

2019-3
MIDEM-Report

THE GENERAL ELECTIONS IN GREECE 2019

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CONTENTS

	SUMMARY	4
1.	THE GREEK PARTY-SYSTEM	4
2.	THE IMMIGRATION ISSUE IN GREECE	8
3.	ELECTORAL RESULTS	12
4.	OUTLOOK	13
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	14
	AUTHOR	16
	IMPRINT	14

SUMMARY

- Following a large defeat by the conservative New Democracy in the May 2019 European Parliament elections the leftist Syriza government called for snap general elections in July. The result was seen as predetermined and the question was the margin of loss of the incumbent.
- As expected, New Democracy won the 2019 general elections with just under 40% of the vote, securing 158 seats in parliament. This was the first time since the onset of the economic crisis that an outright majority was achieved. New Democracy's electoral pledges included measures to stimulate growth, tax cuts, and strengthening public safety and security.
- The election confirmed the trend towards the re-concentration and the simplification of the party-system that was profoundly upset by the economic crisis. Despite its consecutive losses, Syriza managed to consolidate itself as the main left-wing pole of a two-party system, while New Democracy recovered on the right. Four more parties managed to enter parliament, but smaller challengers that emerged across the political spectrum during the crisis disappeared.
- Greece's notorious neo-Nazi party, Golden Dawn did not manage to pass the 3% electoral threshold and gained zero mandates. The relegation of the Golden Dawn, back to the margins of politics was unanimously welcomed by politicians and commentators across the country. At the same time, a new radical right party appeared in the political scene, Greek Solution, attracting 3.7% of the vote. While less extreme than the Golden Dawn, Greek Solution holds hardline anti-immigrant, xenophobic, and Eurosceptic positions.
- Overall, the economy dominated the electoral campaign and immigration was not a central issue. Nationalist energies were focused on foreign policy and the especially contentious Prespa agreement that settled the decade-long name dispute with Greece's neighbor, Northern Macedonia, for which Syriza was bitterly criticised. Despite the low salience of immigration (including the refugee emergency), polarisation was high. Political parties took clearly distinguishable and competitive positions, with left-wing parties advancing migrant-friendly proposals, the far right staunchly opposing migration, and the centre-right New Democracy positioning itself somewhere between the two.

1. THE GREEK PARTY-SYSTEM

The Eurozone crisis triggered dramatic changes in the hitherto stable structure of political competition in Greece. The electorate punished the two long-standing parties that had dominated Greek politics for decades, PASOK and ND, while a multitude of new challengers appeared across the political spectrum. By now, it appears that the party-system has reached a new balance, albeit a more fragile one compared to the pre-crisis years. After a period of extraordinary volatility and fragmentation, the traditional two-party structure of competition seems to have been restored, with Syriza replacing PASOK on the left and ND recovering on the right.

Historically, political conflict in Greece has not been structured by deep social divisions like the ones found in West-European societies. The driver of political behaviour has been, instead, political ideology and, more specifically, a divide between 'Right' and 'Anti-right', going back to the monarchist-republican conflict of the interwar period (Nicolacopoulos 2005: 265). Compounding the relative weakness of cleavages was the centrality of clientelist networks and patron relations, which served as the basis of political organization (e.g. Mavrogordatos 1997). As we shall see in more detail below, however, in the aftermath of the economic crisis these patterns were partly upset, and the political space remains currently rather unshaped.

The fall of the military junta in 1974 inaugurated the process of democratic transition in Greece. ND, a new centre-right party founded and lead by Constantine Karamanlis, won the parliamentary elections that took place in November the same year. In 1981 the left took over, when PASOK ascended to power establishing itself as the main centre-left party of Greece until 2012. Founded by the charismatic Andreas Papandreou, it appeared as an anti-Western, radical party, but eventually it moderated its appeal, espousing a liberal-democratic outlook (Spourdalakis/Tassis 2006).

The 1981 elections inaugurated the era of stable two-partism in Greece (Pappas 2003), which lasted until the critical 2012 May elections. For decades, PASOK and ND alternated in power, even though PASOK governed for a comparatively much longer time period. The only third party that was able to maintain a steady parliamentary presence was the KKE, a Marxist-Leninist party founded in 1918.

In the 1990s Greece witnessed the convergence of the centre-left and centre-right on a common political program focused on modernisation, Europeanization, and pro-market reforms. A major development in this period was the election of Costas Simitis as leader of PASOK and Prime Minister (1996-2004). He oversaw the implementation of a number of reforms, leading to Greece's entrance to the Eurozone. At the same time, PASOK shifted away from populism and a charismatic leadership model to a more managerial and technocratic style (Featherstone 2005).

Glossary - Main political parties in Greece since 2000

N.Δ. Νέα Δημοκρατία	ND <i>New Democracy</i>	Centre-right
ΣΥΡΙΖΑ Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς	SYRIZA <i>Coalition of the Radical Left</i>	Left
Χ.Α. Λαϊκός Σύνδεσμος–Χρυσή Αυγή	GD <i>Popular Association–Golden Dawn</i>	Extreme right
Κ.Κ.Ε. Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας	KKE <i>Communist Party of Greece</i>	Far-left
ΜέΡΑ25 Μέτωπο Ευρωπαϊκής Ρεαλιστικής Ανυπακοής	MeRA25 <i>European Realistic Disobedience Front</i>	Left
ΑΝ.ΕΛ. Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες	ANEL <i>Independent Greeks</i>	Right to far-right
Ε.Λ. Ελληνική Λύση	GS <i>Greek Solution</i>	Far-right
ΠΑ.ΣΟ.Κ. Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα	PASOK <i>Panhellenic Socialist Movement</i>	Centre-left
ΚΙΝ.ΑΛ. Κίνημα Αλλαγής	KINAL <i>Movement for Change</i> (party coalition that includes, PASOK)	Centre-left
Το Ποτάμι	The River	Centre to centre-left
ΔΗΜ.ΑΡ. Δημοκρατική Αριστερά	DIMAR <i>Democratic Left</i>	Left
Ε.Κ. Ένωση Κεντρώων	UoC <i>Union of Centrists</i>	Centre
ΛΑΟΣ Λαϊκός Ορθόδοξος Συναγερμός	LAOS <i>Popular Orthodox Rally</i>	Right to far-right

Crisis politics

The Eurozone crisis put an end to the policy consensus on economic issues. Shortly after a new PASOK government came to power, in October 2009, it was revealed that Greece's deficit had been much larger than previously reported, standing at 15.4%, and that the country's public debt was unsustainable. In March 2010 the government of Prime Minister George Papandreou, son of PASOK's founder, resorted to the financial stability mechanism set up by the 'Troika', i.e. the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The conditions for the emergency rescue (or 'bailout') package were outlined in the so-called Memorandum, and consisted of a series of economic reforms and drastic austerity measures.

The Greek crisis proved infinitely more difficult to contain than previously anticipated. It was only in the summer of 2018 that Greece officially exited the bailout programs. The economy began to slowly grow again and unemployment fell, even though public debt currently stands at a staggering 180% of the GDP (Eurostat).

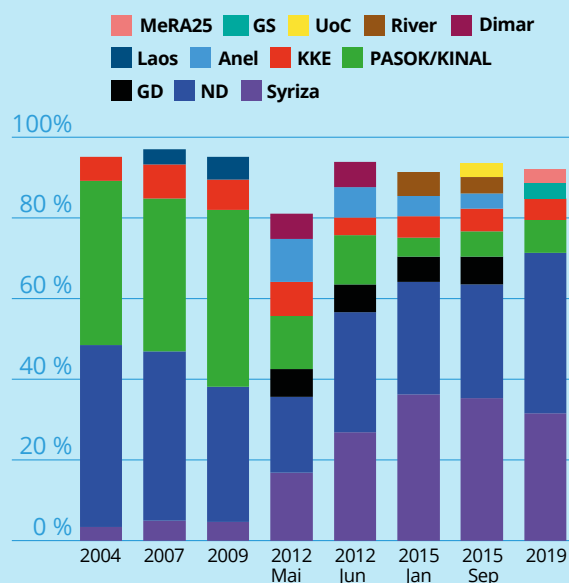
Beyond truly devastating social consequences, the crisis also triggered dramatic changes in the Greek party-system (Fig. 1). After the signing of the first bailout in 2010, political conflict was restructured around a new divide, between those supporting the bailouts and those opposing them (Dinas/Rori 2013: 274f.). At the same time,

the extent of the calamity was widely interpreted as the consequence of a deeply flawed political system, built on clientelism, mismanagement, and incompetence. Hence, the pro-bailout/anti-bailout divide was complemented with an additional distinction drawn between the 'old' and 'tainted' political establishment on the one hand, and the 'new', 'unblemished' forces that promised renewal, on the other hand (Altiparmakis 2019).

Indicative of this new chasm that did not map neatly into the traditional left-right opposition, were the coalition governments that emerged in this period – one of the consequences of the crisis being parties' inability to secure strong majorities. On the pro-bailout side, the grand coalition between ND and PASOK as well as the far-right LAOS was followed by a coalition led by ND and supported by PASOK and the leftist DIMAR (2012-2015). On the anti-bailout side of the divide, we find the peculiar partnership of Syriza and ANEL (2015-2019), "the first ever governing alliance of left-wing and right-wing populist parties in Europe" (Aslanidis/Kaltwasser 2016: 1).

Even though Syriza and its predecessors had some parliamentary presence before the crisis years, the party's breakthrough came afterwards, with Alexis Tsipras in the lead. Syriza's political program and ideology was fairly similar to that of PASOK, but it had established a stronger social movement base

Fig. 1: Parties elected to the Hellenic Parliament, 2004-2019



Source: Own elaboration based on <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Vouli-ton-Ellinon/To-Politevma/Ekloges/Eklogika-apotelesmata-New/#/>

(Altiparmakis 2019). Owing to its anti-bailout and anti-austerity positions Syriza effectively displaced PASOK on the left. As for the minor coalition partner, ANEL, this was founded by former ND MP Panos Kammenos and other ND dissidents. The common point with Syriza was the party's anti-memorandum stance, though ideologically it was positioned on the opposite side of the political spectrum.

Stabilization

The first Syriza-led government that formed in January 2015 began dramatic negotiations with Greece's creditors regarding a third bailout, which reached a stalemate after six months. As tensions escalated, capital controls were introduced and a referendum was held on the conditions of the bailout, which the majority of the Greek electorate rejected. Despite the result, the Syriza-led government eventually backtracked, giving in to the creditors' (now increased) demands. The agreement sparked controversy within the party, leading to a split and new elections that were held in September 2015. Overall, Syriza

came out from this agitated period intact and even strengthened, now freed from the constraints of its internal opposition.

After the watershed of May 2012, the system also began to restabilize into a new, less robust form of bipartism (Dinas/Rori 2013: 271). Even though the two major parties have not been able to secure victories with such large margins as in the pre-crisis period – at least for the time being – there has been a considerable reconcentration of power. Already in January 2015 ND and Syriza jointly reached 64% of the vote, 7.6 points up since June 2012 and 20.9 points up since May 2012.

The 2019 EP elections (combined with local elections) were held after four years of relative political stability, as compared to the turbulence of the preceding period. The elections confirmed the continuing trend toward the simplification of the party-system. Syriza lost to ND by a 9-point difference while ANEL practically disappeared (Fig. 2). The other small parties that emerged in the crisis, River and UoC, failed to pass the electoral threshold at the same time as support for the ultranationalist GD decreased significantly.

The only new parties that were able to gather significant vote-shares were GS on the right and MeRA25 on the left. The former was founded by former LAOS MP and journalist, Kyriakos Velopoulos, in 2016 and managed to get 4.2% of the vote on the 2019 EP elections, which is more or less analogous to the decline of the vote share of the GD: 4.9 points down compared to the 2014 EP elections. GS presents itself as purely anti-systemic and untainted. Velopoulos has claimed that “We are neither right-wing nor left-wing — we are Greeks.” Nonetheless, both in terms of its program and its discourse, GS can be classified as a right-wing populist party, distinguished by economic nationalism, Euroscepticism, social conservatism and welfare chauvinism (the party's central campaign slogan has been “We take Greece into our own hands”). MeRA25 is a “pan-European transborder movement”¹ that was founded by Syriza's former Minister of Finance, Yanis Varoufakis, who acquired a celebrity status during the 2015 negotiations with Greece's creditors. It narrowly missed the electoral threshold and did not get any mandates.

Fig. 1: 2019 European Parliament election results

ND	Syriza	KINAL	KKE	GD	GS	MeRA25	River	UoC	ANEL
33.12	23.75	7.72	5.35	4.87	4.18	2.99	1.52	1.45	0.8

¹ <https://diem25.org/%cf%84%ce%b9-%ce%b5%ce%af%ce%bd%ce%b1%ce%b9-%cf%84%ce%bf-diem25/>

ND's comfortable win over Syriza took the party's leadership by surprise. Even though general elections were originally scheduled to take place in the Autumn, nonetheless, in light of the large difference, the elections were brought forward to the 7th of July.

The 2019 general election campaign

Since it started immediately after the EP and local elections, the national election campaign was largely seen as an extension of the former. Successive polls continued to show an entrenched large gap between Syriza and ND, which led to a relatively muted campaign in the middle of the Greek summer. Syriza focused on minimising further losses, while ND urged voters to give it a "strong mandate" and refrain from "experimenting" with smaller parties.

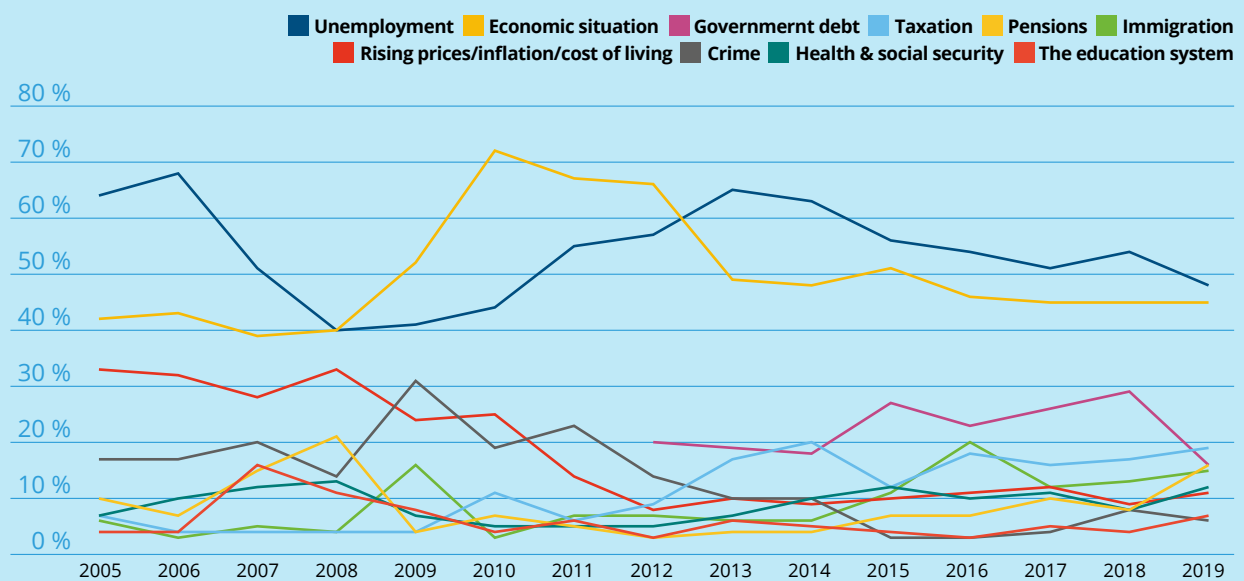
Debate focused on economic issues. This is in line with the priorities of the Greek public, which has been consistently preoccupied with the state of the economy and unemployment, even before the economic crisis, as well as, more recently, government debt and taxation (Fig. 3). Tsipras emphasized that he was the Prime Minister who took Greece out of the memoranda² and the party's representatives pointed out that the Greek economy had been growing for a third successive year. The party also promised tax relief, new public sector jobs, and wage increases. It accused ND for its neoliberal economic agenda, while also inviting citizens to "remember" the harsh austerity policies that the party implemented while in

government. Syriza stressed its progressive legislative achievements, appealing especially to the young and women – two demographic groups, which had apparently switched from supporting Syriza to ND.

ND, on the other hand, promised extensive tax cuts, measures for job creation, reduction of bureaucracy and policies stimulating growth, appealing especially to the 'forgotten' Greek middle class. ND criticised Syriza's governing record, casting it as "incompetent, arrogant and indifferent."³ Such criticism was often levelled with special reference to the 2018 Attica wildfires, which caused the death of 102 people, for the problems surrounding the rescue operation and the government's handling of the disaster more generally. Overall, however, ND appeared temperamentally mild, striving to project professionalism, integrity, and credibility. Central to this effort was the image of the new party leader, Kyriakos Mitsotakis. An heir of a political dynasty, Mitsotakis managed to cast himself as a modernizer, his party as renewed and forward-looking. He also claimed to be a more credible negotiator for the country's foreign partners, including the creditors and the EU. Sending a message of patriotism to "all Greeks", ND tried to appeal to people across demographics and party lines (as signaled also by the party's central slogan, "United we can").

Beyond the economy, Greece's foreign policy was also in focus, mainly the tense Greco-Turkish relations, owing to repeated violations of Greek airspace by Turkish military jets, and the highly contentious Prespa Agreement, signed in the summer of 2018 and going into force in

Fig. 3. Top concerns in Greece, 2005-2019



Source: Standard Eurobarometer, 2005-2018, Spring waves; Special Eurobarometer March 2019 / own elaboration

2 <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1031099/article/epikairothta/politikh/al-tsipras-eimai-o-prw8ypoyrgos-poy-evgale-th-xwra-apo-ta-mnhmonia>

3 <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1030967/article/epikairothta/politikh/kyr-mhtsotakhs-thn-7h-ioylioy-kleinei-enas-kyklos-mias-10etoys-odysseias>

February 2019. The agreement settled a decade-long dispute about the use of the name “Macedonia” between Greece and the now Republic of North Macedonia. While the international community welcomed it, domestically it was very contentious in both countries. ND, ANEL, UoC, GD and the KKE opposed the agreement, moreover, ND filed a motion of no-confidence against Tsipras, which was rejected. Large demonstrations took place on the streets, and nationalist sentiment increased.⁴ The agreement brought ANEL in a difficult position given its nationalist ideology, and the party eventually left the government in January 2019. However, this was not enough to contain the political cost of the agreement, which also contributed to the emergence of the GS that moved into the space of ANEL.

2. THE IMMIGRATION ISSUE IN GREECE

While Eurobarometer surveys regularly find that people in Greece are much more preoccupied with the economy rather than immigration as compared to other EU countries (Fig. 5), this relative indifference is coupled with persistently unfavourable opinions about this issue (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Opinions about immigrants in Greece, 2018

	Agree	Disagree
The number of immigrants in our country over the past ten years has been too high	90	9
The presence of immigrants in our country increases crime	72	27
The presence of immigrants in our country increases unemployment	65	33
The presence of migrants in our country has a positive economic impact	33	65
The presence of immigrants in our country enriches our culture	30	69
The presence of migrants in our country helps to solve the demographic problem of Greece	22	76

Source: *Dianeosis* 2018

As the political project of modernisation and Europeanization was launched in the 1990s, the importance of identity-politics also surged (Featherstone 2005: 224). This was a period of increased immigration to Greece, hitherto a migrant sending rather than a migrant receiving country (Fig. 6). With the fall of the Iron Curtain and the disintegration of state-socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, large numbers of migrants, especially from neighbouring Albania, arrived to Greece in search of better living conditions. They typically entered the labor market at the bottom and offered unskilled labor for Greece’s growing economy. By the 2000s, migration had become more differentiated, both in terms of countries of origin (with large numbers of migrants originating from Africa and the Middle East) as well as in terms of the type of migration, as Greece began to receive people fleeing political instability and conflict. A particularly thorny issue has been the high concentration of migrants in urban centres, especially central Athens (Triandafyllidou/ Kokkali 2010: 16).

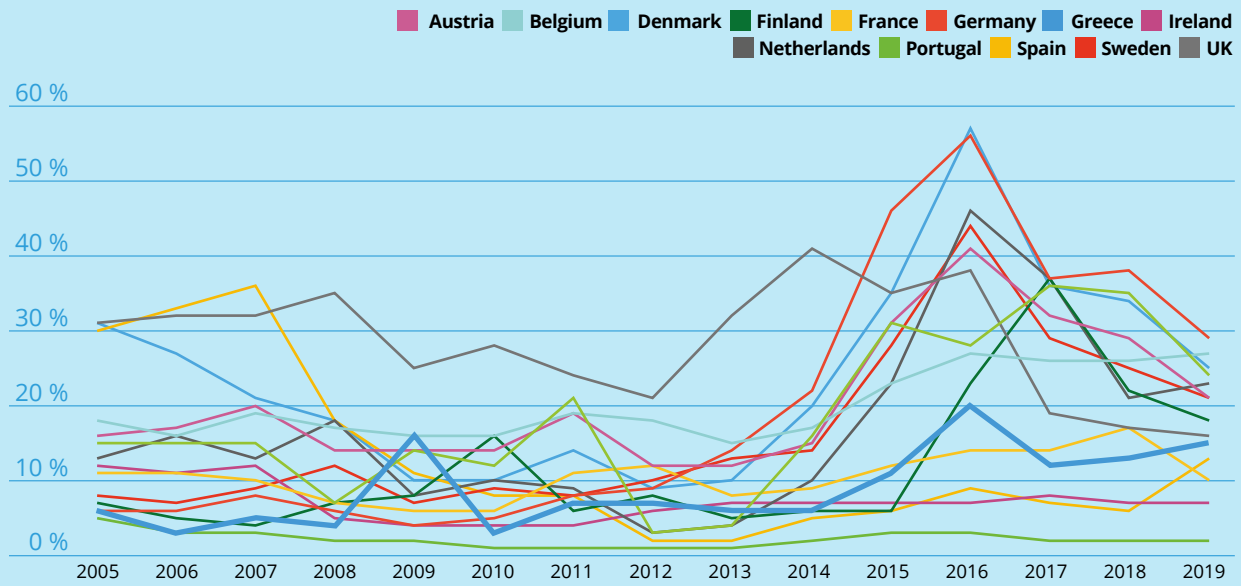
Greek media and public discourse has traditionally framed immigration predominantly as a threat to national identity and public safety. Both PASOK and ND promoted an understanding of immigration as a threat, linking it to criminality. Their policy-responses focused on discouraging migration, e.g. by tightening border control, facilitating deportation, and restricting work permits, though PASOK took more migrant-friendly positions than ND on the issue of integration and naturalization (Karamanidou 2015).

The increased and predominantly negative attention that the issue of immigration received from the 1990s onwards and the (real and perceived) failures of migration policy created a political potential to be tapped by the far right. LAOS was the first far right party in recent times to secure significant independent presence in the Greek parliament. Founded by George Karatzaferis, former ND MP, the party had a nationalist and xenophobic profile, though later it moderated its position and discourse. The party’s first success came in the 2007 national elections, when it gathered almost 4% of the vote, increasing this share even more in 2009. However, LAOS lost its anti-system status by supporting the Memorandum. It was unable to recover in the 2012 elections, opening up space for new challengers on the right, GD and ANEL.

Reacting to the rise of exaggerated forms of nationalism from 2010 on, and trying to draw attention away from economic issues, both ND and PASOK instrumentalised the issue of immigration in the 2012 campaign. Socialists attracted wide media attention by overseeing the arrests of HIV-positive prostitutes, some of them of immigrant background, as well as by announcing the

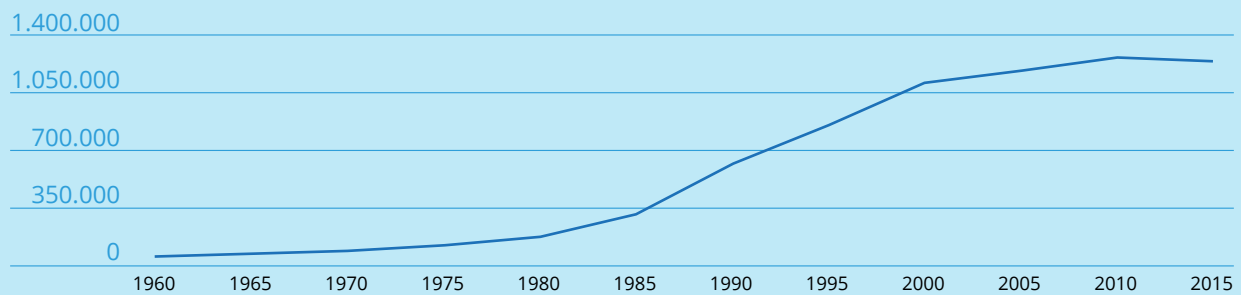
4 <http://www.ekathimerini.com/239359/opinion/ekathimerini/comment/has-the-prespes-accord-increased-nationalist-sentiments>

Fig. 5. Percentage listing immigration as one of the top two issues affecting their country 2005-2019, selected EU Member States



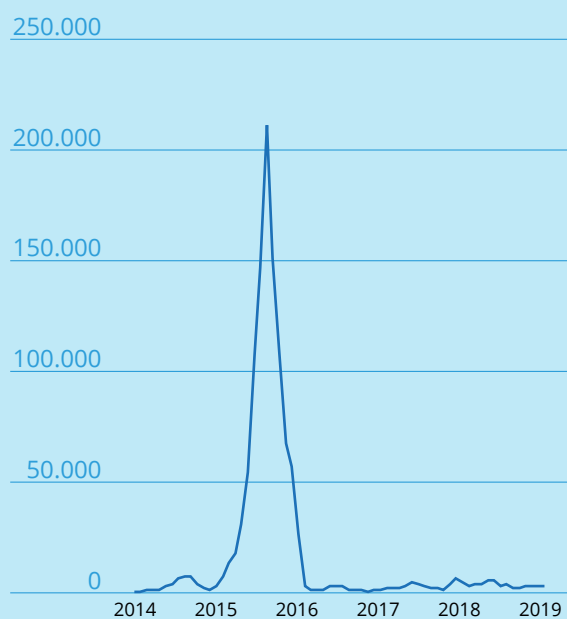
Source: Standard Eurobarometer, 2005-2018, Spring waves; Special Eurobarometer March 2019 / own elaboration

Fig. 6. International migrant stock in Greece, 1960-2015



Source: United Nations Population Division

Fig. 7. Sea and land arrivals to Greece, 2014-2019



Source: UNHCR

establishment of detention centres for unauthorised migrants (Dinas/Rori 2013). At the same time, then ND leader Antonis Samaras campaigned against “illegal immigration,” linking it to the decline of urban centres, drug trade, and prostitution (HRW, 2012: 35). Having come to power in 2012, ND launched a wide-ranging cleanup police operation aimed at the arrest, detention, and deportation of undocumented immigrants, named euphemistically after the ancient Greek god of hospitality, “Xenios Zeus” (Voutira 2016). In December 2012 Greece also completed a ten-kilometre-long fence at its border with Turkey to prevent unauthorised entry into the country.

In 2015, a new crisis was added to the old one(s): the European migrant and refugee emergency. People arriving from war-torn regions in the Middle East, particularly from Syria, crossed from the Turkish shores to nearby Greek islands. Others arrived from the North, via the Evros border crossing. At the peak of the crisis, Greece recorded thousands of arrivals monthly (Fig. 7).

Generally, locals responded to the crisis with a wave of solidarity and thousands of volunteers stepped in to cover the gap in state capacity to deal with the emergency. That said, some local communities periodically opposed the establishment of hospitality centers or hotspots in the vicinity (e.g. Shisto, Veroia), even though confrontations did not last long. Flares of tension and violence also occurred, especially on the islands, with residents protesting the protracted presence of asylum-seekers and continuing arrivals.⁵

Beginning in the autumn of 2016, a highly publicised controversy broke out concerning the integration of refugee children in local schools. Parents and community members gathered in protest, and in some instances there were attempts to bar the entry of refugees in the buildings. Others kept their children at home to avoid contact with refugees. Albeit sporadic, these incidents received wide media attention and generated a national debate over the “refugee question” in Greece, while also morphing into a political conflict between the Syriza-led government and ultranationalist groups, with one particularly visible protagonist being the GD.

INFOBOX – A short history of GD

Current party leader Nikos Michaloliakos has been active in Greek far right circles since the 1970s. He was repeatedly arrested and, in 1978, convicted for possession of firearms and explosives. He served as head of the youth wing of the National Political Union, a Greek far right party founded in 1984 by jailed former junta leader Georgios Papadopoulos.

Michaloliakos established the GD already in 1983, but the party remained on the margins of the political competition for a long time, attracting attention because of violent attacks against migrants and leftists. While in 2009 GD got less than 0.5% of the vote in both the national and the EP elections, in the 2010 Athens city council elections it gained 5.26%. GD successfully capitalised on this victory and attracted almost 7% of the national vote in 2012 reaching its peak in the 2014 EP elections coming in third with 9,39%.

GD is one of the most extreme political formations that managed to enter national parliament in Europe. It espouses an ultranationalist, racist, and anti-democratic ideology (Kyriazi 2016). The “latent xenophobia” (Ellinas 2013: 557) of the Greek electorate, the inefficiency of previous immigration and asylum policies, and the economic downturn jointly contributed to the GD’s breakthrough in the 2012 elections.

GD has been popular among men, the young, secondary education graduates, and people in occupations that are “exposed to market conditions,” i.e. primary sector employees, the self-employed, private sector employees, as well as students and the unemployed (Ellinas 2015: 7; Tsatsanis/Teperoglou 2016: Table A2, Online Appendix).

In April 2015, a criminal trial started against 69 members of the GD, including party-leader Nikos Michaloliakos. They were accused of joining and/or directing a criminal organization, murder and attempted murder as well as other crimes. Since then, the party’s support has seen a considerable decline.

Immigration ahead of the 2019 general elections

Despite the low salience of immigration as compared to economic topics, polarization of the issue was high, with parties positioning themselves in clearly distinguishable and competitive ways. On the whole, left and centre-left parties (Syriza, KINAL, KKE, MeRA25) have taken migrant-friendly positions, while the far right (GD, GS) hardline anti-migrant positions, with ND somewhere between the two.

Starting with the latter, during the campaign ND continued to frame the issue of immigration in the manner that has long characterized the party, i.e. through the lens of security. In a programmatic document produced in 2018, ND referred in positive terms to its previous record of immigration crackdown: “The first priority is guarding and protecting the land and sea borders of the country with modern technical means and intensive and coordinated patrols in cooperation with the European Union. We achieved it in 2012-2014 and we will do it again! Greece is not a fenceless vine!” (ND 2018: 20). The expression “fenceless vine” is popular in Greek parlance and has been used extensively by both left and right to refer to the need for strong migration control (Karamanidou 2015).

ND’s electoral program for the 2019 general elections also had a separate section for immigration, entitled “Our plan for guarding our borders and handling immigration.” In this, ND promised a complete overhaul of migration policy, including prioritising border protection, speeding up the asylum procedure, and the immediate return to their homelands of those not entitled to asylum. ND pledged to allow access to the Greek school-system by “recognized refugees”, but only “until their repatriation becomes possible.” (ND 2019: 10) Kyriakos Mitsotakis also visited the islands most affected by the refugee flows, Samos and Lesbos, pledging to “decongest the eastern Aegean islands”, by moving those not entitled to asylum back to Turkey.⁶

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/03/greek-riot-police-teargas-protest-eu-migration-policy-lesbos>

⁶ <https://www.cnn.gr/ekloges/story/182776/mitsotakis-amesi-proteraiotita-i-aposymforisi-ton-nision>

Despite the restrictive content of these policy proposals, the framing of migration as a security threat, and the emphasis on border control, ND's discourse has been low-key and managerial and top candidates refrained from deploying alarmist, xenophobic language. That said, we shall note that in ND the liberalism of Mitsotakis coexists with a more explicitly nationalist-identitarian current, spearheaded by prominent members coming from the space of the far right, including vice-president Adonis Georgiadis, Makis Voridis and others.

Notwithstanding a considerable degree of ideological and programmatic convergence on migration-friendly positions, there were also differences among the left-wing parties' framing and proposals. SYRIZA talked little about the issue, highlighting mainly its pro-migrant and pro-refugee government record. The 2019 manifesto for the general elections mentioned as an important achievement that Syriza had brokered the law that extended citizenship to second-generation immigrant children.⁷ Tsipras also expressed pride of the way his government handled the refugee emergency, claiming that under his leadership Greece "set an example by defending human values."⁸

KINAL's manifesto for the 2019 national elections was laconic, apart from a general pledge to introduce "policies for the social integration of refugees-immigrants." The party's website, however, contains a more detailed political program that approaches immigration from a rights-based angle and includes, among others, a path to citizenship for second-generation immigrants, access to healthcare, education, and employment and protection from abuse, economic exploitation and racism.⁹

The electoral program of MeRA25 also deals with immigration in a separate section, viewed from the ideological stance of solidarity. The program begins by rejecting the dichotomy between 'migrant' and 'refugee' condemning the EU-Turkish deal and the perception, more generally, of

human mobility as a 'problem' to be 'handled'. The program contains measures to emancipate and empower migrants, and also includes a facilitated path to citizenship.

In this campaign, too, the KKE reiterated its permanent position on the issue of immigration, which it views as being induced by global economic inequalities. KKE used the migration issue to criticise the political establishment —both Greek mainstream parties, the European Union, 'imperialism' etc. — for their handling of migrants and refugees, and to advocate for equal treatment, regularisation of legal status, and protection of all migrants' social, political and economic rights.¹⁰ Party leader Dimitris Koutsoumpas remarked that KKE was an alternative choice against pro-memorandum parties on the one hand and the "fascists," on the other hand.¹¹

On the far right, GD has consistently called for the immediate expulsion of "illegal aliens" and casted immigration as an existential threat to the "nation", conceived as a racial community. The party's positions on the issue did not shift, and it continued to be at the forefront of anti-migrant discourse and practice. In a recent televised interview, MP and spouse of party-leader, Katerina Zaroulia, promised the "expulsion of all illegal intruders and the closure of the borders."¹² She also called attention to GD's social work with vulnerable Greeks (e.g. donating food, clothing and blood "only for Greeks," a "Jobs for Greeks" program, etc. , described in detail by Ellinas 2015: 15). Beyond immigration, the party's candidates tackled various issues pertaining to national sovereignty and identity, from the Prespa agreement and the Turkish 'threat', to demographic shrinkage and the need for economic autarchy.

While ANEL declined irreversibly and did not even participate in the 2019 general elections, a new player emerged on the far right, GS. It is more moderate than GD in that it is not a criminal organization that espouses neo-Nazi ideology. However, GS is still a hardliner on immigration.

Fig. 8: Distribution of seats in the 2019 Hellenic parliament



Source: Own elaboration based on <https://ekloges.ypes.gr/current/v/home/en/>

7 <https://www.syriza.gr/ekloges2019/>

8 <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1031108/article/epikairothta/politikh/tsipras-varia-kai-krisimh-h-apofash-stis-e8nikes-ekloges>

9 <https://kinimaallagis.gr/schedio-ellada/anoikti-koinonia-dikaiomata/>

10 http://www.kke.gr/metanastes_-_prosfyges/anakoinosh_toy_grafeioly_typoy_me_afomh_thn_pagkosmia_hmera_prosfygon_2019?morf=1&tab=1

11 <https://www.news247.gr/ekloges/koytsoympas-ekloges-laos-epilexei-anamesa-mnimoniakoys-fasistes-kke.7467618.html>

12 <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/thleoptikes-emfaniseis-kai-proeklogikes-draseis-ths-chrushs-aughsbint4>

Moreover, unlike GD, which had limited visibility in the Greek information environment beyond the criminal trial of some of its members, GS has been able to disseminate its xenophobic views through its own media outlets, Alert TV and voicenews.gr, but also as an invitee of the mainstream media. Touring the major TV channels, party-leader Velopoulos and other candidates rehearsed the dominant topics of xenophobia and Islamophobia, propagating for a six-meter tall border wall and the installation of a minefield along the Evros border with Turkey, stating that Greece had no money to give benefits to “every Hasan and Ibrahim,” as well as linking immigration to crime.¹³

3. ELECTORAL RESULTS

As expected, ND won the 2019 general elections reaching almost 40%, which was an increase of 12 points since 2015 September and 7 points since 2019 May. ND secured 158 seats in the 300-seat Parliament (given the 50-seat electoral bonus awarded to the first party according to the electoral rules), which constitutes a comfortable majority. For the first time since the pre-crisis 2009 elections, there was no need to form a governing coalition.

Syriza did not manage to reverse the defeat of the 2019 May European Parliament, and regional and municipal elections. Nonetheless, Syriza did increase its vote

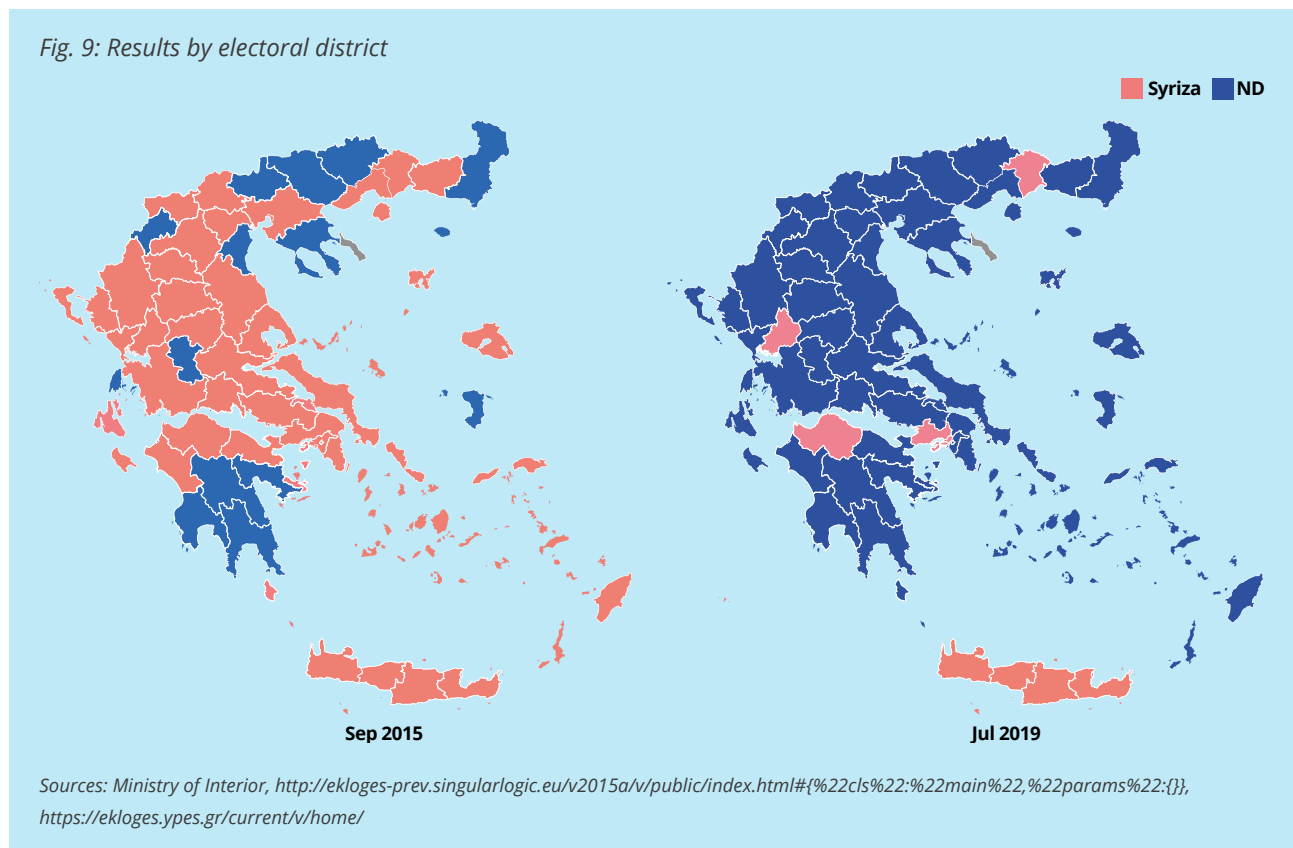
share even more than ND, reaching 31%, and thusly avoiding a two-digit loss. Overall, the process of the consolidation of Syriza as the main left pole of the political system has continued.

The results show a considerable degree of re-concentration in the Greek party-system and support the argument regarding the formation of a new bipartism. ND and Syriza cumulatively won roughly 70%, as the number of parties crossing the electoral threshold decreased from eight to six. At the same time, the extreme right GD collapsed to under 3% and failed to secure any mandates.

Apart from ND and Syriza, four more parties managed to pass the electoral threshold. KINAL has stabilised as the third biggest party, augmenting its vote share since the EP elections, though proportionately less so than Syriza. KKE managed to enter the parliament but did not increase substantially its vote share, failing to attract the left-wing protest vote against Syriza, which went to Varoufakis’ MeRA25, instead. KKE is currently entrenched at around 5%.

Another major development was the collapse of the GD, which will have no presence in the national parliament. Along with the disappearance of ANEL, support for right-wing populist parties that increased during the crisis years has, therefore, retreated. It has not

Fig. 9: Results by electoral district



Sources: Ministry of Interior, <http://ekloges-prev.singularlogic.eu/v2015a/v/public/index.html#%22cls%22:%22main%22,%22params%22:{}>, <https://ekloges.ypes.gr/current/v/home/>

13 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftQVuCCb0bo>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgWNHII-Dno>

disappeared, however, as attested by the emergence of GS, an anti-systemic party that has a discourse and program built around xenophobia, social conservatism, and Euroscepticism.

Turnout was a bit under 58% — slightly lower than in the EP elections and somewhat higher than in September 2015 (56.6%), but a far cry from the 2000s when participation exceeded 70%. Furthermore, the new bipartism is weaker than in the pre-crisis years as smaller formations are regularly able to pass electoral thresholds.

Some early data indicate that ND increased its share since the 2019 May elections by taking votes from The River and KINAL as well as the far right. In terms of the geographic distribution of the vote, ND prevailed in almost all of the electoral districts but Crete and a number of lower socio-economic status districts in Athens and Piraeus (Fig. 9). ND's gains in the North were especially large and most probably the Prespa agreement has contributed to this landslide; tellingly, GD and GS were also strong in the North.¹⁴ ND prevailed among the self-employed, winning nearly one in two ballots in this occupational group as opposed to 24.5% of Syriza.¹⁵ Syriza won the young voters, leading in the group of 17-34. ND was more popular among the rest, especially the 55+ group.

Overall, the political opportunities opened up by the economic crisis have diminished and the party-system appears to have come a full circle. Political leaders and commentators alike interpreted the results as a return to normality after a tumultuous decade. Tsipras and Mitsotakis reinforced this impression by striking a conciliatory tone in their first statements, with the new Prime Minister reiterating his intention to work for all Greeks.

4. OUTLOOK

Mitsotakis was sworn in on the 8th of July and the transfer of power proceeded smoothly. In a symbolic move, he declared that the Greek Parliament would not go to recess in the summer of 2019, as urgent legislative work was awaiting. It was announced that among the first measures to be taken would be reforming the structure and operation of the government and introducing the promised tax cuts. In the evening of the 8th of July the composition of the new cabinet was also announced. Along well-established career politicians, Mitsotakis chose a number of extra-parliamentary members for his administration, with the intent to signal professionalism and reform-mindedness. The small representation of women in the new government was, however, striking, as only five women made it into a cabinet comprising 51 members.

The economy will continue to be the main focus. Even though Greece exited the bailout programs in the summer of 2018, the country is still under monitoring and economic hardship is far from over. In the immediate future, the ND government will have to open negotiations with Greece's creditors to reduce the required primary surpluses in order to stimulate growth. This will not be an easy task, though Mitsotakis' good relations with other conservatives in the European Peoples' Party will surely aid this endeavor.

While the unifying message of the ND resonates after years of polarisation and bitter division, it remains to be seen whether the programmatic aim of bringing together 'all Greeks' will come to the expense of immigrants and refugees, given ND's prior governing record and the party's restrictive policy proposals.

On the other side, immediately after the elections, party-leader Alexis Tsipras announced the impending transformation of Syriza into a modern left-wing progressive movement with a mass base.¹⁶ Syriza is entering the first post-bailout Parliament as a more experienced and mature party than before, firmly established as the left-wing pole of the restored bipartism in Greece.

14 https://www.efsyn.gr/politiki/ekloges/ekloges-2019/202911_boyleytikes-ekloges-ta-apotelesmata-ki-i-analysi-toys

15 <https://www.tovima.gr/2019/07/08/politics/i-kalpi-sto-mikroskopio-ti-apokalyptoun-ta-exit-poll/>

16 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIUDjuS9NXY>

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PROFILE

In recent years in particular the topic of migration has led to new political polarisations in the societies of Europe. The political and social challenges associated with this development are not yet foreseeable. There is a need for studies which explore the relationship between migration and democracy.

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