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## FIRST THOUGHTS ON THE 21ST MAY 2023 ELECTION IN GREECE



GPSG Pamphlet No 7

Edited by Vasiliki (Billy) Tsagkroni

[www.gpsg.org.uk](http://www.gpsg.org.uk)

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# **First Thoughts on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2023 Election in Greece**

Edited by Vasiliki (Billy) Tsagkroni

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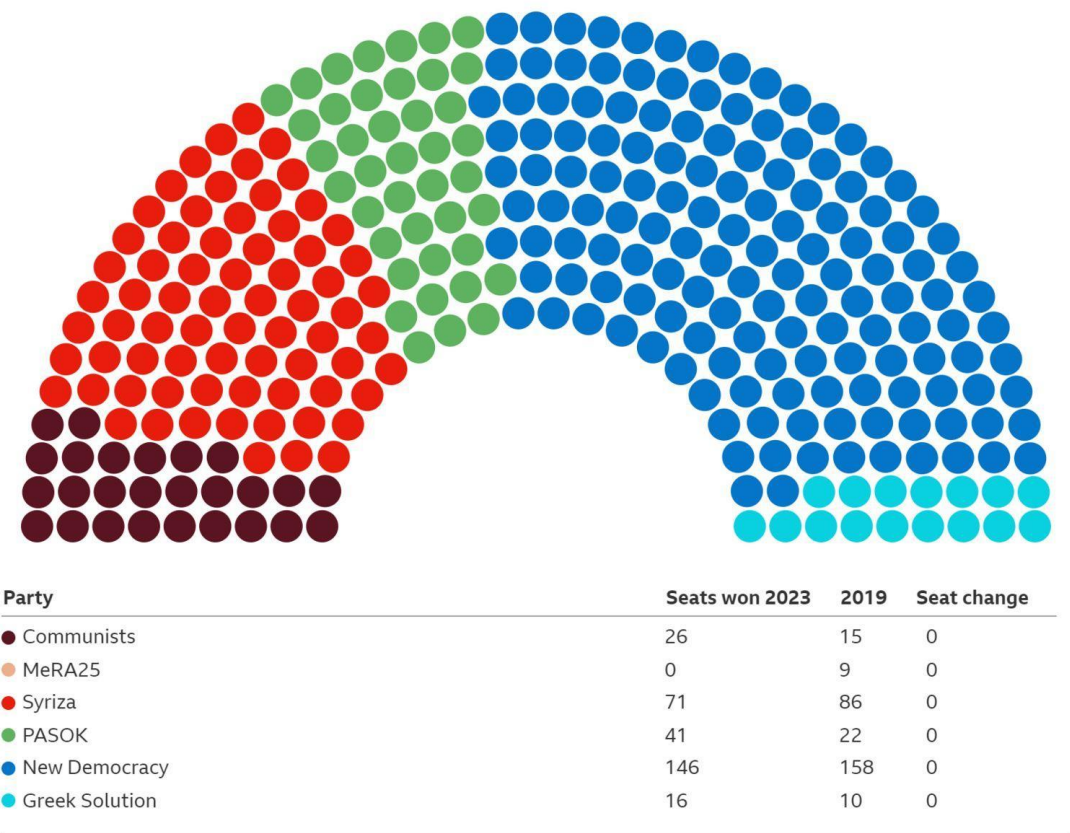
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# Greek parliamentary elections 2023

Based on 99.61% of results



Source: Greek interior ministry; Turnout 60.92%



21<sup>st</sup> May Parliamentary Elections Results *Source: BBC* <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65666261>



Rotterdam's electoral division, The Netherlands (© Vasiliki (Billy) Tsagkroni)



B' Athens electoral division, Greece (© Panagiota Manoli)



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## Editorial

By Vasiliki (Billy) Tsagkroni, Angelos Angelou and George Dikaos

After almost a decade, this year's polls were the first without financial assistance program in place. 32 parties entered the electoral competition, with two main contestants: the conservative party of New Democracy (ND), under the leadership of the current Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, and the main opposition party, SYRIZA, under the leadership of Alexis Tsipras, who served as Prime Minister during some of the most turbulent years of the financial crisis (2015-2019). The other main political actors are the social-democratic party of PASOK, led by Nikos Androulakis, the Greek Communist Party KKE, led by Dimitris Koutsoumbas, the right-wing party of Greek Solution, led by Kyriakos Velopoulos and the left-wing European Realistic Disobedience Front MeRA25, led by Giannis Varoufakis, the maverick former minister of finance of the first SYRIZA government back in 2015.

With the newly introduced proportional voting system in place, the estimations were that it would be unlikely for any party to get the required majority to form a one-party government, thus, pointing to two alternative scenarios: either a coalition government would be formed (with the current divisions among parties making this a rather distant scenario) or a second election would take place. The latter scenario makes it easier for the party winning the majority to form a government, as a bonus applies, i.e. if the first party wins 25% of the vote, it is then awarded with a bonus of 20 seats. For every 0.5%, over 25%, it gets an additional bonus seat, a total of 50 bonus seats. For instance, if the first party gets 35% of the vote, it will be awarded a bonus of 40 seats.

In the run-up to the elections, ND enjoyed a double-digit lead in opinion polls, but since the rail accident of 28 February at Tempì, the party experienced a significant drop in public support. The ruling party also struggled with the surveillance scandal, implicating both politicians and journalists. The scandal increased mistrust towards the government and sparked tensions in the electoral debate. Despite the rail disaster and the wiretapping scandal, opinion polls continuously pointed to a steady lead of the current leading party. However, the final outcome of Sunday's results came as a surprise to most.

Against every prediction, ND won by a large margin (40.79%) in what can be considered as a triumph and political turbulence in the national political scene. While the new proportional system did not allow ND to form a one-party government, it was left only five seats short of a majority (146 of 151 required). One of the biggest surprises came from the low percentage of 20.07% for the party of SYRIZA. SYRIZA experienced an 11.46% drop from the previous elections of 2019. Additionally, three other parties passed the 3% threshold, with all of them experiencing an increase compared to the previous elections: PASOK (11.46% in comparison to 8.10% in 2019 results), KKE (7.23%, with a rise of 1.93% compared to its 2019 results) and Greek Solution (4.45%, with a rise of 0.75% compared to its 2019 results). Another surprise, though, concerns the high percentage of parties that didn't manage to reach the



required 3% threshold. For the sake of comparison, the respective percentage in 2019 was 8.07%. In particular, attention is drawn to the three parties that marginally didn't make it: the already mentioned MeRA25, which received 2.62% of the vote; the Course of Freedom, a left-wing party formed by Zoi Konstantopoulou, a former member of SYRIZA and president of the Greek Parliament in 2015, which received 2.89%; and finally the Democratic Patriotic Movement NIKH, another right-wing party formed by Dimitris Natsios in 2019, that received 2.92% of the vote.

A first reading of the results points to a clear intention of the Greek electorate to support a second term of the current ruling party, hence, expressing a notion of desired stability in government and a continuing preference to follow the path of pragmatism. While ND looks ahead to the second election with optimism and a sense of accomplishment, the strategic loss of SYRIZA has created a heated internal discussion over how to re-organise for the upcoming second elections. Moreover, the party seems to have initiated a wider debate over its leadership, political identity and structural weaknesses. SYRIZA's electoral campaign pointed to a party that overestimated its strength and whose programmatic platform lacked persuasiveness and clarity. According to the first exit polls, SYRIZA's supporters seemed to not have rallied around the party this time (only 68.5% of SYRIZA voters of 2019 voted for the party this time around). They also presented high vote volatility rankings and shifted towards all parties, as mentioned above. Finally, what seems to be the case is that SYRIZA lost a high percentage of the anti-systemic vote, with left-wing supporters choosing between MeRA25 and Course of Freedom as alternative options and right-wing voters between the Greek Solution and NIKH. Independently of whether they will be able to achieve parliamentary representation in the forthcoming second elections, the dynamic appearance of all three MeRA25, Course of Freedom and NIKH portends a determined intention for obtaining and maintaining a long-term presence in the country's political scene.

This year's elections also constituted a benchmark for Greeks living abroad as it was the first time they were entitled to participate in the election process, yet, having the right to choose only State ballots for each party. The polls were set up in 35 countries around the globe, with 99 electoral divisions in operation. A total of 22.827 expatriate Greeks were registered to vote. In the end, there was a 79,6% turnout of the registered voters in the special foreign electoral polls (18.203 voters in total), with the majority voting for the party of ND (44.62%) followed by SYRIZA (19.04%) and KKE (11.07%). Although the Greek parliament approved the relevant law (4648/2019) in December 2019, the information campaign on registering in the special foreign electoral polls was initiated only in 2021. This, in addition to the registration procedure and the strict conditions that need to be met for one to exercise the right to vote, may justify the low number of approved registered voters. While expatriates were essentially allowed to elect only three MPs, a fact that limits the impact of the vote, this does not diminish the importance of Greeks participating in national elections while living abroad. Indeed, this signifies a new phase in the relationship between the Greeks of the diaspora and the Greek state.

Finally, special attention is drawn to the young electorate, with the age limit to participate in the elections being dropped to 17. According to official figures, 438.595

young people between the ages of 17 and 21 had the opportunity to cast their maiden vote, representing a generation that differs substantially from the previous ones. Indeed, this generation is called to participate in the electoral process for the first time after experiencing a decade of economic hardship and the pandemic's implications. Analysts estimated that young voters could significantly influence the election result, thus prompting parties to focus a significant part of their campaign on them, trying to approach them through social media and youthful narratives (informal and comprehensible discourse). Final results showed that young people between the ages of 17-24 voted for ND at 31.5% and SYRIZA at 28.8%.

Kyriakos Mitsotakis, on Monday, 22nd, 2023, conveyed to the political leaders his intention to speed up the formation and dissolution of Parliament so that the second parliamentary elections can be held on June 25th 2023. After the second election, it might be the time to ask ourselves and attempt to explain through our scientific research what made the election campaign period (leading to the 21st of May election) so uninteresting and its result so unexpected? Does this result reflect the actions of a successful government and/or a failed stance of the largest (and leading) opposition party? Also, does this outcome signify that the electorate is willing to accept that mistakes do happen (and, in this particular case, this is "ok")? Has the time come to see the differences between the parties beyond their ideological cloak and the right-left dichotomy? The elections of the 21st of May opened a new and intriguing period for the analysis of the Greek political scene.

Following the success of our previous Pamphlet editions, the Greek Politics Specialist Group is delighted to host our seventh collection of short commentaries on the May election. This pamphlet is by no means a comprehensive, detailed or definitive account of the elections. It is merely a dialogue platform as an opportunity for reflection. We hope this publication will sparkle further discussion on the Greek political scene, and we welcome further contributions through our various outlets, such as the GPSG Working Papers series, the series of articles on our website and newsflash, and, of course, our forthcoming events and panels.

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## **Section I**

### **The Greek elections in context**

# 1 | 'Out of the woods; toward a new political landscape'

By Costas Dikeos

An initial response to the May 2023 election would be the words 'remarkable', 'astonishing', 'surprising', 'unexpected', and 'watershed'. Though all by and large correct, they should be qualified, plus the term 'watershed' prompts the question, 'where does the shed lead the water to'? This brief approach goes as far back as 1990.

Let me commence by dividing the thirty-three-year period (and thirteen elections) into two shorter ones, related both to political landscapes and the economic crisis: therefore, the two sub-periods are 1990-2009 (or 2012, for that matter) and 2012 to 2023. Is the post-2023 period going to be by any means different?

Elections between 1990 and 2009 featured a two-party system with PASOK and Nea Dimokratia, whilst turnout is worth noting and taking into account as a parameter too. During the first sub-period, turnout ranged between 79.51% in 1990, getting gradually lower (with only 2004 being higher than 2000) and ending at 70.95% in 2009. Contrary, the 2012 (I) election features a turnout of 65.10%, getting as low as 56.57 at the 2015 (II) election and remaining at a low of 60.92% (though admittedly higher than the 57.78% of 2019) in May 2023.

Similarly, the aggregate of the two major parties ranged from 86.18% in 1993 to a 'low' of (!) 77.39% in 2009, whilst the gap between the two major parties had a high of 10.45% (in 2009 PASOK over Nea Dimokratia) and a low of 1.05% (in 2000 also PASOK over Nea Dimokratia) being at the range of, in the early 1990s and circa, 3% to 5% in other elections. Turning to the gap between the second and the third party, we observe a high of 37.22% in 2000 to a 'low' (!) of 25.93% in 2009.

Once more, I will use the term 'contrary' regarding the 'post memorandum' party system and political crisis. The 2012 (I) election gave an aggregate of the two major parties at 35.72% (lower but once of the total of the second party till then), with the gap between the second and the third party being at 3.69%, whilst three (or even four as SYRIZA that existed before had undergone significant restructuring) new parties entered Parliament. The second 2012 (II) election showed differences but remained far from returning to the previous landscape. The 2015 elections (both I and II) indicate some change, with the total of the two major parties being 64.5% and 63.55%, and the gap between second and third getting to about 21 to 22%. The appearance and extinction of parties during these years should not remain unnoticed.

The 2019 election took a step towards 'old stability' with the two major parties (but SYRIZA instead of PASOK now being the one) having an aggregate of 71.38%, and the gap between the second and the third party (PASOK renamed as KinAl) getting at 23.43%.

As mentioned at the onset, the 2023 election result is 'remarkable', 'astonishing', 'surprising', and 'unexpected': the aggregate got 60.92%. However, this is predominantly due to SYRIZA's collapse, as ND got a rather high 40.79%, increasing its performance both as a percentage (fractionally) and in numerical terms by about 150.000 votes. The 'remarkable' etc. feature is the gap between the two major parties standing for the first time not only after 1990 but ever since 1977, at 20.72%. On the other hand, PASOK increased its performance, and the difference between the second and the third party got as narrow as 8.61%.

A key question that needs to be addressed regarding most elections after 2012 relates to turnout vs abstention. Who are the voters abstaining? Why are they abstaining? Did they abstain at the previous election too, or what did they vote the last time they voted? A post-election poll, e.g. at 19:00 on Sunday, would be as interesting and as useful as an exit poll- pollsters should sometime consider this.

Last short point on the 'watershed' and water flow towards a new landscape. Though 'a week is a long time in politics' it seems that ND will prevail in June (or July) 2023 and that it will also dominate Greek politics for some years to come. The 20% gap seems very wide, and SYRIZA will have a high hill to climb, whereas losses may lead to restructuring.

Therefore, a question is looming over Greece and the future Greek political landscape: is Greece drifting towards a dominant (liberal-conservative) party system reminiscent of Japan? Or is it that a week is a long time in politics?

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*Dr Costas Dikeos is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the Democritus University of Thrace.*

## 2 | Should we choose between economic prosperity and democracy? A meta-question after the Greek elections of the 21st of May

By Odysseas Konstantinakos

The electoral outcome in Greece is an undisputed triumph of New Democracy. Despite all the odds that accumulated from scandals and crises, Kiriakos Mitsotakis managed to convince voters. For the opposition, yesterday's elections were a disaster. I want to focus on the main message of the two contenders and extrapolate from that to a more abstract question that remains unanswered. New Democracy was elected on a platform of political stability and economic prosperity: i.e.; we go forward, we cannot take any risks now. This narrative resonates well with a society that went through a protracted economic and political crisis. The former government delivered in terms of aggregate growth but failed to distribute fairly. And Kyriakos Mitsotakis promised this during his last campaign: more jobs, better jobs, higher wages. Fair enough! He might be able to deliver something along these lines because he leads a business-friendly party that represents self-employed entrepreneurs and employees. He also believes in the animal spirits of markets, and his faith is that an investment spike might happen after a decade of anaemic growth.

A sceptic might call this 'wishful thinking', but narratives are very influential in attracting market actors. Already on Monday, the stock market went on a spree with 7% while bank stocks went up by a staggering 15%! So there was economic rationality in the way people voted, and markets reacted positively. Let's shift to the other side now: SYRIZA's punch line was 'Justice'. The electoral campaign was a battery of criticism and negative campaigning against New Democracy and the PM personally. They accused them - and rightly so - of numerous scandals, from clientelism to wiretapping, nepotism, and corruption.

Greece has been a textbook case of democratic backsliding in the last few years, scoring extremely low on press freedom, judiciary independence, and human rights. Both agendas are 'right' from a normative point of view, but the meta-question is disturbing: what if economic prosperity and democracy are mutually exclusive in Greece? Voters consciously choose a party that is likely to deliver a more dynamic and competitive economy. Still, it is unlikely that the rule of law and press freedom will improve with a majoritarian government formed by the same party and political personnel under whose watch democratic standards deteriorated. Yet, markets endorsed this choice, and confidence in the economy rose. This is not a novelty; Greece follows a trend: strong leaders promise economic stability in times of crisis, disregarding democratic principles.

The question of whether capitalism is compatible with democracy is an old one, but it gains relevance after yesterday's results. Left-wing forces in the West opt for a post-



material pro-democracy discourse that often fails to deliver tangible economic outcomes for reasons beyond their capacity. On the other hand, right-wing parties focus on bread and butter, tapping into the market confidence they enjoy. Can we have both?

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*Odysseas Konstantinakos is a PhD candidate at the European University Institute.*

### 3 | Blast from the Past or Path to the Future?

By Marios P. Efthymiopoulos

The outcome of the recent electoral voting process is of historical value. A phenomenal result is “Made in Greece”. This is a message about the future character of electoral voting in Europe. I wonder. Back to Greek politics, the result has never been seen before. What a range of differences between the first party and the second! 20.1 points.

And yet one may wonder, why would I be happy mentioning this at this stage? More so since we are probably moving on to a second round of the election on June 25th 2023. Mainly because this is a clear message for the future of the state and the Greeks themselves. And no wonder the upcoming voting, the electoral result will provide a far greater number of MPs to lead on the Hellenic Parliament (approximate numbers account between 170-180 -while for a government, it is required to have majority control of a minimum 151 members out of 300).

Greece looks mature. Ready to take on more active roles. To upscale the state and its people. This is the opportunity for a vision of the future. The immediate outcome of results did indeed directly impact the national stock market, while also a global market reaction. Two keywords in the aftermath of the elections: Stability and prosperity. It is thus time for the next Greek government to proceed with actual work. To overcome obstacles and chronic mistakes. While also ever-growing political pathogenic circumstances. We are looking at a political culture in the making.

The elections of May 21st, 2023, hold multiple messages. To all that wish to lead and rule. And to those that believe that they are on the right path. A message to the political parties from our voters. A strong Greece requires a clear-cut position. In multiple topics of concern. Knowledge also, among others. Alliances as well. A strong Europe needs a strong Greece, and vice versa. Greece is now on its way to a deeper Euro-Atlantic Identity. But it is also time to talk about a Global Greece. With much prosperity and stability, evolution into the future with pioneering processes, methods, and actual results. While also the resolution of pending issues, while also the correction of current ones.

For Greece, it is now a matter of “pride”. In the face of its current Prime Minister and Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. A government that is stable means that it can provide for its people. With a vision and a process. For a government that should and can do more for its people. For a leader that presents credentials supported by its people nationally and internationally. Leadership is born in such circumstances. Greece was not left untouched by recent and past challenges starting through Covid. And it will not be left unchanged by the challenges ahead of us. Considering regional, peripheral, and global volatility, a changing security and climate landscape. The

scarcity of resources and the need to go beyond a traditional thought in action and the starts.

This is not a virtual reality. This is a whole new chapter in the Greek politics. A new era is ahead of us. It is not a myth or a philosophy. It is a reality applied. And for parties to rule, they must integrate into the reality of strategic thinking for the long term.

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## 4 | The known unknowns and unknown unknowns of the Greek elections of 21st May 2023: Return to electoral normality

By Georgios Maris

The Greek elections of 21st May 2023 are a prime opportunity to challenge and revise much of our conventional wisdom about the behaviour of Greek voters. Moreover, the result of the Greek elections makes us understand that there are issues that we did not know or at least refused to discuss.

The first issue is related to electoral normality. Almost 15 years have passed since the appearance of the economic crisis in Greece and nearly five years since the end of the memorandums. However, both the political scientists in Greece and the political parties, mainly those belonging to the center-left, failed to interpret such a shift towards normality, continuing the conflicting rhetoric in their programs. This created false expectations in the party-political leaders and alienated a large part of their voters.

The second issue is related to leadership. Even if it was taboo in the centre-left, Alexis Tsipras no longer seems to be the leader who can attract Greek voters during electoral normality conditions. He has lost his political credibility. He seems to be paying for his political choices and his change of attitude toward the referendum. The Greek voters did not punish him during the economic crisis because the crisis conditions were still valid. Getting back to normality, it seems to be very difficult for him to come back.

The third issue is related to ideology. The left, whether radical or socialist, unlike in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, has not managed to convince the Greek people of the superiority of its ideological narrative. Both the return of electoral normality and the loss of credibility of Alexis Tsipras have contributed to this. PASOK also failed to create the same ideological narrative. The historical evaluation of the electoral behaviour of Greek voters has shown that they turn en masse towards that political party that manages to create the most stable and reliable ideological narrative. In this sense, the political leaders of SYRIZA, PASOK, and MERA-25 failed to interpret the consequences that the return to electoral normality would have on the electoral behaviour of Greek voters.

The fourth issue is the organizational issue. This is also a taboo among the political leaders of the left parties. They have not developed an effective organizational-level network to promote their political goals and ideas, especially in the periphery. In particular, due to the unexpected success of the last years, the political party of SYRIZA seems to have rested on the laurels of its own success, without developing its ability to access the Greek periphery and without building a stable democratic party organization. But how could one successfully organize political campaigns without this

stable party organization? The electoral representatives of SYRIZA were simply absent. PASOK was more organized than SYRIZA in the periphery. The absence of a reliable SYRIZA party organization is another issue that has not been discussed at all by political scientists and SYRIZA executives.

It is clear from the discussion above that there are many issues that we did not know we did not know. These issues have been overlooked both by political scientists and policymakers, especially from the left political space. The return to normality will be hard for those who continue to ignore the expectations of the Greek citizens. Under these circumstances, the result of the Greek elections seems perfectly normal.

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*Dr Georgios Maris is an Associate Professor at the Department of Mediterranean Studies at the University of Aegean.*

## **Section II**

### **The 21st May elections**



## 5 | The 2019-23 New Democracy government's record: domestic and international perceptions

By Kira Gartzou-Katsouyanni

The magnitude of New Democracy's lead on Sunday's election surprised citizens, commentators, and politicians in Greece and abroad.

A friend, who in the past had supported SYRIZA and voted "No" in the 2015 referendum, explained that this time she voted for New Democracy "because the country went forward". Part of the reason for that feeling are improved economic conditions: the boom in tourism and the availability of public funding to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis contributed to Greek growth rates that exceeded the Euro area average for the first time in ten years (Figure 1). While broader economic trends that turned out to comparatively benefit Greece were not of the New Democracy government's making, the government capitalised on those trends. For example, Greece was one of the first EU countries to impose a windfall tax on energy companies, including oil refineries, raising revenues that helped address the cost-of-living crisis. Moreover, Greece's Recovery and Resilience Plan was among the first to be approved by the European Commission, opening the path for the early disbursement of EU pandemic-response funds, which have continued to flow into the country at a fast pace (in May 2023, Greece was among the first three EU countries to request a third disbursement).

Beyond the economy, Greek citizens have experienced improvements in some aspects of their daily interaction with the state, most famously in e-government, among other policy areas. One of the widely recognised achievements in this sphere was the delivery of an efficient, transparent vaccination campaign that fully utilised digital tools for booking appointments and checking vaccination records.

On the other hand, the recent train accident in Tembi, which cost 57 lives and was the result of unforgivable mistakes at the operational and political level, showed that in several policy areas, not much changed during the last four years. The accident was a stark reminder that in Greece, competent government is not a luxury, but a matter of life and death. Nevertheless, the opposition failed to persuade that it had the vision and the ability to deliver relevant improvements, while New Democracy's declared priorities for the next four years seemed to resonate: improving the public health system and raising salaries.

Some of the issues that have recently figured prominently in the international press, notably the wiretapping scandal, the allegations of pushbacks at the Greek borders, and Greece's media landscape, appeared to have played next to no role in Sunday's election. It is tempting for New Democracy to conclude that it can ignore those issues or dismiss them with a cavalier attitude. However, Greece has experienced how quickly a country's international reputation can be tarnished, and what destructive

consequences this can have (see our short book on [The Greco-German Affair in the Euro Crisis](#)). New Democracy would be well-advised to address those issues seriously, and where any allegations are justified, to make it its utmost priority to promote the rule of law in Greece.

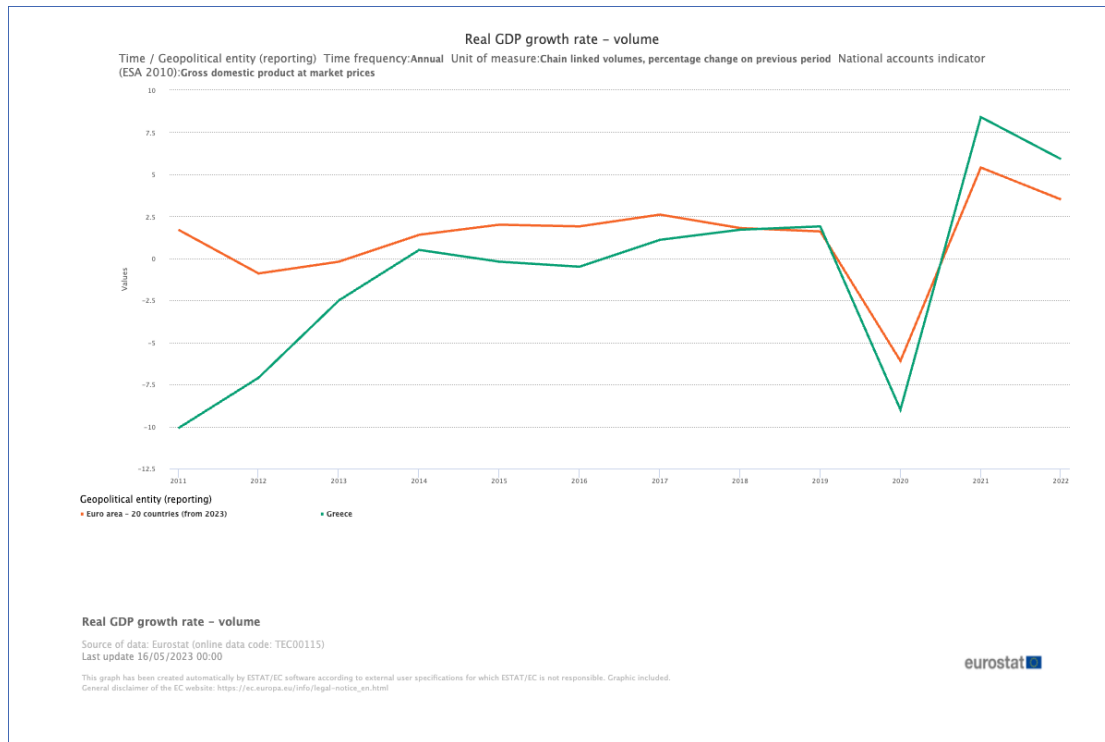


Figure 1: Real GDP growth rate in Greece and the Euro area, 2011-2022. Source: Eurostat.

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*Dr Kira Gartzou-Katsouyanni is a postdoctoral researcher at the LSE's Hellenic Observatory.*

## 6 | Greek elections May 2023: A triumph victory for Mitsotakis, collapse for Tsipras

By Orestis Chatzigiannakis

The Greek elections of 2023 have been characterized as the most important elections for the future of the country and its financial direction. Since August 2020, the country is, formally, without the supervision that the memoranda of understanding applied, but with a massive public debt regulated only until 2030, the next government's decisions will have a huge impact on the next generations. On Sunday, around 6 million people voted in the elections and gave a great victory to the right-wing party of New Democracy. In particular, New Democracy gained a tremendous percentage of 40,79% i.e. 2,5 million votes ( a turnout not significantly different from the one in the 2019 elections).

In these elections the right-wing party of New Democracy, having to confront mostly the spyware scandal and the tragic train crash in Tempi, aimed to achieve a majority that would allow it to establish a one-party government, without having to resort to second elections on June 25. This goal acted as a compass for voters, who left behind the abovementioned events and chose stability. Regardless of this dystopic political reality, New Democracy achieved to make the demand for political stability its main slogan, in addition to economic growth and public sector digitalization. As such, it achieved a triumph that leads the country to a big crossroads. Either the new right-wing government, stronger than ever in Greek history, will choose the path of implementing a program of modernization, or Greece will be led in the same dark path such as Hungary's "urbanism".

On the other hand, the left-wing party of SYRIZA with an old-school and more leader-centred electoral campaign suffered a terrible loss. This electoral collapse is probably the end of Tsipras's political career. Greek society punished SYRIZA leading to alarming results and to the potential of a huge downswing in the next elections with the party even risking to be in third place in a month from now.

Regarding the other parties, the centre-left party of PASOK- KINAL with its new leader managed to overcome the stepping stone of 10 %. With this result and some media support, the party is moving forward to regain its old electoral power of the '80s and 90's and to become the progressive pole in the battle against New Democracy.

The Communist party also increased its power gaining 7,26 % of the total vote. This should be attributed to the fact that, for the first time, the party conducted a mainstream electoral campaign. In addition, DiEM 25 suffered a great loss, mainly due to Yanis Varoufakis's ambiguous financial strategy. The far-right party of Kyriakos Velopoulos achieved easily its entrance into the Greek Parliament by winning the votes of disappointed right and far-right citizens.

Concluding, the result of the elections was a “triumph” victory for the party of New Democracy and a huge defeat for SYRIZA, which can lead the party to extinction. As such, Greece probably enters a new era with the right-wing party stronger than ever.

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## 7 | Yet another Greek snap election?

By Alexandros Kyriakidis

The May 21st Greek general election is the eighth time within 15 years that Greeks vote; an average of approximately one election every 2 years. How is that possible?

According to the [Greek Constitution](#) (par. 1, Article 53), the Parliamentary term, and, hence, electoral (and governmental) cycle, is 4 years from the date of the last general election. However, the Constitution also gives (par. 2, Article 41) the President the ability to, pursuant to a proposal by the government, dissolve the Parliament at any point “for the purpose of renewing the popular mandate, in view of dealing with a national issue of exceptional importance,” leading to the proclamation of snap (earlier) elections (snap elections are also called when it is not possible to form or maintain a government that enjoys the confidence of parliament, after the resignation of, or removal of confidence by the parliament in, governments, and if there is a failure to elect a President; Articles 32, 37 and 41).

Within the last 15 years, there have been no full parliamentary terms; all eight Greek general elections have been snap elections called, on average, 1.5 years earlier than the expiry of the parliamentary term, and in all but three cases (17.06.2012, 25.01.2015, 20.09.2015) based on the constitutional provision relating to a national issue of exceptional importance. The average duration of a Parliamentary term has been half (approximately 2 years) of what is constitutionally provisioned (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Greek general elections and Parliamentary Terms 2007 – 2023.

Proclaimed	Held	4-year term expiry	Held vs. 4-year term	Parliamentary term duration (previously held vs. next proclaimed)
<a href="#">22.04.2023</a>	21.05.2023	07.07.2023	47 days	3 years, 9 months, 15 days
<a href="#">11.06.2019</a>	07.07.2019	20.09.2019	75 days	3 years, 8 months, 22 days
<a href="#">28.08.2015</a>	20.09.2015	25.01.2019	1223 days	7 months, 3 days
<a href="#">31.12.2014</a>	25.01.2015	17.06.2016	508 days	2 years, 6 months, 14 days
<a href="#">19.05.2012</a>	17.06.2012	06.05.2016	1419 days	10 days
<a href="#">11.04.2012</a>	06.05.2012	04.10.2013	516 days	2 years, 6 months, 7 days
<a href="#">07.09.2009</a>	04.10.2009	16.09.2011	73 days	2 years, 20 days
<a href="#">18.08.2007</a>	16.09.2007	07.03.2008	174 days	3 years, 6 months, 7 days

The above are in contrast with other countries with electoral systems allowing for snap elections, even those that underwent structural adjustment programs (and, hence, inevitably experienced the relevant political unrest) during the Eurozone crisis [like](#) Greece. For the same 15 years, the [United Kingdom](#) and [Ireland](#) had half the number of general elections (4 each), [Italy](#) and [Portugal](#) had 5, and [Spain](#) had 6.

It is [common](#) in parliamentary systems to provision for the possibility of snap elections; not least when there is no possibility for the formation of a government that enjoys the confidence of Parliament or when a government resigns, for example. However, the fact that it is constitutionally permitted in Greece to call for snap elections for any issue that an incumbent government alone deems “of exceptional importance,” while theoretically providing for the possibility that, in certain exceptional and grave circumstances, the popular mandate should be renewed, thus enhancing democratic standards, results, in reality, in an inherently unpredictable electoral cycle, parliamentary terms that are consistently and considerably shorter than what is constitutionally provided, and potentially opportunistic behaviour from incumbent governments. Moving forward, a stricter interpretation and/or application of this particular provision, or consideration of relevant legislation introducing a more consistent electoral cycle, may potentially improve confidence and reduce the likelihood of the aforementioned issues.

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## 8 | A clear win for the first party and the challenge for the next electoral race

By Stylianos Ioannis Tzagkarakis

The Greek parliamentary elections of May 21, 2023, were conducted using the simple proportional system, with a threshold of 3% for a party to enter the Parliament. Although achieving a majority of 151 seats by a single party is extremely difficult, New Democracy (ND) came close as it managed to elect 146 representatives. The 20.7% difference between ND and the second party, SYRIZA, in addition to the five parties that entered Parliament, saw only SYRIZA lose approximately 600,000 voters in comparison to the 2019 elections, with all other parties gaining more voters. On the one hand, a significant portion of the electorate positively evaluated the management of successive crises (pandemic, energy crisis-inflation, Turkish aggression) by the ND government as well as its proposals, but on the other hand, they were not convinced enough by the governmental proposal of SYRIZA. Moreover, the fact that ND came close to winning an outright majority with the simple proportional system while also outperforming in all electoral districts of Greece except Rodopi is unprecedented and further emphasizes the fact that voters chose the stability of an enhanced proportional system over the possible instability that the simple proportional system may bring. This is important to note when considering the limited conditions and political culture for programmatic convergences.

The percentage of PASOK increased by approximately 40%, indicating that several centre-left voters were persuaded by the party's proposals and its oppositional stance. This has the potential to open a window of opportunity for even greater electoral gains if the next elections are held soon. The Communist Party (KKE) also increased its percentages, remaining faithful to its oppositional stance and its denial of potential post-election coalition scenarios. Moreover, Greek Solution attracted more voters compared to the 2019 elections, particularly in northern Greece. While MERA25 did not even enter Parliament, perhaps paying the price for the uncertainty created by the proposal for a parallel currency unit named "Dimitra".

Consequently, the day after the elections, Greece found itself without a government majority. As revealed by the statements of party representatives, there is no room for convergence among the parties to form a coalition government. The significant electoral difference between ND and SYRIZA, as well as with the other opposition parties, highlights the intention of the electorate for a single-party government, which could be achieved through the enhanced proportional system that will be used in the upcoming elections. Though this will be the case only if there is not an agreement for a coalition government this week.

According to the system used in the upcoming elections, the first party receives a bonus of twenty seats in the parliament with a 25% share and an additional bonus seat for every 0.5% above 25%, receiving a maximum of fifty bonus seats at 40% or

higher. If the percentages follow the trends of the May 21 elections, ND will have a single-party government in the next electoral race.

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## 9 | A Crystal-Clear Political Mandate

By Georgia Dimari

The Greek people's mandate in this election was crystal-clear: a dynamic renewal of Kyriakos Mitsotakis' government. A first glance at the results, in my view, highlights three peculiar realities in the Greek political scene.

First, populism has lost its impetus in Greece. More specifically, in the case of Syriza, Alexis Tsipras does not enjoy political credibility or trustworthiness. This can be attributed to the fact that his leadership has been compromised several times by a number of trusted partners. Moreover, during his governance and his role as the political opposition, Syriza lost its ideological compass. Indeed, there has been an infusion of numerous leftist strands in the party that do not provide for a clear-cut ideology, impacting, overall, the party's political strategy, which, as the debate showed, seems vague. Last, Tsipras, being himself a by-product of the desperate surge for change that spread around Europe in the 2010s, did not manage to offer a reliable political alternative during the years of his governance, and furthermore, as the results show, he failed in his vital role as political opposition to Mitsotakis' party. To conclude, in my view, Tsipras has been a political phenomenon with strong 'underdog culture' ties, doomed to fail.

Second, despite the significant and long-awaited increase in the vote share of PASOK-KINAL, there is no political evidence yet that would suggest a future leadership comeback for this historical party. Continuing further, it seems that the Greek people do not have the will to 'resurrect' the mogul party of PASOK, as it has been registered in the Greek political and historical consciousness, mainly due to its association with corruption in the public sector and its alleged contribution to the financial turmoil that Greece has found itself in during the last years. Yet, despite these impediments, PASOK 'shines bright like a diamond' in these elections for two reasons. First, it has managed to oust the primacy of Syriza in several key prefectures and areas of Greece and to double its percentages from the previous elections. Second, it has drawn up such a meticulous political strategy that it could place second in the upcoming elections. A marvellous development indeed.

Third, it seems that Kyriakos Mitsotakis, during his term, has provided the Greek people with what they needed the most after years of uncertainty: a 'sense' of security in several domains, the most notable ones being security at the borders and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even mega issues of the economy, such as the raging inflation and the painful electricity bills, have not overshadowed the successes of Kyriakos Mitsotakis in the economy, such as the attraction of investments from abroad and his controversial social policy of money infusions to the most vulnerable in multiple instances. Add these to the absence of a serious opponent, and you have these elections' historical results.

Overall, what strikes me the most is that the leadership of Mitsotakis is so firm that neither the Tempi tragedy nor the wiretapping scandal has managed to curtail or even diminish his electoral triumph. This should say something to us.

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# 10 | Mitsotakis emerges triumphant while the Greek left suffers a night of complete downfall

By Georgios Samaras

It is truly a remarkable and astonishing triumph for New Democracy, as this victory marks Mitsotakis as one of the most influential Greek prime ministers since the Metapolitefsi era. The performance of New Democracy highlights three primary aspects: a) incidents such as the wiretapping scandal and the Tempi accident have had no discernible impact on Mitsotakis, b) the Greek populace appears to wholeheartedly endorse the government's adept handling of the economy, and c) New Democracy has gained an advantage from nearly 700,000 votes that seemingly migrated from SYRIZA following the 2019 legislative election.

Alexis Tsipras and his closest confidants must be exceedingly disheartened, as his 16-year tenure as the leader of SYRIZA is on the verge of a conclusion. SYRIZA must reflect on its errors, concentrate on crafting a new manifesto that advocates for a more robust welfare state, and challenge New Democracy's fiscal policies.

The polling data has completely failed to anticipate the influence of New Democracy and the collapse of SYRIZA, underscoring once again the glaring methodological flaws. However, the magnitude of the outcome is truly unprecedented, revealing a failure on the part of pollsters who underestimated New Democracy's appeal across Greece.

Another profoundly surprising outcome is the steady ascent of PASOK, which could impact SYRIZA's performance in the second election. Should voters rally behind PASOK, this may lead to further losses for the party, unless, of course, a dramatic shift occurs between now and June 25th, which is likely to be the date of the subsequent election.

On an ideological level, I believe that the next four years will provide New Democracy with the opportunity to reinforce most of its policy preferences. The party has embraced a stringent migration policy, utilizing unlawful pushbacks to address waves of migration from the east, while also adopting a xenophobic rhetoric. This victory affirms that these practices garner approval from a significant portion of the Greek public, conveying a clear message to New Democracy.

All in all, the Greek election serves as evidence of a substantial right-wing shift within European nations. New Democracy has attained an unparalleled triumph, which has the potential to widen the margin in the upcoming June 25th election.

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# 11 | Greek National Elections of 21st May 2023: A challenge to bipolarism at its best

By Ioannis P. Sotiropoulos

If the Greek National Elections of July 2019 resulted at the beginning of the reconstruction and re-institution of bipolarism in the Greek political system, it is more than obvious that in the most recent elections, the Greek voters decided to halt this process. The primary responsibility for this lies with the party of the Coalition of the Radical Left-Progressive Alliance (SY.RI.ZA-P.S.), although it has spent four full years in the opposition and has grosso modo, failed to adjunct and consolidate its position as a big and strong party-pylon within the Greek political parties' spectrum.

Without a doubt, the Greek National Elections of 21st May 2019, resulted in a wide margin unprecedented electoral victory for the governing centre-right liberal political party of New Democracy-(N.D.), with a 40,79% (146/300 seats) against SY.RI.ZA-P.S., which, ideologically, put itself between social democracy and communism, and gained 20.07% (71/300 seats). In the third position finished the centre-left, social-democratic party of PA.SO.K. which gained 11,46% (41 seats), leaving in the fourth place the Greek Communist Party (KKE) with 7,23% (21 seats), while the last party over 3%, threshold put by the Greek Constitution for the entrance in the Greek Parliament, was Hellenic Solution, a traditional popular right party, with 4,45% (16 seats), respectively.

In the midst of a creeping and profound party crisis, SY.RIZ.A.-P.S. proceeded to the political campaign with a series of organizational inadequacies and disadvantages and perform a lot of tactical errors such as the lack of new and effective ideas, the implementation of several inapt and unsuitable campaign tactics, which, inter alia, included the systematic application of negative political advertising, while its party executives and other staff had not concrete but rather vague and diverse ideas regarding the possibility of post-election party's cooperation policy, the promising of a wide paternal welfare state and allowance in all social and economic sectors without providing of analysis or explanation of regarding programmes' cost, and finally it, lazily, recourse to old-style obsolete anti-right slogans of the 1980s. Finally, at the end of the election campaign, a statement was added on behalf of an important political figure and SY.RIZ.A.'s former powerful minister about the existence of a double agenda regarding the wide increase in the taxation of self-employment and private enterprises. Overall, SY.RIZ.A.-P.S. managed something unique in Greek electoral history; to stay 20% behind the victorious party, losing over 33% of its total electoral strength, even though in the opposition for the full parliamentary term of 4 years since the last national election of July 2019 (31,50%).

On the other hand, N.D., which exemplary coiled the centre-right wing of the political spectrum during the election campaign communicated stability and experience in the economy, innovation and efficiency in public administration, determination in foreign policy and national defence, seriousness and realism in its political discourse,



expressing well-thought-out arguments for its social and economic vision, whether one agrees or not, and above all, it published a fully costed economic program for the development of the country. With these as a springboard, N.D. is the only political party in the history of the Greek national elections that left the second party over 20% behind during the post-1974 period.

Despite the vibrant majority, N.D. cannot form a self-sustaining government (i.e., 151/300 seats) due to the current electoral law of “simple” proportionality that SY.RIZ.A. voted for when it was the governing party, with this very goal in mind.

In the next National Election, which will be held on the 25th of June with an “enhanced proportional” electoral law, the leading party of N.D. is called to expand its political dominance in Greek society, which leads to a comfortable 175 to 180 parliamentary seats, while SY.RIZ.A.-P.S., whilst suffering a profound party crisis, is called to avoid a further decrease in strength, if not collapse. Above all, the only thing certain is that the upcoming National Election will put the last nail in the coffin of rigour mortis bipolarism in Greece for the medium term.

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## 12 | Fire disasters and train crashes: Fatality's impact in the Prime Minister's discourse in 2019 and 2023

By George Kordas

Fatality is considered a situation involving citizens. Whilst a car accident could be an example of fatality, when events involve the government, there is a differentiation in its consequences and impact. Due to the fatality's significance, the electorate sees the government as accountable: it is accused of triggering social frustration and a crisis due to the state's weaknesses. Such examples could be found in two specific events in 2018 and 2023: the wildfires in Mati and the train crash in Tempi. Both events took place under different governments, Mati with SYRIZA and Tempi with New Democracy, thus offering us the opportunity to compare the two incidents and their implications. Moreover, both disasters occurred less than a year before the upcoming national elections: Mati 11 months before the 2019 elections and Tempi three months before the 2023 elections. Considering the impact of these events on the PM's popularity and the upcoming elections, one can assume specific discourse strategies.

The fire in Mati burst out in August 2018, at the peak of the tourist period. The government's inability to manage the situation and secure citizens' lives resulted in numerous deaths. Alexis Tsipras, PM during that period, blamed officials for not informing him adequately of the situation. The relevant judicial investigation underlined the government's inability to direct the firefighting efforts. Subsequently, this created much social frustration that was deemed responsible for SYRIZA's electoral defeat in the 2019 elections. The train crash in Tempi increased polarisation within the Greek society. Kyriakos Mitsotakis accepted the responsibility for the accident, yet this was questioned due to his government's significant mistakes regarding the railways. The public also questioned the credibility of the respective judicial investigation. Nevertheless, Mitsotakis was able to successfully manage New Democracy's temporary decline in the polls, which led its party members to rally around their leader.

Given the recent electoral results, more research is needed regarding the discourse employed under such circumstances. Results could be drawn regarding psychological or emotional factors that affected the relationship between the electorate and the PM's discourse. Furthermore, the discourse of the PM's party could be further examined in view of drawing insights regarding party discipline during moments of social frustration and polarisation. In any case, comparing the two electoral results reveals that, despite the significant gaps in the blame attribution process, SYRIZA's management of the Mati wildfires was understood as irresponsible and pathetic, whilst New Democracy's discourse about Tempi had negligible effects on the electoral results.

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# 13 | The Greek elections of May 2023: A short analysis

By Minas Lyrstis

The Greek election concluded with a turnout of 60% and with ND (New Democracy) winning by a landslide victory with 40,78% (2.4 million votes) followed by Syriza, leader of the opposition with 20,07% (1.1 million votes). This came as a surprise to many as it was not forecasted in the pre-election surveys and it is very rare for the governing party to face elections without any loss of votes. Instead, ND received about two hundred thousand more votes than in the 2019 elections. Syriza on the other hand had the biggest loss of votes, almost a third of its base which in turn moved in support of other parties. The smaller parties of the parliament saw their positions strengthened with the centre-left PASOK reaching 11.53%, KKE (The Communist Party) 7,20% and right-wing Elliniki Lisi achieving 4,45%. Only Mera 25, with 2,62% lost its chance to be re-elected into parliament.

It is very rare for the governing party to face elections without any loss of votes. Specifically, ND received about 200.000 more votes than in the 2019 elections. This was achieved by a careful public relations campaign and by adhering to the beliefs and wants of the centre-right voters closely. Thus, the policy of ND was characterized by themes such as internal security, national defence, economy and the issue of refugees. On the other hand, Syriza, the leader of the opposition, disintegrated by losing about a third of its voters. Its stance as opposition dissatisfied many of its traditional voters, while blunders by its representatives (announcing tax increases a few days before the elections) distanced middle-class voters. This loss of votes was directed chiefly to PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) and partly to ND and smaller parties on the left.

While ND is only five seats short of forming a government, they will not attempt a coalition aiming at the failure of the current parliamentary assembly. The opposition does not have a consensus on a coalition of their own. So, by 25 of June Greece will be once again at the voting booths, but this time the elections will be conducted under a new electoral system voted by ND during its tenure. This system will present the first party in votes with thirty extra parliamentary seats, thus achieving a majority government. Meanwhile, Syriza is facing an internal crisis as questions have risen about whether a change of leadership is necessary or at least of political strategy. At the same time, its voting base will come under increased pressure from other left parties especially PASOK which seeks to reclaim its lost status as leader of the centre-left in the Greek Parliament.

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## 14 | Greece chooses blue over pink for security, but more shades of green coming soon?

By Georgios Kostakos

The 21 May elections in Greece certainly upset the pollsters, who had not predicted the size of the electoral victory of the centre-right/right-wing New Democracy party. A major victory for outgoing Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, and a major defeat for former Prime Minister and head of the left-wing SYRIZA party Alexis Tsipras. This does not necessarily mean a major shift of the electorate to the right. It does show, though, the yearning for relative effectiveness and stability, personified by Mitsotakis, versus wooden political language without concrete proposals, which has been the case of Tsipras. The significant increase in the votes for PASOK-KINAL shows a partial return of the centre-left vote to the original pool that SYRIZA drew from in the past, deflating the SYRIZA bubble in the process. The failure of Gianis Varoufakis' Diem25 party to enter parliament seems to be part of a similar deflation pattern.

It is surprising that despite the proportional representation system used for this election only five parties managed to get over the 3% threshold, out of a total of about forty parties that were competing. In addition to the three aforementioned parties, the other two who made it were the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the nationalist Elliniki Lysi, for good measure. A section of the political spectrum that is clearly missing is a Green party, despite the fact that a couple of parties with "Green" and/or "Ecology" in their name did participate with meagre results. The fact that the Greek Supreme Court disqualified, for a technical omission, the "Green & Purple" coalition of seven Green, pro-Europe, ecofeminist and animal rights parties did not allow them – us, as I was supposed to be a candidate with this coalition too – to prove that it brought something new to this space. Another chance to prove that may be coming soon, though, as a new election is planned for 25 June, under a different electoral law that is expected to give Mr Mitsotakis the absolute majority of seats in parliament that he is after.

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## **Section III**

# **Media and Campaigning**

# 15 | Towards a social media election?

By Stergios Fotopoulos

Social media is not only increasingly used and present in people's everyday lives, it is also gaining considerable ground vis-à-vis traditional media in news consumption and trust<sup>1</sup>. Concretely, Twitter has been extensively used in news dissemination and political communication during the last decade, with some pundits arguing that it has changed the character of public discourse<sup>2</sup>.

While the use of Facebook has declined since its peak in 2017<sup>3</sup>, Instagram and TikTok are growing in popularity, in particular among young people. This has attracted interest from several political actors, who perceive the platforms as an opportunity to connect with younger voters<sup>4</sup>.

Greece's parliamentary election could not deviate from the norm. Both Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras alike made extensive use of social media in their campaigns, including Instagram and TikTok. Their posts were impactful in terms of engagement and increasingly personalised content, as they sought to show a more amiable and human face. PM Mitsotakis created, inter alia, a series of humorous backstage videos on TikTok, where he squeezed his son's cheeks, played with his dog, and made jokes.

For his part, in a more relaxed way compared to his behaviour in other appearances, Alexis Tsipras shared his thoughts about the televised debate and revealed what Zoomers<sup>5</sup> told him about the election itself. A new space for political communication seems to be in the making, introducing the practice and rationale of "politainment"<sup>6</sup>, an amalgamation of politics and entertainment. Yet, at the time of writing these lines, it is not certain whether these campaign activities will ultimately succeed in mobilising around 450,000 young voters aged between 17 and 21 years to go to the polls. To

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<sup>1</sup> Eurobarometer (2022). Media & News Survey 2022. [Media & News Survey 2022 - July 2022 - Eurobarometer survey \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurobarometer/survey/europa.eu)

<sup>2</sup> Ott, B. L. (2017). The age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the politics of debasement. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 34(1), 59–68.

<sup>3</sup> Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, R. K. (2022). Reuters Institute digital news report 2021. *Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism*. [Digital News Report 2022 | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism \(ox.ac.uk\)](https://www.reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report-2021)

<sup>4</sup> Herrman, J. (2020). TikTok Is Shaping Politics. But How? *The New York Times* (June, 28).

<sup>5</sup> Liebhart, K., & Bernhardt, P. (2017). Political storytelling on Instagram: Key aspects of Alexander Van der Bellen's successful 2016 presidential election campaign. *Media and Communication*, 5(4), 15-25.

<sup>6</sup> Riegert, K., & Collins, S. (2015). Politainment. *The international encyclopedia of political communication*, 1-11.

capture a more comprehensive picture of the issue, future research could focus on this aspect.

Despite the challenges of misinformation and fake news, as well as the increased uncertainty about the future of social media, people engage with news and cross-party and cross-ideological discussions on social media. One would find it hard to contemplate a future without it. Rather than considering social media as competition to the wide range of traditional campaign methods, each should be considered as complimentary to each other.

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*Dr Stergios Fotopoulos, Press and Communication Administrator at the Council of the EU.*

## 16 | Why was Mitsotakis re-elected?

By Panos Koliastasis

New Democracy (ND) became the second ruling party since the restoration of democracy in 1974, managing to be re-elected by taking a higher vote share than previously before. The first was PASOK, under the leadership of Kostas Simitis, in the 2000 election.

Thus, the question arises: why was Mitsotakis re-elected?

One could infer that there are four main reasons for this result.

First, he maintained a credible political brand. In particular, he remained the most consistent representative of the anti-SYRIZA vote. In 2019, ND was backed to remove SYRIZA from power, and in 2023, to prevent its return. In addition, Mitsotakis managed to deliver, to a significant extent, on his 2019 election pledges, including tax cuts, attracting private investment, improving public safety, and reducing migration flow. Therefore, he was able to promote a credible programmatic proposal for the future.

Second, according to opinion surveys, most voters prioritized the economy as the most critical issue facing the country. In this context, ND was rewarded for the good state of the economy. It was credited with positive growth rates, lower unemployment, improved wages, and a relative reduction in the impact of inflation. Moreover, Mitsotakis outperformed his political opponents in all the relevant polling indicators.

Thirdly, given that voters vote to choose a government, Mitsotakis had a clear political proposal that focused on the formation of a one-party government. In contrast, the prospect of a coalition proposed by SYRIZA seemed hardly feasible because minor opposition parties, such as PASOK, appeared reluctant to join. Thus, ND has emerged as the safest option for maintaining political stability.

The fourth reason explaining Mitsotakis's re-election is related to his communication strategy. From 2019 until now, he has been engaged in a permanent campaigning process. His systematic and consistent communication activity, both in the media and social media, has allowed him to maintain the trust of his catch-all voting coalition. Throughout his tenure, he has been consistently leading the polls on the popularity index of political leaders. In addition, his professionally planned and executed social media campaign aimed at reaching out to a young audience paid off. Among younger voters aged 17 to 24, ND outperformed SYRIZA for the first time since 2012, receiving 31.5% against 28.8% of the vote.



Certainly, despite ND's landslide, it fell short of the 151-seat majority needed to form a one-party government due to the electoral system of pure proportional representation. However, the second poll, which is expected to be held at the end of June, will be conducted under a different electoral law, that of reinforced proportional representation, according to which the winning party receives a total bonus of 50 seats if it gets at least 40% of the vote. Thus, the formation of a new single-party government led by Kyriakos Mitsotakis is quite likely.

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# 17 | Pixelated Polity: Decoding Greek Parties' Digital Campaign Strategies in 2023

By Alexandros-Christos Gkotinakos and Fabio Votta

Digital platforms assume an increasingly important role in elite-mass political communication, and parties adapt their marketing strategies to benefit from a variety of targeting capabilities offered by these platforms (Dommet, 2019).

Using data from the *Meta Ad Library* and *Google Transparency Report*, we provide a descriptive account of Greek parties’ digital targeting campaigns on the occasion of the 2023 legislative election campaign. We tracked a total of 750 political advertisers across Google and Meta services from April 20th - May 19th (spending 1,4m EUR in total), focusing on parties in Parliament.

Figure 1 : Share of budget allotted to advertising platform by party April 18 - May 17 2023 (Source: Authors' elaboration based on Meta Ad Library and Google Transparency Report data) Note: Figure on the right denotes the total amount spent on both platforms



While all of them rely on social media to help promote their message, resources, output, and platform choices vary. Most strikingly, KKE relies solely on Google, while all other parties rely on both Google and Meta platforms (previously Facebook), with the latter being generally dominant, although to a different extent (Figure 1).

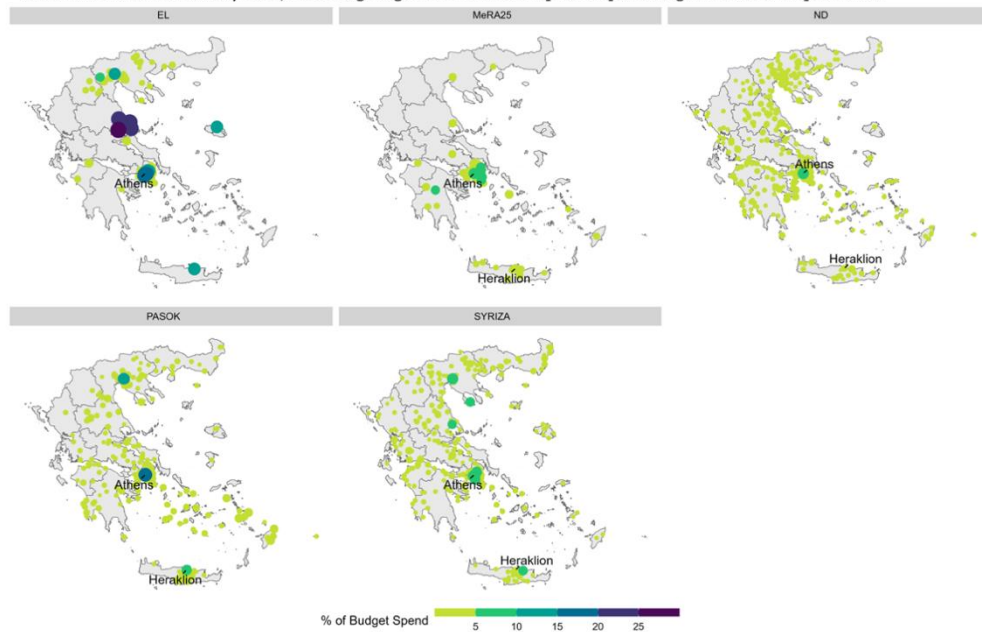
Combined, New Democracy and SYRIZA make up the vast majority of the total ad spend with 86,59% of the total 1.4 m EUR of all advertising money. To group them together, however, is to mask considerable heterogeneity between these two main parties. With 60,87% of ad money belonging to New Democracy, followed by SYRIZA’s 25,71%, it’s beyond doubt that this election’s winner is the largest investor in digital campaigns. This leads us to the question of *how*, and *who*, parties choose to target.

Table 1: Spending Activity by Greek Parties April 20 - May 19 (Source: Author's elaboration based on Meta Ad Library data) Note: Figure on the right denotes the total amount spent on both platforms

PARTY ABBREVIATION	NUMBER OF ADS	TOTAL SPEND
ND	7,190	€869,544
SYRIZA	3,307	€367,350
PASOK	1,877	€141,082
KKE	73	€19,800
MERA25	292	€16,701
EL	309	€13,870

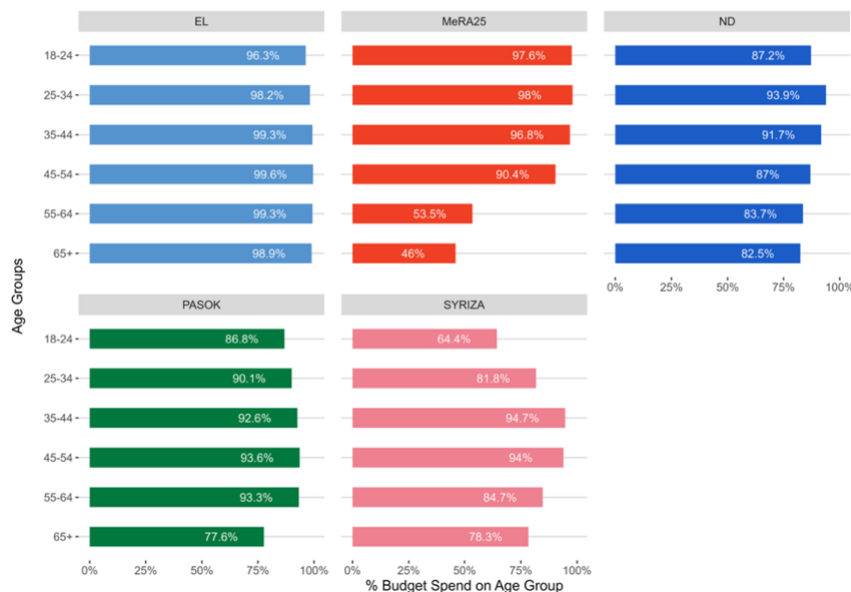
In terms of *target method*, parties' targeting criteria relate primarily to spatial considerations, with 41% of the budget expended for targeting cities. Generally, all parties concentrate their advertising efforts on urban centres, but the choice of cities varies quite a bit, especially regarding the attention paid to cities beyond Athens and Thessaloniki (Figure 2).

**Figure 2:** Parties' Meta campaign budget broken down by city April 20 – May 19 2023 (Source: Authors' elaboration based on Meta Ad Library data) *Note: targeting criteria can overlap so the percentages do not sum up to 100%.*



Concerning their *target groups*, parties appear to differ with regard to the profile criterion they emphasize, but also their target group of choice. All parties target users of *high* political interest, presumably to appeal to mobilized voters who will more likely head to the polls. However, some parties like ND, EL, and PASOK target all age groups almost uniformly, while MeRA25 puts a clear emphasis on young voters, and SYRIZA on the centre of the age distribution.

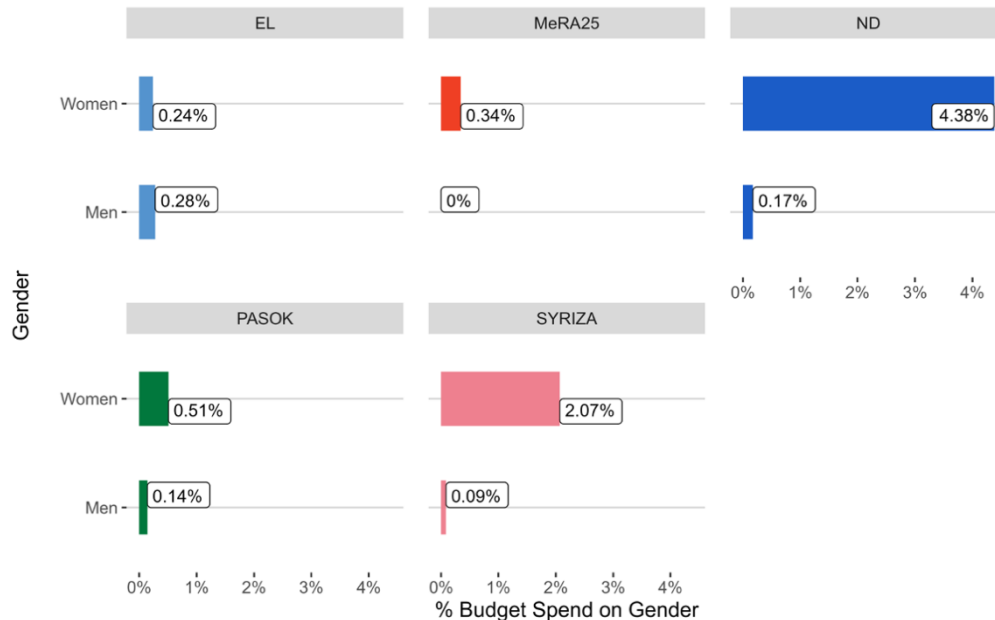
**Figure 3:** Parties' Meta campaign budget broken down by age target groups April 20 – May 19 2023 (Source: Authors' elaboration based on Meta Ad Library data) *Note: targeting criteria can overlap so the percentages do not sum up to 100%.*



Turning to the gendered dimension, most parties, ND, PASOK, SYRIZA, and MeRA25, tend to target women voters. This trend is especially visible in the case of ND, and less so in EL, which does not rely on gender targeting so strongly and, if anything, shows a slight preference for targeting men.

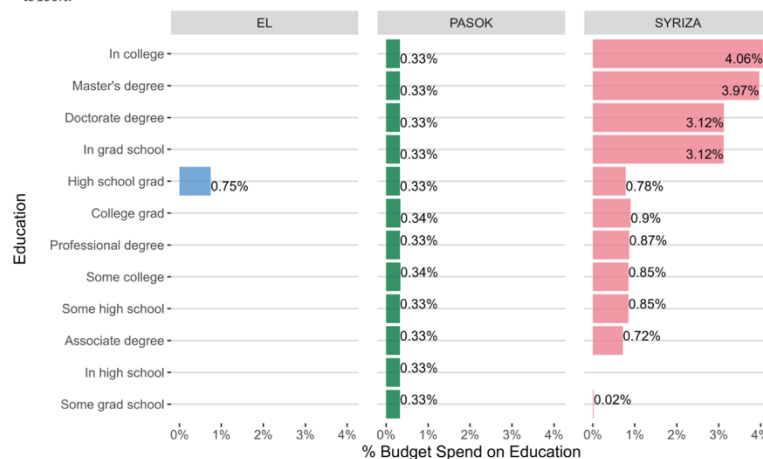
**Figure 4: Parties' Meta campaign budget broken down by educational target groups April 120 – May 19 2023** (Source: Authors' elaboration based on Meta Ad Library data)

Note: targeting criteria can overlap so the percentages do not sum up to 100%.



The latter also has a distinct focus on targeting high school graduates, while other parties, like PASOK, distribute their budget far more broadly across the education gradient, or target higher-education graduates, like SYRIZA (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Parties' Meta campaign budget broken down by gender target groups April 20 – May 19 2023** (Source: Authors' elaboration based on Meta Ad Library data) Note: targeting criteria can overlap so the percentages do not sum up to 100%.



Overall, our overview underlined shared tendencies, but also some of the nuances in parties' online campaign strategies. This illustrative selection of results barely scratches the surface and opens a broad research agenda on the dynamics of the 2023 online campaign. For additional information on our methodology and more findings, see <https://favstats.github.io/GreeceElection2023/>.

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## **Section IV**

### **Parties' performance and the new political landscape**

## 18 | The Lesson SYRIZA Refused to Learn

By Antonios Karvounis

In 2015, Syriza shook the political establishment across Europe by winning the Greek national elections on an anti-austerity platform. Those days must now seem a distant memory for the party's leader, Alexis Tsipras, who was dealt a severe blow in yesterday's general election. Syriza came trailing in at just over 20.1%, while the centre-right party of the incumbent prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, clinched 40% of the vote – a difference rarely seen since the collapse of military rule in 1974. The tactics that Tsipras repeatedly used obviously did not deliver.

Syriza seemingly failed to learn the lesson of the 2019 defeats in the local, regional, general, and European Parliament elections. Actually, Syriza never seriously tried to determine the cause of these defeats because they seemed unable to believe that they had lost power. For them, it was a real shock that they never got over it. Instead, they comfortably indulged themselves in the received 31.54% of the 2019 vote. Syriza believed that this percentage represented the party's main voter pool, therefore they did not try to widen their electorate appeal. In this sense, Tsipras chose "the blame-game strategy," criticizing Mitsotakis unrelentingly, though in many respects, pretty fairly. He believed the Prime Minister sided with Hungary's populist leader, Viktor Orban, and Italy's far-right Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, on refugee policy, accusing him of turning a blind eye to illegal pushbacks of asylum seekers at the borders with Turkey. Syriza also decried Mitsotakis's response to the phone-tapping scandal as inadequate. And Tsipras held New Democracy solely responsible for the inadequate safety measures on Greek railroads, which led to the February train collision that killed many university students. Yet, in adhering to this strategy of avoiding a solid alternative, left agenda and giving reliable responses to the everyday concerns of the people, it is fair to say that Syriza is paying the price. Their lack of flexibility to accommodate new political and economic realities no longer resonates with voters, as yesterday's verdict made obvious. Their loss is due to a long psychological strategy of victimhood rather than victory. They consciously engineer situations where they cannot possibly win power. They find reasons why they were unfairly defeated – the media, the pollsters, the government – and thus organize ineffective campaigns, using shibboleths of the past with no substance and impact on the electorate. To put it briefly, if there is no drastic transformation of the party's political agenda in the coming weeks, another defeat for Syriza looms in mid-June.

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# 19 | SYRIZA: The price of appealing for support to ex-Golden Dawn voters

By Alexandra Prodromidou

On the eve of the Greek national elections on May 21<sup>st</sup> 2023 and while all main political parties were attempting [to attract last-minute voters from other parties](#), the left-wing leader of the opposition, Alexis Tsipras, made a public appeal to supporters of the now defunct neo-Nazi Golden Dawn (GD) party to join the SYRIZA electorate. Tsipras notoriously stated, '[we cannot be foolish enough to think that people who got carried away and voted for a fascist party at some point are actually fascists](#)', offering an alternative platform for an anti-systemic vote against the ruling party, New Democracy (ND).

The statement was immediately met with criticism by [different parties](#), although in fact, what Tsipras said is not very far from reality. Between 2012-2019, i.e. before [the GD's members were convicted for operating a criminal organisation under the guise of being a democratically elected party](#), the party's voters comprised a group of people who [did not necessarily identify with the neo-Nazi ideology](#), rather they wanted to express their fury against the mainstream parties and their policies, which GD supporters blamed for the financial crisis. Another two parameters might have contributed to the decision of Tsipras to appeal to this specific pool of voters.

The first one is that [SYRIZA chose to abstain from blocking Ellines](#), a party created and led by a former prominent member of GD, Ilias Kasidiaris, currently serving his sentence, from taking part in the elections. The second parameter is that both [Kasidiaris](#) and another ex-GD MP, [Konstantinos Mpamparousis](#), prompted the voters of Ellines (ex-GD voters) to support SYRIZA as a revenge vote against ND and PASOK, the two parties which secured blocking Ellines on the basis that [the party's leader, Kasidiaris, is a convict](#). Despite that, it seems that most of whatever was left of the former GD electorate, [after shrinking to less than half after 2019](#), chose to reinforce two extreme right-wing populist parties, [Elliniki Lysi-Kyriakos Velopoulos and NIKI](#). Both parties share the following characteristics which appeal to former GD supporters much more than SYRIZA does for an anti-systemic vote: a strong Islamophobic [anti-migration narrative](#); a [pro-Putin position](#) based on the Orthodox religion link, especially with respect to the Russian invasion in Ukraine; an [anti-vaccination stand](#); and Eurosceptic/anti-EU and anti-Western sentiments.

The results of the first round of the parliamentary elections showed that even if SYRIZA were supported by former GD voters, it would still have a huge difference from ND, which finished first. Their improbable support in the second round would still be insufficient for SYRIZA to secure a victory. On the other hand, Tsipras' approach to the former GD voters will probably dominate the narratives of the other main parties, especially ND and PASOK, during the month leading to the second election round in



order to enhance their voters' pool and/or prevent further support of SYRIZA by other leftist parties' voters. A heavy price to pay?

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## 20 | Some thoughts on Syriza and its monumental defeat in the May 21, 2023 elections

By Pavlos Roufos

Syriza is the party, in 2015, that took advantage of the collapse of Pasok and the dissatisfaction towards New Democracy because both these parties had implemented harsh austerity. Once in power, however, it became the party that accelerated austerity, always under the pretence that it had “no choice” due to pressure from the Troika (somewhat cynically, some would compare that with the infamous “there is no alternative” trope). While it makes of course little sense to deny pressure from European institutions, this simplification fails to explain why the technical compliance reports of the European Commission were enthusiastic about Syriza “implementing reforms that were not even part of the memorandum”.

Closer to reality, and once in power, Syriza re-imagined itself as a serious ‘party of governance’ that could finally “modernise” Greece properly way. It was, at the time, hard to miss how painstakingly mainstream the economic views of its ministers were. Moreover, while implementing austerity during 2015-2019, it took a ‘realistic’ turn towards the centre, absorbed the remnants of the defunct Pasok (at the level of both MPs and voters) and championed what was nothing but a vulgar, populist but essentially a-political type of ‘politics’.

In doing so, however, it proved shockingly unable to understand that while reviving the old Pasok might have acted as an attractive pole during the memorandum years, it offered no realistic political option thereafter. The simple reason was that the old Pasok functioned under a completely different international environment, implementing a Keynesian-inspired fiscal expansion (in 1981-85), while politically legitimising the left that had been marginalized from Greek society since the end of World War II.

Attempting to become a revived Pasok, not simply in the absence of fiscal expansion but while implementing harsh austerity appears to have never registered to Syriza as a contradiction. In the real world, however, the only part of the old Pasok they could actually emulate was its vulgar, petty-bourgeois individualist nightmare, concomitant with a cynical clinging to power at all costs and alongside an equally cynical depoliticisation (few remember that Syriza had the audacity at the time to ask the “movement” to demonstrate in the streets against the measures they were implementing).

This strategy, if one could call it so, was further reflected in the astonishingly contradictory messages and policies that different Syriza members have publicly promoted since 2019. There, one found Covid denialism along pro-vaccination messages, left and centrist slogans, pro-EU and anti-EU positions, pro-migrant rhetoric while building concentration camps, pro-worker declarations while cutting wages,

anti-memorandum cries while implementing austerity. Astonishingly, none of that registered as contradictory to them.

Those who supported them after 2019 were roughly split between two main categories: those who wished to gain something by being close to a “party of governance” and those who simply could not bear the right-wing government of New Democracy. Yesterday’s elections showed that the latter category abandoned ship. This is nothing sort of phenomenal. For it takes a tremendous amount of incompetence to convince those who see New Democracy’s government as “the worst government since 1974” that you are, in fact, even worse.

There is no doubt that after this debacle Syriza will change. This might mean that Tsipras resigns but there is evidence that he will also refuse to. What remains important though is that yesterday’s results seem to have brought a dramatic end to what had opened up around 2012. With Pasok setting its sights on becoming the official opposition in the second round (New Democracy’s landslide did not secure them a majority in parliament), it is conceivable that Syriza will collapse back to where it was before the crisis: around 3-4 per cent.

This would be a positive development. For Syriza has not only proven to be shockingly incapable of serious opposition, but it also has essentially and systematically destroyed any pretence or hope that the left (however broadly that is defined) can actually provide an alternative. In favourable and unfavourable conditions, Syriza convinced itself (and voters) that there is only one possible left: that of the old Pasok. Only this time around, the fiscal capacity that would allow them to sustain a social block of support was nowhere to be found.

In the coming years, an unhinged New Democracy will flex its authoritarianism even further, newly legitimised by an external fairy tale of an economic success story and Syriza’s profound incompetence. Faced with such an onslaught, real opposition is urgently needed. Syriza has proven that they are not it.

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## 21 | The future of Greek progressive parties in the aftermath of the May 2023 national elections

By Alexandros Ntaflos

Yesterday's result is a huge shock for the whole progressive and leftist voters bloc. The most striking event of these elections was the big defeat of Syriza (Coalition of Radical Left), which fell from 31,5% to 20% of the votes. Of equal importance is the unprecedented (though not inexplicable) electoral resilience of the incumbent party (center-right), New Democracy, which secured again around 40% of the votes. Lastly, the rise of KKE (Communist Party of Greece) from 5,5% to 7% and PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement), from 8% to 11,5% is important for their parties' internal mechanisms but far from being a significant electoral earthquake within the centre-left and radical left political spectrum.

Many pundits have already started comparing yesterday's results with the May 2012 elections, the so-called electoral earthquake. Back then, Syriza jumped from 4,5% to 16%, while PASOK fell from 43% to 13%. Looking at this analogy from a purely numerical perspective is clear that we have to do with two different (in size) kinds of events. Nevertheless, some argue it is the tendency that matters; the problem with this syllogism is its inability to consider the historical contexts under which these electoral changes happened. In 2012, PASOK had implemented harsh austerity measures (within a vast economic crisis period), contradicting its decades-long people-centric legacy. Simultaneously, significant corruption scandals related to prominent PASOK figures had created the perfect storm for the socialist party. On the other hand, in 2023, a lot can (and should) be said about Syriza's failure to convince the critical mass of left and centrist voters about its competence to be again in government. The traumatic legacy of 2015 and significant tactical mistakes after 2019, combined with the raging mass media dominance of the New Democracy, briefly led to this result.

However, as it has also been shown in the 2019 Euro elections (Syriza won 24% of the votes) that followed the painful (due to the implementation of the third Memorandum austerity program) 4-years Syriza governance period (within the post-crisis political system), Syriza has established its position as the leading actor of the centre-left political spectrum, being able to consistently gain more than 20% of the votes, since 2012. In this rationale, for a radical electoral change to happen again, in which PASOK will re-gain dominance within the progressive parties equation, it will take a lot of time and many more things to occur (such as a potential resignation of Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras). Overall, it seems we live in the golden era for the long-established centre-right party (New Democracy). Progressive parties have proved unable to become hegemonic again, fighting each other for who will be the biggest opposition party.

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## 22 | The Communist Party of Greece – KKE: an old-school communist party using old and new tricks

By Aimilia Vilou

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) is an "orthodox" communist party, the oldest (founded in 1918) in the Greek political system and has been represented in the Greek parliament since the democratic transition of 1974. After the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact (1991) and the party's twofold split (1989 and 1991), the KKE maintained its "Marxist-Leninist" characteristics and a steady 5%–6% share of the vote. The KKE, during the 1990s and a good part of the 2000s, unfolded its agenda mainly through anti-imperialistic discourse implemented by ancillary organizations such as the pro-peace organization "Greek Committee for International Détente and Peace" (EEDYE) and antimonopoly discourse implemented by the "All Workers Militant Front" (PAME), which can be described as a coordination secretariat between trade unionists. In the mid-2000s, the party opted for a harder line by being more selective concerning potential political allies, unfolding an anticapitalistic agenda focused on the working class, and utilizing PAME in this battle. Its significance changed, and it was then prioritized as the main KKE agent in the social movements.

During the pandemic crisis, the KKE appealed to the public with the slogan "Only the people can save the people." This is a common refrain across Latin America and refers to "people" as a transclass stratum. But regarding KKE, "people" is not a transclass category; it refers to the working class and its allies, the popular strata. Since 2013, poor farmers and the individual self-employed have been the most popular strata for KKE. The KKE defied police restrictions and demonstrated, using social distancing, in two major events: the 1st of May and the protest in memory of the Athens Polytechnic uprising. As expected, this led to a clash with the police.

Despite this, the party managed to proceed to its 21st conference (June 2021); the 162-page theses were voted on by the party cadres, and a shift occurred. The party decided that the PAME would act only as a coordination secretariat, thus making the pro-peace movement relevant again. The party loosened its demands and tried to find allies among the militants of the social movement, such as the pro-peace movement, local trade unions, and student unions. With more inclusive and transclass options during this 4-year period, the party managed to gain 22.98% (2023) of the share of the vote in the General Assembly of the General Federation of the Workers (GSEE), taking second place to the grouping supported by the conservative party. Furthermore, the groupings supported by the KKE achieved first place and an extraordinary 35.44% (2023) and 33.87% (2022) share of the votes at the student body elections.

At the elections on May 21, 2023, the KKE's slogan, translated into English, was "All of us together, all of them alone". In Greek, it is considered a catchier phrase but overall conveys the idea that the people united are against the systemic parties and the ruling

class. The KKE either constructed or described an "Other", which are the systemic (all the other) parties that are engaged in a partnership with the upper class. Against the "Other," the party opposed the "We", the people, which are the working class and the popular strata, mentioned previously. This is another reference to the past from the 2004 elections.

Yet another aspect of this year's election would be the extensive use of social media; the party denied the use of it and forbade its members from participating. Additionally, the general secretary of the party was interviewed by a lifestyle journalist and a stand-up comedian, which is a first for the Greek communist party. The party's ballot also included former members of SYRIZA, the dominant radical left party, and other extra-parliamentary radical left or communist parties. The party gained 7.23% of the votes, and the party has started capitalizing on discontent. In summation, the outcome of the election is not as important as the changes that have occurred in the past four years to KKE; the party is changing, and we are overeager to witness the direction.

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## 23 | KKE and its strengthening in the Attica region

By Thanassis Dimakas

The Greek Communist Party (KKE) gained 425.795 votes (7,23%) in the 21st of May 2023 elections. As a result, KKE will have 26 members in the Greek Parliament. In comparison with the elections of July 2019, KKE gathered 126.174 more votes increasing its percentage by 1,93%. An important factor in these results was the performance of the KKE in the Attica region, which includes the capital of Greece, Athens, and a total population of about 4 million people. In the 2019 parliamentary elections, KKE gathered 114,413 in Attica and managed to secure six parliamentary seats in Attica's electoral districts, failing to elect an MP in the regions of "1st Piraeus" and "Western Attica".

On the contrary, in 2023, KKE managed to elect one or more MPs in all of the eight electoral districts of Attica, a total of 11 MPs. This is because KKE gathered a total of 168,627 votes in Attica. Taking the above into account, two critical factors that prove the success of the KKE in Attica are that slightly less than 50% of KKE's "new votes" (54.000/126.000) are in Attica. Furthermore, due to this dynamic, KKE managed to surpass PASOK-KINAL in all Attica districts, except in the "Eastern Attica" district, and secure third place, even though the social democratic party (PASOK-KINAL) was third in votes/percentage nationwide. In conclusion, it seems that KKE guarantees a strong presence in the country's most critical (due to its population) region and a prospect of further strengthening its position in view of the upcoming elections.

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## 24 | The rhetoric of time in New Democracy's early announcements

By Panagiotis Karagkounis

The result of the Greek elections on May 21 was hailed by the Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, as a 'political earthquake'. This concept was first coined by political scientists to describe the Greek national elections of 2012 when the existing political system almost collapsed, and SYRIZA emerged. Mitsotakis' use of the same phrasing cannot be seen as random after SYRIZA's tremendous defeat. In his first public announcement, after the official announcement of the results, Mitsotakis established a particular temporal frame to legitimise a second (long) term of his government by stating, 'one cycle ends, but another begins.' But how can one interpret this phrase?

The rhetoric of the victorious New Democracy (ND) establishes a progressive sense of time, which ultimately delegitimises SYRIZA. The first strand of this temporal framing is the public association of SYRIZA with the years of 'Crisis' (2012-19). This can be seen even in the pre-electoral campaigns. ND did not make any references to the close past, namely the 'decade of crisis.' Instead, their message mainly focused on an abstract future. On the contrary, SYRIZA insisted on a negative framing of the recent past (i.e., 2019-2023), and its main message was to speak against the previous government. Thus, SYRIZA's campaign discourse remained trapped in a political lexicon of crisis. This made it much easier for ND to undermine SYRIZA as a by-product of the Crisis, which emerged exceptionally in an otherwise linear and stable political system.

The second strand of temporal framing seen in Mitsotakis' rhetoric was an interplay of binaries – restoration versus disjointedness, openness versus constraint, and ultimately progress versus stability. Since SYRIZA did not really foster a solid political base, ND could position itself as the natural and teleological dominant political power. Within this idea lies a very important distinction that Mitsotakis successfully introduced. Contrary to some common assumptions, accepted mostly within the Left, Mitsotakis did not identify the idea of progress solely with young people. Nor did he present a closed-off, ideological vision of progress. Instead, he presented his party as the 'definitive governmental solution', which would 'catch up the lost ground between us and the rest of Europe.' Within this solution lies a new understanding of governance: that progress will be acquired through a decisive technocratic model based on a very open interpretation of what the future should be. Instead of considering SYRIZA a potential opponent, Mitsotakis presents himself and ND as the epitome of order and the only way to restore a stable political system. The electoral reinforcement of PASOK strengthened this narrative.

Overall, Greece is once again at a crossroads. It is almost certain that in the next elections, ND will win the vast majority of seats in the Greek parliament. Yet the future position of SYRIZA in the Greek political landscape is rather questionable since many



of their voters chose PASOK. A central takeaway from these elections should be that an overemphasis on a polarised past is destructive. These elections were just a warning.

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## 25 | The Real Winner of the Greek Elections: Realpolitik

By Dino Bozonelos

The Greek parliamentary elections, where New Democracy surpassed expectations and secured more than 40% of the vote, reaffirms Prime Minister (PM) Mitsotakis's realpolitik. Greece will continue to build upon its newly formed and restrengthened defence alliances. First, Mitsotakis has warmly embraced Biden's more activist leadership, as evident through the ratified amendment to the U.S.-Greece Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement (MDCA). The Giannoulis military base will continue to expand and host U.S. naval personnel, set up concerning U.S. logistical support for Ukraine's counter-invasion efforts. However, it also has a major secondary function, serving as a deterrent to any potential incursion by Turkish forces, a sentiment expressed by Turkish President Erdoğan. In addition, the Biden administration seeks to sell Greece's fifth-generation F-35 Lightning II stealth fighters and, in contrast, sell Turkey F-16s. A SYRIZA win would have scuttled such a proposal and called into question the strengthening of Greek-American defence cooperation.

Second, Greece will fully implement the Government-to-Government agreement between the Hellenic and Israeli Defense Ministries. Greece will continue to upgrade its national air force by purchasing advanced equipment and implementing pilot training in Kalamata set up by Elbit Systems, an Israeli defence electronics company. Both right-wing governments share similar security concerns about Erdoğan's threats to violate Greek sovereignty in the Aegean and Israeli control over holy places at the Temple Mount. This "Turkish shadow" was large enough that even former PM Tsipras saw the value of having a relationship with Israel. However, the pursuit of deeper ties that took place with Mitsotakis would not have occurred, and a win by SYRIZA would have stalled a stronger relationship.

Third, Mitsotakis will seek to build upon the Strategic Partnership on Defence and Security, an intra-NATO mutual defence pact that, for the first time, committed two countries, France and Greece, to provide support if attacked by another NATO member. The purchase of French Rafale fighter jets and frigates will replenish a Greek military force, decimated in the difficult years of the Greek Debt Crisis and economic depression. The defence pact also strategically includes Greece in France's plan to build a European Defense Force that could act independently of NATO.

Finally, Greece has signed a number of bilateral defence agreements with countries that have also felt threatened by Turkish military adventurism, most notably the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt. The defence pact between Greece and the UAE requires each country to come to the other's defence if under attack. Likewise, the agreement between Greece and Egypt seeks to improve maritime security. Turkey's expansive Mavi Vatan, or Blue Homeland foreign policy, is an ambitious geopolitical strategy that aggressively seeks to extend Turkish influence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The larger-than-expected parliamentary win by New Democracy has reaffirmed the foreign policy of PM Mitsotakis. A second parliamentary election, which would see the party win bonus seats and lead to a majority government, will only solidify Greek realpolitik.

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## **Section V**

### **Policies, politics and new dynamics**

## 26 | The Secret Code: Affective Polarisation and Electoral Behaviour in Greece

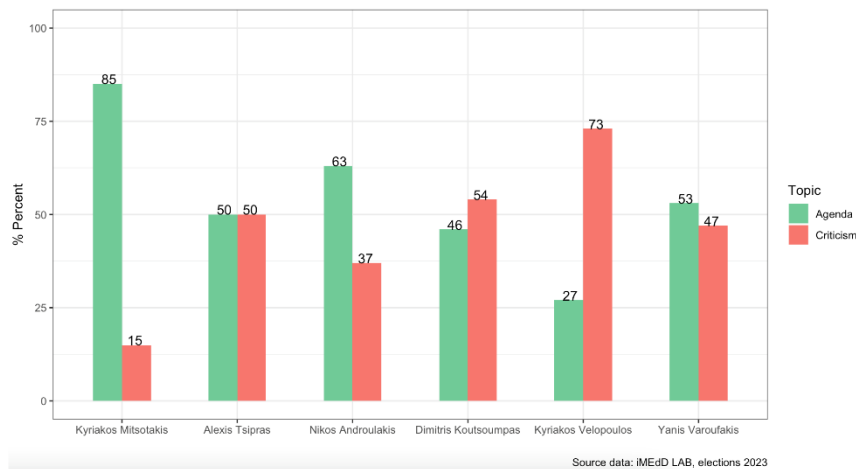
By Georgios Karyotis and Iakovos Makropoulos

The results of the 21 May 2023 Parliamentary election in Greece represent a watershed moment for Greek politics, which have been marked and shaped in recent years by rolling and multi-faceted crises. The emphatic, and unexpected in terms of its margin, the victory of the incumbent New Democracy (ND) party, not only puts it in a commanding position to form a single-party majority after the second election pencilled for 25 June but also reveals powerful and generalisable lessons about the drivers of electoral behaviour that extends beyond the Greek case. These lessons were, indeed, identifiable in our [analyses](#) of a post-election survey conducted after the June 2019 contest, which provide unique insights as to why public support increased for ND (from 39.9 to 40.8%), plummeted for Syriza (from 31.5 to 20.1%) and increased for the centre-left PASOK (from 8.1 to 11.5%) in 2023.

Party	Oct 2009	May 2012	June 2012	Jan 2015	Sep 2015	July 2019	May 2023
New Democracy (centre right)	33.5	18.9	29.7	27.8	28.1	39.9	40.8
SYRIZA (radical left)	4.6	16.8	26.9	36.3	35.5	31.5	20.1
PASOK (centre left)	43.9	13.2	12.3	4.7	6.3	8.1	11.5

*Figure 1: Greek Parliamentary Elections Results (2009-2023) – Top 3 Parties*

Traditionally, economic voting theories predict reward or punishment for the incumbent based on economic performance. Valance theories assume that voters make rational choices based on their competence evaluations of the programmatic positions of parties and their leaders. More recently, emotions have been shown to have a remarkable but under-appreciated impact on political behaviour, producing ‘affective polarisation’ and a negative emotional reaction to an out-group on the basis of party identification and/or competing worldviews on the most salient and divisive issues of the time and place. What the voters think and feel, of course, is largely bounded by the competing messages they consume. In turn, parties will seek to develop campaigns that appeal to their electoral base, while also reaching out to first-time and floating voters. New Democracy, evidently, was most successful in this in 2023, benefiting also from the miscalculations that informed the strategies of its opponents, which our analysis of the drivers of voting in 2019 can illuminate.



*Figure 2: Leaders' Pre-Election Rhetoric: Ratio of Programmatic vs. Negative Messaging*

ND convinced voters that it had, overall, the best, and most realistic policy agenda, as well as the competence to produce better economic outcomes for citizens. Indeed, as Figure 2 shows, Prime Minister Mitsotakis overwhelmingly (85%) devoted his electoral campaigning to present the party's programme, with the economy (10%), health (8%) and employment (8%) as focal points. Thematic and sentiment analysis of each party's leader pre-election campaign speeches conducted by the [iMEDD lab](#) also shows that the PM's discourse was less critical of opponents, consistently more positive in sentiment, and less polarising in tone than all other party leaders. In doing so, ND embraced the 'crisis as opportunity' frame, projecting confidence and offering positive incentives for voters to support collective efforts for the country to 'move forward', frames which have been shown to impact on political behaviour at turbulent times ([Karyotis et al, 2021](#)). The other notable finding in the iMEDD project is how markedly sober and anti-populist the discourse of Mitsotakis' was on the campaign trail, in a clear attempt to attract Syriza floating and disenchanted voters. To avoid fuelling domestic polarisation, this strategy was launched internationally in his remarks at the US-led "[Summit for Democracy](#)" (December 2021) and the [US Congress](#) (May 2022), invoking the historical wisdom of Ancient Athenians who would reject a "pandering populist politician who offered too easy solutions to hard problems".

Syriza, on the other hand, which had rapidly risen in popularity and governed Greece from 2015-2019 by housing the grievances of anti-austerity and other disenfranchised voters, failed to convince that a return to the government would allow it to deliver the 'hope' and 'change' it had promised in 2015. Its programmatic pledges, which Tsipras dedicated 50% of his speeches to explain on the campaign trail, were received with more scepticism this time, undermined also by inconsistencies in the messaging by other prominent party members. The other 50%, Tsipras dedicated to criticising opponents, none less than the PM personally, focussing on economic themes (19%),

accountability (10%) and corruption (9%) the most. Such affective (negative) polarisation may be on the rise internationally but there is some indication that it does not impact the political behaviour of young Greeks. A [diaNEOsis](#) study undertaken by GPSG (2022) on the drivers of support for European integration demonstrated that contrary to older generations, young Greeks are not interested in or influenced by blame games and, instead, demand good policies that empower them to enhance their life satisfaction. Syriza’s diluted optimism and negative polarisation may have, thus, failed to mobilise their vote in 2023, a hypothesis that future research may fruitfully test.

PASOK, the party in power at the start of the economic crisis in 2009, has shown signs of resilience and recovery, after a decade of electoral punishment and introspection. Its new leader, Nikos Androulakis, dedicated 63% of his campaign speeches to laying out the party’s agenda, focusing on agriculture (8%), as well as a breadth of other ‘bread and butter issues around housing, social state, health, education and the economy (7% each). These, along with the return to the party’s traditional name and logo, our prior [analysis](#) had projected, would likely appeal to its electoral base and help it reach into the Syriza share of the vote. It is far more doubtful, however, that the high levels of polarisation observed in Androulakis’ discourse and his emotionally charged critiques of Mitsotakis, particularly around the wire-taping scandal, would have had a similarly beneficial electoral effect on his party.

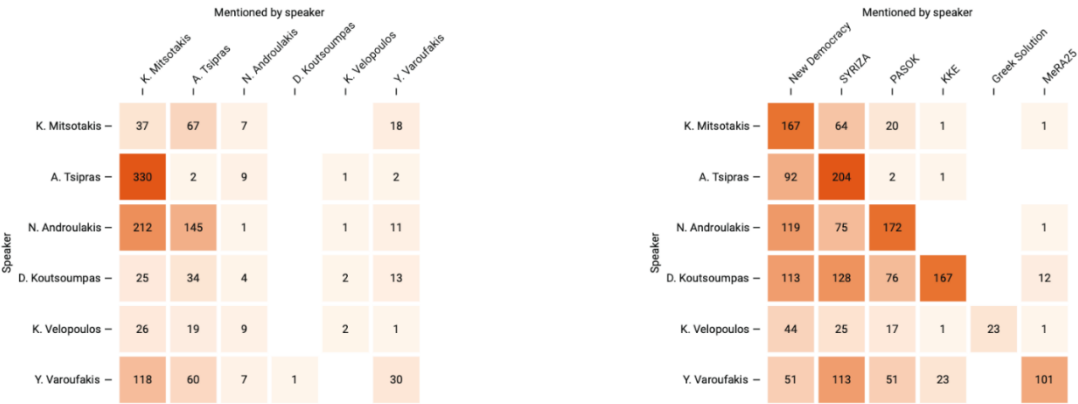


Figure 3: Who did Party Leaders Talk about on the Campaign Trail? Source: [iMEdD lab](#)

This is because, our data analysis revealed, the degree of affective polarisation around the personalities of party leaders, i.e. how much they are liked/disliked, is the single strongest predictor of vote choice for ND, while the exact opposite is true when such polarisation happens around partisan/party lines. With this in mind, it would seem that the predominant pre-occupation with the PM, who Tsipras, Androulakis, as well as Varoufakis (MeRA25), referred to most frequently in their campaign speeches (Figure 3), may actually have, inadvertently, helped New Democracy attract votes, contributing to the margin of its victory in May 2023.

Reflecting on broader trends, polarisation that is driven by affect (emotion) has to be considered a significant factor in electoral behaviour, alongside economic voting and valence politics. It may also be seen as a particularly volatile one, likely to be fuelled by the issues that are most salient in the run-up to the election, as spotlighted in the discourse of party leaders or brought about by events, like the tragedy at Tempi which sent the country in a period of collective mourning and emotional outburst, but which had dissipated by the time of the May election. This should remind us that in the repeat elections, which will be the decisive ones, there are still prospects for the gaps between the top three parties to widen or shrink, depending on what issues dominate the agenda in the next few weeks.

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## 27 | Registered, Banned and Excluded: Thoughts on Mobilisation and Exclusion of Far-Right Parties

By Vasiliki (Billy) Tsagkroni

This year a new record was set in regards to Greek parliamentary elections. 50 political parties and party coalitions registered to the Supreme Court in order to participate and claim the vote from the electorate, while in comparison, in 2019, the number of registrations was only 24. Interestingly, out of those 50 political formations, 15 have some reference to the far-right, expressing mainly anti-immigrant positions and nationalist narratives. This high number of marginal formations points to a hyper-activity within the ecosystem and its various subsystems of the far-right. In this sort of essay, two main points will be discussed: first, the mobility within the far-right space, and second, the role/control of the Supreme Court on the participation of party formations in the elections.

Regarding the first, similar to past cases, a number of new formations come from seceding from the governing party of ND that express more extreme positions, especially in terms of security and anti-immigration policies. Additionally, the latest legislation (39/01.03.2022) on state funding of political parties and party coalitions defines that political parties that exceed 1.5% in the national election are entitled to funding. Considering that the latest exit polls suggest that more than 10% of the electorate is considering casting their vote to a far-right formation, that can mean potential access to funding for some, even if not reaching the 3% threshold to enter the parliament. And access to funding creates better long-term opportunities for political parties, which can strongly motivate some of them. Having said that, the high number of different formations, individual opportunisms of party leaders and inner competition indicate a lack of ability to form a coiling united front of the far-right and a possible reduction to the dispersion of votes. This does not exclude, though, a possible wider armament in the second elections, with the leader of Greek Solution calling for a mobilisation of the national patriotic front to achieve a more vigorous representation in the national parliament.

The second point refers to the legislative framework, following the developments after the trial and defunct of Golden Dawn and the exclusion and ban of a party from participation in the elections. This framework focuses on National Party-Hellenes, formed by a former member of Golden Dawn, Ilias Kasidiaris (currently serving jail time). In the end, the Supreme Court decided to disqualify the party due to, among others, the incitation of violence, disrespect to democracy, promotion of totalitarian ideologies, dissemination of racist and intolerant ideas and hatred that threaten the peaceful coexistence of social groups in the country. This is the first time, after the re-establishment of democracy, that the court considered the request for such a ban to protect democracy and the current constitution. However, this does not mean a ban on the functions of the party itself, but just a temporary ban on participating in the specific elections that leave open the opportunity for the party to reintegrate in the

future in an attempt to circumvent the previous prohibition. Finally, the decision of the court also included exclusions of other far-right formations mainly due to technicalities in the process, something that stimulated some criticism about what extent the ruling party of ND is using the process as a strategic tool to undercut political rivals of the far-right for its electoral benefit.

The issue of banning political parties that pose a threat to democracy was initiated just after the appearance of the Golden Dawn in the 2012 elections. However, it had only been seriously discussed in 2021, followed by numerous amendments in the legislation that ultimately led to the ban of National Party-Hellenes. The need for a long-term solution becomes apparent in the process, with better-defined criteria to protect the state's free functioning and a healthier political competition that will not leave any space for even implying that judicial power is a tool of political power.

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## 28 | “Cold peace” or “hot war”?

By Emre Metin Bilginer

The rise of the right populism and nationalism gained momentum to affect the dynamics of bilateral relations between Turkey and Greece. The outcome of the Greek Legislative Elections in May 2023 revealed engaging projections regarding the future of Turkish-Greek relations. Although Turkey and Greece faced, respectively, earthquake and train crush disasters just before their general elections, Erdoğan and Mitsotakis governments managed to motivate their electorates with their securitization policies. The voters of both countries did not prioritize the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian War, the refugee crisis, and the dire economic straits. Both Mitsotakis and Erdoğan were capable enough of instrumentalizing foreign policy in their domestic politics.

Mitsotakis managed to maintain brinkmanship during his former period in office and to convince his electorate that Greece’s main problem was security. Turkish-Greek relations have been subjected to multi-layered damage recently, considering factors such as the introverted attitude around the world, the momentum gained by populist politics, and the prevalence of fake news.

For the moment, Mitsotakis did not get enough votes to form a government without a coalition, but he obtained a driving force to win the next elections with his foreign policy moves. Considering that Mitsotakis is ready to build a new dialogue field with his counterpart in Turkey, we might expect a new “cold peace” period embellished with nationalistic discourses.

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## 29 | Climate crisis in Greek elections

By George Dikaïos

It is astonishing how the Greek political sphere ignores so profoundly one of the biggest challenges of our times. A very useful research project conducted by the ETERON think tank gathers the public statements of Greek politicians during the pre-election season. Its results are overly disappointing, showcasing little to no reference to either climate change or climate crisis. This becomes even more alarming, taking into account that in April, the global record of greenhouse gas emissions was broken twice. Moreover, the situation worsens in the turbulent times that we live in, leading countries and governments to drift away from their climate commitments.

The climate crisis is nowadays an embedded challenge to people's minds. However, a growing number of citizens -at the European level- do not seem to wish to change their everyday routine in order to contribute to its tackling (see Guardian 2023). Greeks are no different from this tendency, although Greece is a country that will suffer -and already is suffering- disproportionately from climate change, despite the fact that its contribution to the actual problem is rather low.

It is disheartening to note that in Greece, the very few statements on climate change that are made by the political parties are mostly ostensible and vague, and the need for bold measures is not taken seriously. Moreover, some political decisions in combating climate change seem to happen more for communication reasons rather than substantive ones, arguably falling under the umbrella of greenwashing at times.

On the election of 21st of May, as in any other election in Greece ever, no Green party was even close to getting elected (all Green parties combined, reached under 1%). This leaves the burden of climate policies to the ruling parties. It is them that must seriously consider that the causes of climate crisis do not need communicational management but actual tackling.

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