonikolopoulos 2021; Kalogeropoulos et al. 2021).

While these studies have provided analytical insights into specific events, a lack of empirical research remains in systematically mapping how the Greek public consumes foreign policy information in the digital age. Consequently, key questions remain unanswered: Which sources do citizens rely on? How frequently do they engage with foreign policy content? What level of trust do they place in digital versus traditional information providers? To address these gaps, the following section presents findings from an online survey designed to capture patterns of foreign policy information consumption among Greek citizens.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND FINDINGS

The empirical analysis is based on a nationwide online survey conducted between February 2 and 14, 2024, using a self-administered questionnaire. The survey targeted Greek citizens aged 18 and over, with a final sample of 800 respondents. Quotas were applied to ensure representativeness across key demographic variables, including age, gender, educational attainment, and type of residence (urban or rural). Participants were reached through targeted advertisements on Meta platforms and were selected using a randomized process to ensure equal inclusion probability across the adult population. Data collection was conducted by a professional survey company, Fisherman's Online Ltd. (2024), with extensive experience in public opinion measurement. The questionnaire was only available in the Greek language and hosted on a dedicated website, where participants could complete it anonymously. No personal data was requested or recorded that could identify respondents, and no user information was transferred from Meta to the survey platform. The survey aimed to examine how citizens access foreign policy information across both traditional and digital channels, to identify their preferences. It included questions on the frequency of following foreign policy news, preferred sources and platforms, and the perceived credibility of various actors (e.g., politicians, journalists, experts).

Additional items assessed views on the impact of digitalization on democratic participation and the openness of political dialogue in online spaces. Most responses were recorded using three- to five-point Likert-type scales, depending on the structure of each question.

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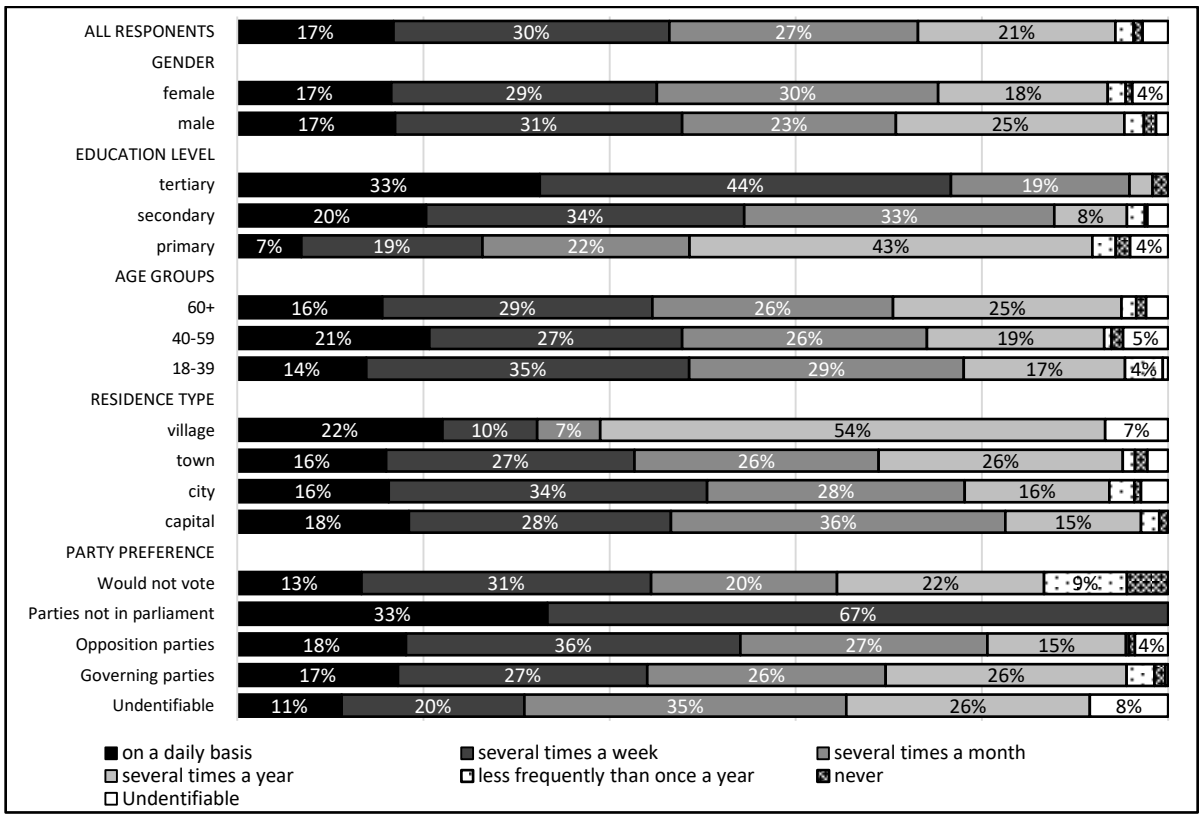


Figure 1: To what extent do you stay informed about Greek foreign policy? (Source: Own data collection conducted by Fisherman's Online Ltd. 2024)

Turning to the results, Figure 1 displays the frequency with which Greek citizens followed foreign policy during the sample period, revealing a moderate but uneven pattern of engagement. The most common response was "several times a week" (30%), followed by "several times a month" (27%) and "daily" (17%). Occasional engagement ("several times a year") was reported by 21%, while fewer than 3% followed foreign policy rarely or never. Engagement levels varied across political and demographic groups. Opposition supporters were the most engaged, with 54% following foreign policy at least several times a week, compared to 44% of both government voters and non-voters. Educational background had a strong influence on engagement, with the share of respondents following foreign policy at least weekly declining steadily from those with tertiary education (77%) to secondary education (54%) and primary education (26%). Similar trends are observed across different types of residence, with daily and weekly engagement reaching 46% in the capital and 50% in cities, but dropping to 43% in towns and 32% in villages. Although some variation exists across gender and age groups, the differences are not as significant as those seen by education or place of residence. The results thus indicate that while foreign policy holds a regular place in the information habits of many Greeks, higher engagement is associated with political activity, education, and residence type.

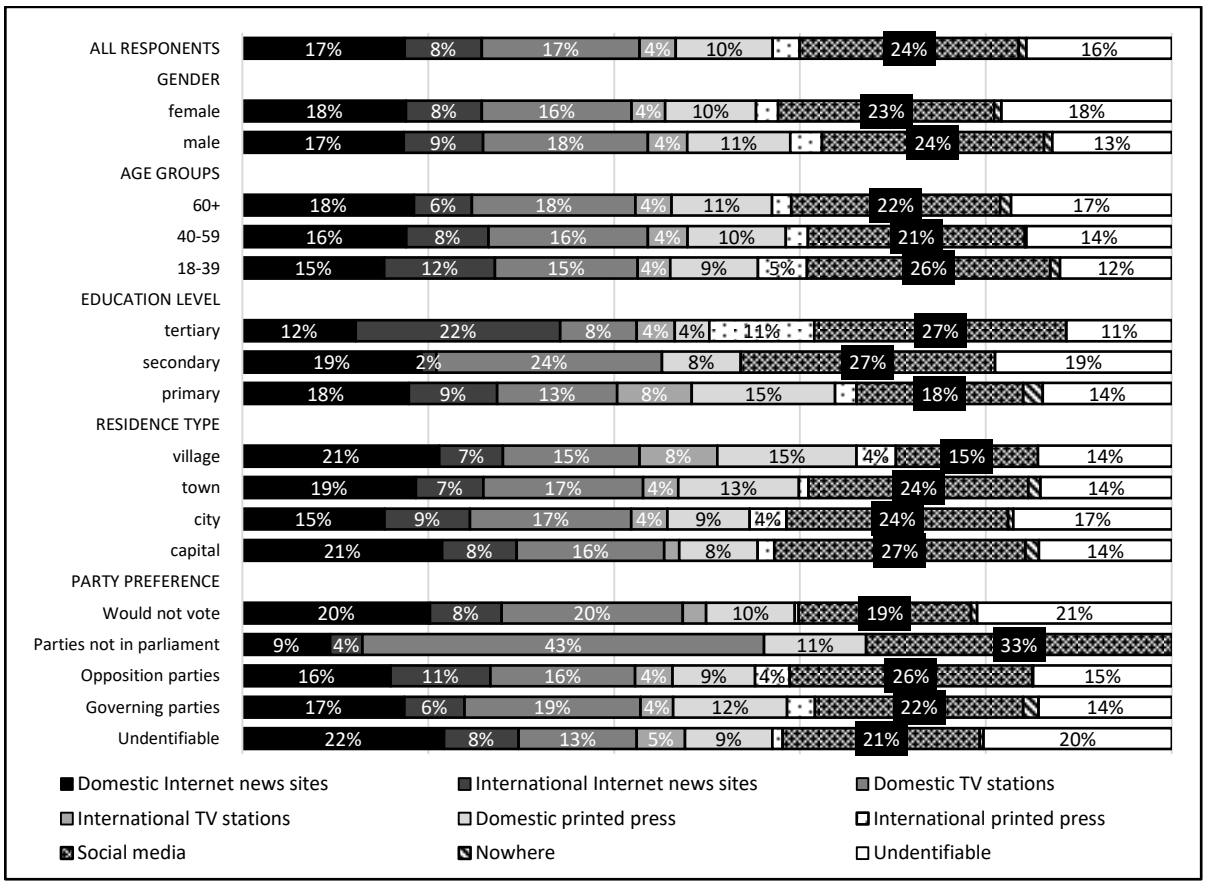


Figure 2: Through which sources do you follow Greek foreign policy? (Source: Own data collection conducted by Fisherman's Online Ltd. 2024)

The next question addressed a central issue: Through which sources do you follow Greek foreign policy? Figure 2 shows that information sources were diverse, with clear emphasis on digital platforms. The most commonly mentioned sources were social media (24%), domestic internet news sites (18%), and domestic television (17%), followed closely by international television (15%). Traditional print media accounted for 10%, while international sources were used less frequently, ranging from 8% (international internet news) to just 3% (international print). Demographic differences are also indicative. Political affiliation clearly influenced preferences: opposition supporters were more likely to use digital platforms (53%), and, despite having a strong interest in domestic sources (48%), also showed notable openness to international ones (29%). In contrast, government voters relied less on digital media (45%) and international sources (11%), and focused more on domestic outlets (48%), including TV and the printed press (29%). The leading role of social media is also indicative in both cases.

Educational background also shaped preferences. Educational background also shaped preferences. Respondents with tertiary education reported the highest use of digital platforms (61%) and were significantly more likely to consult international sources (33%). In contrast, those with primary education showed a strong preference for domestic sources (59%), particularly television and printed press (44%), and were far less likely to use international content (7%).

Similar trends appear across residence types. Citizens living in the capital and major cities were more digitally oriented, with a combined digital media usage of 57–59%, and greater openness to international news sources (24–27%). Meanwhile, respondents in towns and villages relied more heavily on domestic media (52–55%), primarily TV and print (34–36%), and made limited use of international or online platforms. Social media remained a significant source across all groups but was particularly dominant in more urban and highly educated segments of the population. Although less notable, age and gender differences were still observable. As expected, the most active users of social media and digital platforms were younger respondents (ages 18–39), whereas older age groups (60 and above) relied more heavily on television and print media. Men tended to consult a broader range of sources, while women demonstrated a stronger preference for domestic, traditional media channels, particularly television.

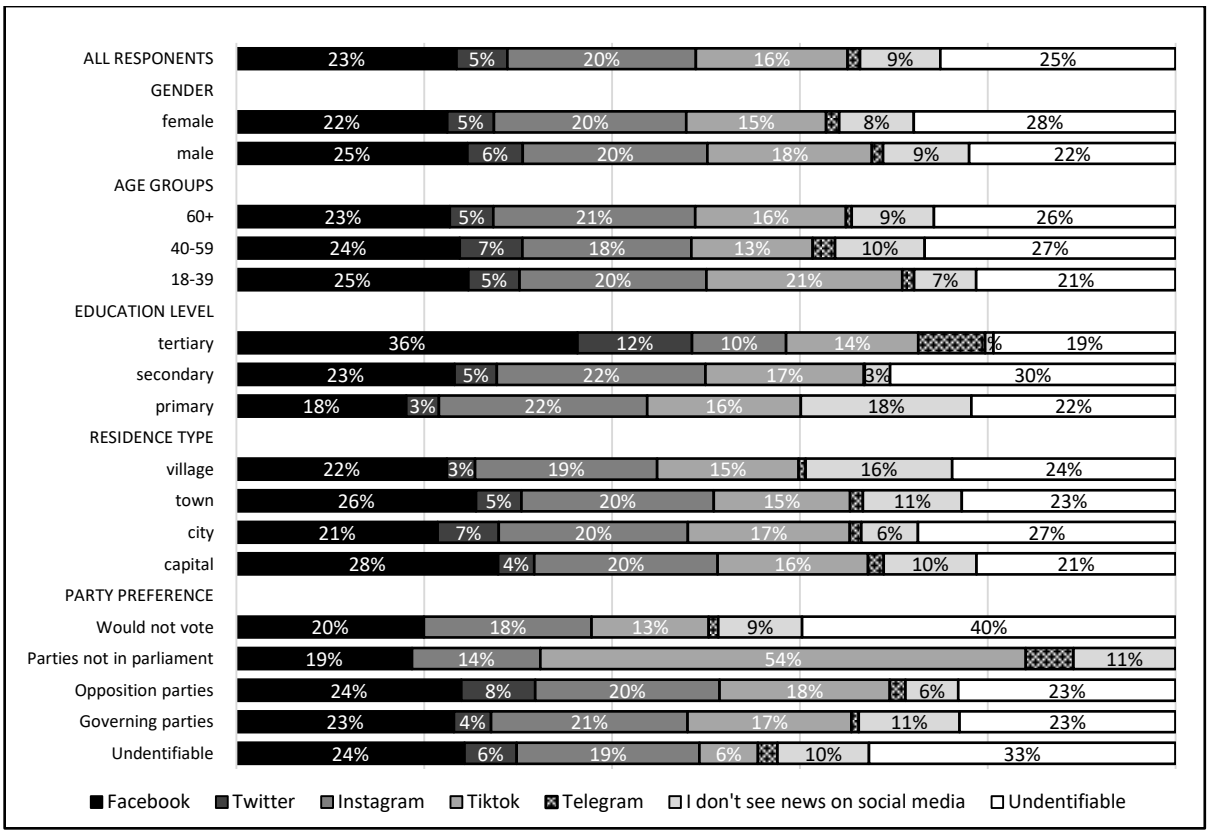


Figure 3: On which social media platforms do you most often encounter foreign policy news? (Source: Own data collection conducted by Fisherman's Online Ltd. 2024)

Given the leading role of social media in foreign policy information consumption, it was important to examine which platforms Greeks use most frequently. Overall, Facebook (23%), Instagram (20.1%), and TikTok (16%) emerged as the most popular platforms, followed by Twitter (5.4%) and Telegram (1.3%). A notable 8.5% of respondents indicated that they do not encounter foreign policy content on social media, while 25% provided no clear response. Gender differences were minimal, though men showed slightly higher usage of Facebook. Age differences were similarly limited: Facebook remained the preferred platform across all age

groups, although younger respondents also actively engaged with TikTok and Instagram. Political affiliation revealed broadly similar patterns between government and opposition supporters, with differences of approximately 1% across the three leading platforms. However, opposition voters showed slightly higher usage of Twitter (6%), whereas 11% of government voters reported not encountering any foreign policy news on social media. A notable trend appeared among supporters of non-parliamentary parties, who significantly favoured TikTok (54%) and showed much lower use of Facebook and Instagram compared to other voter groups.

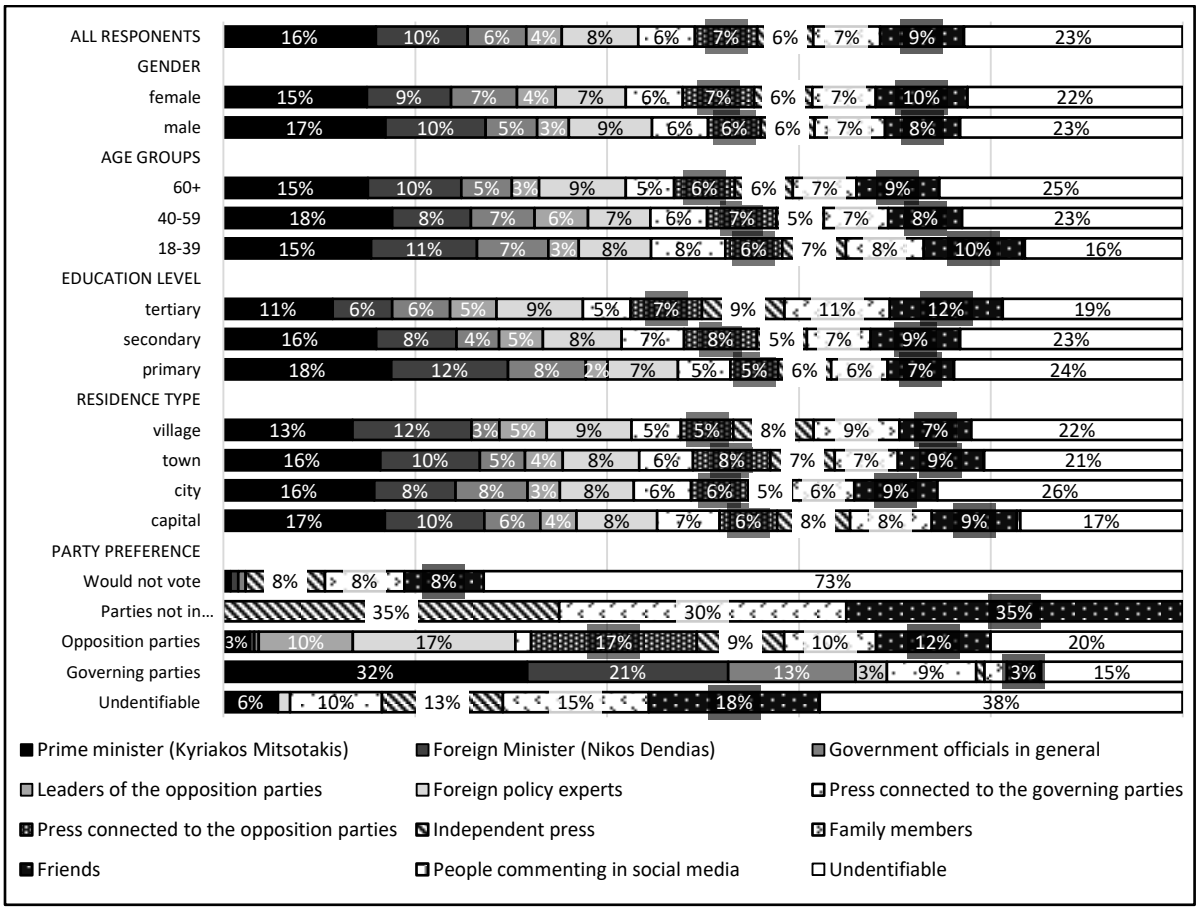


Figure 4: Which sources of foreign policy information do you consider credible? (Source: Own data collection conducted by Fisherman's Online Ltd. 2024)

As the Greek information environment has long suffered from a credibility deficit and public distrust (Frangonikolopoulos 2007; Pleios and Frangonikolopoulos 2013), the survey examined respondents' trust in standard sources of foreign policy information. Accordingly, Figure 4 presents the credibility attributed to various sources of foreign policy information among respondents. In terms of overall results, the prime minister (16%) was the most trusted individual source, followed by the foreign minister (9.6%), respondents' friends (9%) and foreign policy experts (8.0%). Trust in both government officials in general (6%) and opposition leaders (3.7%) was relatively low, and the independent press (6%) only slightly exceeded the party-affiliated media. Family members (7%) and friends ranked higher than most media outlets, while

people commenting on social media were trusted the least (0.05%). A large portion of responses (22.8%) were undetermined, signaling the broader climate of distrust and uncertainty in the Greek information environment.

Trust patterns across gender were broadly similar, with differences between categories generally limited to 1–2%. Across all age groups, the prime minister was the most trusted source, with slightly higher trust among respondents aged 40–59 (18%). Younger adults (18–39) showed greater openness to trusting friends and informal social sources, while older respondents placed more trust in government officials and traditional media. Trust in foreign policy experts remained consistent across age groups but relatively low overall (7–9%) compared to political decision-makers. In terms of education, the credibility attributed to the prime minister declined with higher qualifications: it stood at 17.5% among those with primary education, 15.9% among those with secondary education. It fell to 11.4% among tertiary-educated respondents. The credibility of the foreign minister follows a similar pattern.

In contrast, foreign policy experts gained credibility as education increased, rising from 7.3% among those with primary education to 9.0% among those with tertiary degrees. Respondents with tertiary education also found friends (11.7%), family members (11.0%), and the independent press (8.6%) more credible compared to those with lower educational backgrounds, who tended to place similar trust in government figures, party-affiliated media and social sources. Credibility patterns changed moderately by place of residence. Capital residents gave the highest credibility to the prime minister (16.9%), while village residents were least likely to do so (13.5%), but placed more trust in the foreign minister (12.4%). While other categories showed relatively similar scores across all settlement types, notable differences emerged in views on government officials in general, with credibility being clearly lower in villages compared to urban areas.

The most considerable differences were observed along party preferences, highlighting not only an intense polarization between government and opposition voters, but also deeper fragmentation when non-voters and supporters of non-parliamentary parties are considered. Opposition voters largely rejected government figures as credible sources, attributing very low credibility to the prime minister (3%) and foreign minister (0.5%), while placing greater trust in foreign policy experts (17%) and opposition press, the opposition leaders (10%) and independent press (9%).

In contrast, government supporters displayed a strong preference for institutional figures, particularly the prime minister (32%) and the foreign minister (21%), while expressing minimal credibility toward opposition actors or independent media. Non-voters generally refrained from assigning high credibility to any category, although they tended to place greater trust in the independent press as well as family and friends. Supporters of non-parliamentary parties exhibited highly selective trust, largely disregarding mainstream actors such as the prime minister and instead favoring alternative sources or social networks. These patterns reveal a fragmented credibility landscape, shaped by political orientation and characterized by selective trust and parallel narratives.

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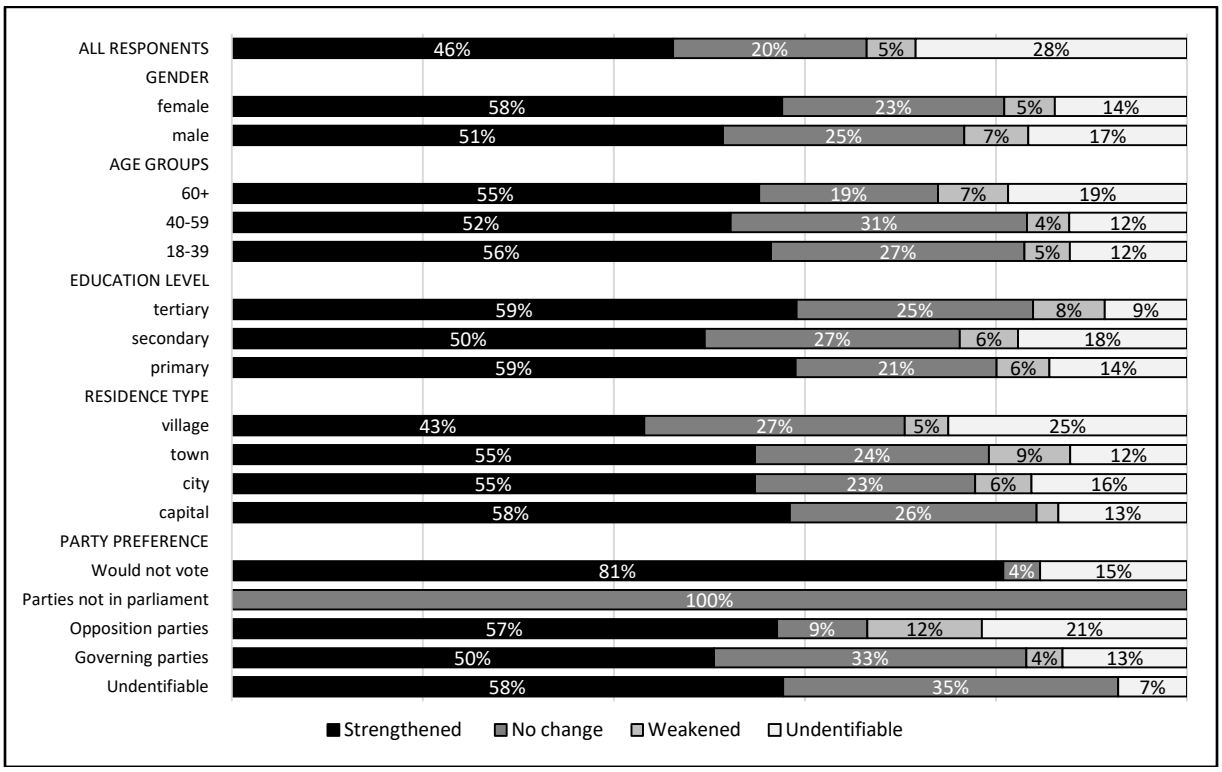


Figure 5: Do you consider the increasing use of digital solutions to strengthen, weaken, or have no impact on opportunities for democratic participation?
(Source: Own data collection conducted by Fisherman's Online Ltd. 2024)

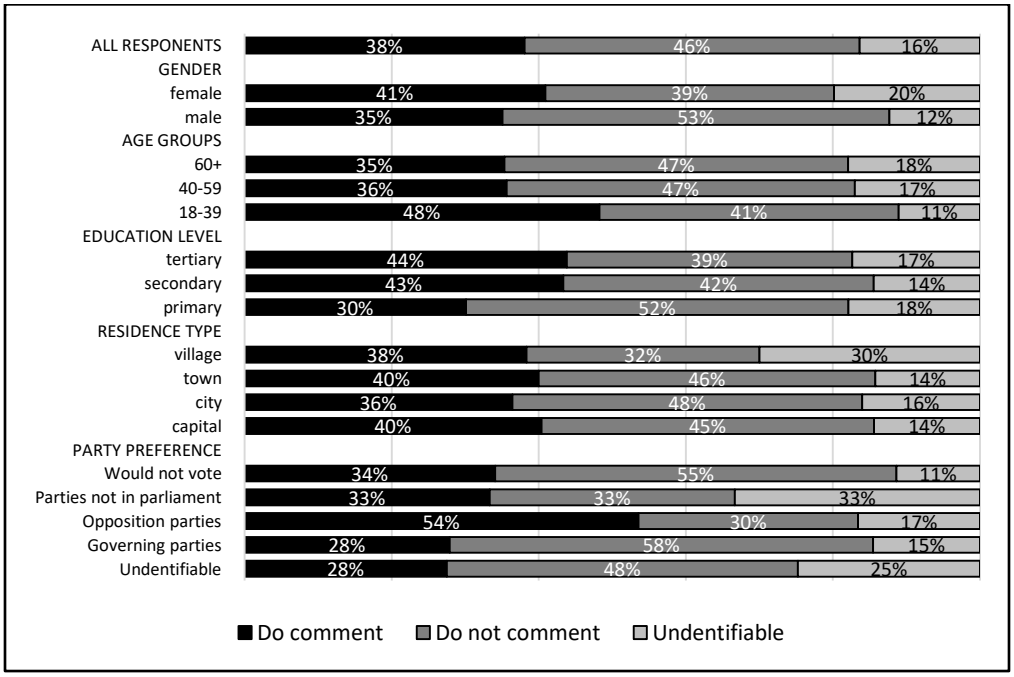


Figure 6: Do you comment on foreign policy news on social media or digital news platforms?
(Source: Own data collection conducted by Fisherman's Online Ltd. 2024)

Considering the widespread dissatisfaction among Greeks with their democratic processes, along with theoretical claims that digitalization can democratize information environments (Manor 2019; Sotiriu 2015; Gilboa 2016), the survey also explored perceptions of digitalization's impact and respondents' willingness to engage in foreign policy discussions on social media. Analyzed together, Figures 5 and 6 reveal an interesting gap between positive perceptions of digitalization and actual online participation. Figure 5 shows that majorities across nearly all demographic groups believe digitalization has strengthened opportunities for democratic participation. However, respondents from villages were slightly more skeptical, as were supporters of non-parliamentary parties, who saw no significant change. This overall positive perception contrasts with Figure 6, which suggests that most respondents do not actively engage with foreign policy content. The gap was particularly visible among government voters and respondents with primary education: while half or more (50% and 59%, respectively) viewed digitalization positively, their actual participation levels were comparatively low (28% and 30%, respectively). Different patterns emerged among opposition voters and younger respondents, who showed a closer alignment between their high confidence in digitalization's democratic potential (57% and 56%) and their active engagement in online foreign policy discussions (54% and 48%). Despite these notable exceptions, the overall findings suggest that while digitalization is broadly seen as democratising, positive perceptions do not necessarily translate into consistent active engagement.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This section interprets the empirical findings by first examining the main trends identified in the analysis and assessing how they correspond with existing research on the Greek information environment. This provides a basis for addressing the research questions and comparing the results with the theoretical arguments outlined earlier.

Beginning with the main trends, findings related to Figure 1 confirm that Greek public interest in foreign policy remained relatively high during the sample period, with the majority of respondents engaging with foreign affairs at least once a week. This indicates that foreign policy continued to be politically and commercially relevant to the Greek public, remaining a key topic of public discourse despite turbulent domestic affairs and economic struggles. While sustained public interest has preserved the political and commercial value of the foreign policy market (Baum and Potter 2008, 2019), the composition of its key actors has undergone a clear shift. This is related to the overwhelming digitalization of information gathering patterns: according to survey results, digital platforms, particularly social media and domestic online news outlets, have become the primary source of foreign policy news, thereby superseding the traditional gatekeeping role of offline media.

On the one hand, this suggests that the Greek foreign policy market has undergone a significant transformation over the past decade, with online agenda-setting capacities becoming increasingly important. On the other hand, it also reflects the emergence of new digital actors and mediums (e.g., Figure 3) that complement or replace earlier intermediaries in the distribution of information commodities.

While these general trends are clearly visible, the survey also indicates that the consumption of foreign policy information is neither over-centralized nor evenly distributed

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among different sources. This means that despite the lack of a single dominant actor and the plurality of the information space, respondents still tended to rely on one-sided sources. As shown in Figure 2, media consumption is highly fragmented across both domestic and international sources, with political affiliation, education level, and age serving as key factors in shaping these patterns. This suggests that distrust identified in the offline media environment has been transferred to digital platforms. Figure 4 further supports this by highlighting how credibility assessments are shaped by political and demographic divides, with respondents expressing selective trust aligned with their political affiliation and social background. These patterns confirm that, although digitalization has expanded the range of available sources and improved access to information, it has not mitigated selective exposure or political alignment; the polarization and media fragmentation of the offline environment have remained largely unchanged (Iosifidis and Boucas 2015; Kalogeropoulos et al. 2021a). Accordingly, the majority of respondents did not or could not utilize the diversity of information provided by the digital foreign policy market; instead, they engaged with one-sided narrative sources, either directly through self-selection or indirectly through algorithmic filtering and targeted advertising.

The transfer of offline structures to the online space also influenced how respondents used digital platforms to access foreign policy information. While Figure 5 showed that a clear majority viewed digitalization as an opportunity to enhance democratic participation, Figure 6 revealed that this potential remained largely unrealised in practice. Most respondents did not actively participate in online discussions of foreign policy, except for opposition voters and younger individuals aged 18–39. This lack of activity suggests that, despite general optimism about the democratic potential of digital platforms, many citizens remained disengaged due to disinterest (as seen among non-voters), satisfaction with the policy orientation (in the case of government voters), or persistent distrust rooted in the perceived replication of offline echo chambers in the digital environment. These patterns help explain how the traditional features of the Greek foreign policy market have re-emerged online.

First, information providers have transferred political polarization and commercialized practices into digital spaces. Second, citizens themselves often reproduce offline behaviors, favoring familiar sources and avoiding critical or pluralistic engagement, thereby constraining the transformative potential of digitalization.

These empirical findings provide a solid foundation for addressing the research questions. The first question (Q1) asked which sources of foreign policy information are the most recent and most important for the Greek public. The findings indicate that foreign policy information gathering has mainly become digitalized. Social media platforms and domestic online news sites now serve as the primary channels through which most Greek citizens access foreign policy content. Although traditional outlets, such as TV and print media, remain relevant, particularly among older respondents, the broader trend clearly favors digital platforms. However, the distribution of source preferences is far from uniform. It is segmented along key demographic and political lines, with younger, urban, and opposition-aligned respondents showing a marked preference for digital sources. This reflects a reshaped media environment where digital intermediaries have become central, even though no single actor holds dominant agenda-setting power.

The second research question (Q2) examined the extent to which digitalization has altered traditional patterns of information consumption. The survey data suggest that, while

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digitalization has broadened access and diversified the range of sources, it has not fundamentally changed the structural characteristics of the Greek media system. As Figures 2 and 4 illustrate, political polarization, selective exposure, and media fragmentation remain central features of the information environment. Respondents continue to rely on ideologically aligned sources, and credibility assessments are still largely influenced by political affiliation and social background. In this regard, digitalization has transformed the channels through which information is consumed but has replicated, rather than replaced, the core dynamics of the offline system.

The third research question (Q3) examined how socio-demographic factors influence patterns of information gathering. The results indicate that education and type of residence were particularly influential in shaping both media preferences and assessments of credibility. Respondents with tertiary education and those living in urban areas were more likely to use a wide range of information sources, including international ones, and to express skepticism toward government-affiliated media. In contrast, individuals with lower levels of education and those living in rural areas relied more heavily on traditional domestic sources and institutional figures. Age and political orientation also played a key role: younger individuals and opposition supporters were more digitally engaged and more likely to comment on foreign policy online, whereas non-voters and government supporters exhibited lower levels of both engagement and platform diversity.

The theoretical implications of these answers enable us to identify a few broader implications.

Firstly, in contrast to the assumptions of the Almond-Lippmann consensus, which suggested that the general public is largely uninformed and indifferent to international affairs (Almond 1956; Lippmann 1955), the survey results reveal a relatively high level of interest in foreign policy among Greek respondents. This finding supports the key principles of neoliberal theories, which argue that citizens can form stable, rational views on global affairs (Nye and Keohane 1971; Rosenau 1980; Burton 1972). However, the Greek case also highlights key limitations: interest alone does not necessarily translate into active or critical participation, even within the more accessible and interactive environment of digital media. Structural and cultural constraints, such as political polarization, media distrust, and algorithmic filtering, continue to limit engagement, indicating that the potential for public influence remains significantly mediated.

Secondly, the findings also help clarify theoretical perspectives on how the public gathers information about foreign policy. These perspectives range from top-down, elite-driven frameworks to bottom-up, pluralist approaches, offering competing interpretations of the relationship between controlled information flows and citizen-initiated engagement (Holsti 1992; Kertzer 2023). The Greek case reveals a hybrid configuration: while digital platforms theoretically support more horizontal flows of information, actual patterns of access and trust remain shaped mainly by vertical structures. Most respondents continue to rely on ideologically familiar sources, and credibility is often attributed based on political affiliation rather than expertise or neutrality. This supports the argument that even within a formally pluralistic media environment, information-gathering is defined by existing social identities, political orientations, and institutional traditions (Zaller 1992; Kertzer 2023).

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Thirdly, the results should also be examined in terms of the transformative effects of digitalization. In this respect, Greece followed global trends, showing clear signs of an accelerating shift towards a digitalised foreign policy market. While these changes were evident at both structural and technical levels, such as expanded access and the introduction of new intermediaries, their qualitative impact on the foreign policy market, particularly in terms of public engagement, was limited. Contrary to more optimistic expectations in the literature (Baum and Potter 2008, 2019; Bjola and Manor 2022), digitalization did not lead to broader societal participation in foreign policy processes; the Greek case largely reproduced established patterns of information asymmetry and selective trust. Although these patterns helped to avoid the current centralizing tendencies observed elsewhere in the Balkans and Central Europe (Ilić and Markov 2024; Kacziba 2024; Dudlák 2023), they still reflect the characteristics of polarized pluralist systems (Papathanassopoulos 2013), now reinforced by digital fragmentation and online asymmetries.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Greek citizens access foreign policy information in the digital era. The findings confirm that Greece's foreign policy information environment has shifted toward digital channels; however, this shift has not led to a more dialogic public sphere. Despite broader access, political polarization, selective exposure, and low credibility continue to shape how information is accessed and consumed. As a result, information gathering in the digital space replicates old tendencies. Instead of relying on expert opinion and objective analysis, citizens often turn to political sources or trusted, yet non-professional, social media sources. These results reveal a hybrid configuration in which digitalization has broadened horizontal access to foreign policy information. However, vertical structures such as political bias, distrust, and algorithmic curation continue to influence consumers' judgments on international affairs.

The results support theoretical claims that public interest in foreign policy is higher and more consistent than classic public opinion theory suggests (Almond 1956; Lippmann 1955). This aligns with subsequent work treating citizens as attentive actors (Holsti 1992; Page and Shapiro 1992). Nevertheless, the lack of active democratic participation suggests that a greater interest in and a digitalized foreign policy information market do not automatically translate into citizen involvement (Aalberg, Van Aelst, and Curran 2010; Değirmenci 2020; David 2022; Manor 2019). In Greece, this is linked to the persistence of a polarized-pluralist media system that absorbed digitalization into its established logic rather than being transformed by it (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Papathanassopoulos 2013; Kalogeropoulos et al. 2021). The same patterns influence trust in foreign policy information sources, leaning not only toward favored politicians but also toward peer networks. This demonstrates that Greece continues to exhibit Southeast European tendencies (Valchanov et al. 2022; Ilić and Markov 2024; Tzifakis and Vasdoka 2025).

Research related to this paper suggests that analyzing digitized foreign policy processes necessitates a more comprehensive consideration of public opinion and broader societal dynamics. This study attempted to address this requirement by conducting a cross-sectional, self-reported survey to map source use, credibility judgments, and participation patterns. While this approach produced valuable results, the study had limitations: it did not analyze behavior on specific digital platforms, it did not trace preferences toward audiovisual social media (e.g.,

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YouTube), and, as a single-country case study, it failed to generate comparative results suitable for generalization. Future research should therefore focus on specific foreign policy issues and test which messages, messengers, and formats build trust and encourage participation, while also placing case studies in comparative contexts.

CONTRIBUTOR

The author contributed solely to the intellectual discourse that forms the foundation of this article, as well as its writing and editing, and assumes full responsibility for its content and interpretation.

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Statement of Human Rights:
The study adhered to the ethical standards outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and relevant guidelines for research involving human participants. A nationwide online survey was conducted from February 2 to 14, 2024, among Greek citizens aged 18 and above. Participation was voluntary, fully anonymous, and no personal identifying information was collected or transferred. Data collection was managed by Fisherman's Online Ltd., a professional survey company.

Statement on the Welfare of Animals:
This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any authors.

Informed Consent:
All participants provided informed consent before participating. They were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. The self-administered questionnaire, completed anonymously on a dedicated Greek-language website, ensured that participants' privacy and autonomy were fully protected. No identifying information was collected or linked to responses, further safeguarding participants' confidentiality.

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