

Political Barometer 90

May 2011

Date of publication

May 15, 2011

public issue

Political uncertainty growing

A further element has now been added to the process of reconfiguration of the party system which is currently in full swing. It is one that aggravates the climate of uncertainty and is accelerating political developments. The new historical low recorded for the (social and) electoral support (vote estimate 32%) for the ruling party is testing not only its social cohesion but also its administrative capacity, while it is clearly not enough to secure a parliamentary majority in the event of an electoral 'upset'. In a possible 7-party House, which according to Public Issue's May assessment presently seems to be the most likely scenario, it appears that the leading party would not win more than 141 seats. This is true even in the most favorable scenario for the first party, namely that of a 5-party House, which would be the case if none of the newly formed parties manage to win a seat. In light of the above, there seems to be very little likelihood of a sudden, early election being called.

Moreover, the 'gap' between the first and second parties has narrowed markedly, from 6.5 to 3 percentage points in just one month. This is not only due to the ongoing decline in the social and electoral support for the ruling socialist PASOK party but also – for the first time in 1½ years – a significant monthly rise in the vote estimate for the main opposition, conservative New Democracy party (+2%, 29%). Although PASOK remains in front, its hitherto undeniable electoral supremacy is now in doubt. The average monthly decline in PASOK's vote estimate, since last September, has reached around 1.5 percentage points. So, the logical question that arises is: what political initiative, or what major event is capable of halting or reversing this trend?

The rise in New Democracy's vote estimate may be explained by two factors: **First**, the reduction in the number of supporters switching to the right-wing LAOS party, as well as to the center-right Democratic Alliance party, especially in the past two months. The decrease in the number of such losses increased the rallying of New Democracy voters to 56%, from 52% in April. Defections to LAOS have decreased from 9% (of ND voters in 2009) in March and 6% in April to just 4%. In addition, the popularity of LAOS leader George Karatzaferis incurred monthly losses of around 8%, while the party's image deteriorated by

Author

Yiannis Mavris
Public Issue Research Institute

Public Issue

16, Vas. Konstantinou Str,
Athens, GR – 116 35
T: +30 210 757 5000
F: +30 210 757 5100
E: info@publicissue.gr
W: www.publicissue.gr

About Public Issue's Political Barometer

The results presented in this analysis are based on monthly telephone opinion surveys, with a general population sample of 1,200 adults (18+) from across Greece. The May 2011 survey was carried out: 4-10/5/2011. Published by: SKAI / KATHIMERINI.

approximately 5%. It is clear that the 'deconstruction' offensive launched by prominent ND deputy Vangelis Meimarakis has been effective, causing significant damage to LAOS. A similar decrease has also been seen in the number of defections from ND to Democratic Alliance (falling from 3.5% of ND voters in 2009, to just 1%). This development has a different explanation, since it is more closely connected with public opinion about the Memorandum and the stance adopted toward it by Democratic Alliance's leader, Dora Bakoyannis. **Second**, the gains made by ND among the so-called 'middle ground' electorate, i.e. those voters who have at some time cast their ballot for each of the government parties. Undoubtedly, this second factor is more important. According to the May survey, it is estimated that the direct shift of PASOK voters to New Democracy is currently around 6%. A switch of this magnitude has not been recorded since December 2006.

In the year that has passed since the signing of the Memorandum, the accumulated social dissatisfaction with the country's governance has not taken the form of open social protest. Historically, due to the ideological consolidation of parliamentarianism in Greece, social discontent usually finds a parliamentary/electoral outlet, with an expression of disapproval for the ruling party. The likelihood of such an outlet being provided in the present circumstances remains quite strong and it is not certain that increased abstention can play a mitigating role.

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