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The party system one year after elections

One year ago, the parliamentary elections of 6 May marked a **structural break** in Greece's contemporary political and electoral history. The result proved to be catastrophic for the traditional government parties (socialist PASOK, conservative New Democracy) and at least in the case of PASOK signaled a point of no return. The significance of the popular verdict was threefold: *First*, it signified the unprecedented political bankruptcy and electoral collapse of the country's two-party system that was shaped after the military dictatorship (1967-1974), as well as of the electoral system in force. *Second*, it socially delegitimized the neo-liberal policy being implemented under the Memorandum. *Third*, the electoral success of left-wing SYRIZA marked the end of PASOK's period of hegemony and the political re-emergence of the Left. For the first time since the 1950s, the left is at the heart of political developments, rather than being consigned to the margins. However, the current situation in SYRIZA with regard to its policy program and organization is maintaining uncertainty about its prospects.

The May elections finally put an end to the historical cycle of the Metapolitefsi¹. The political vacuum that appeared is comparable to the void within the Greek political scene in 1950, after the civil war, as well as in 1974, after the fall of the military junta. The big difference vis-à-vis the previous two historical moments being that the main grouping of the Left is now at the center of developments and not on the political margin under the shadow of defeat.

The contemporary crisis of representation in Greece was, of course, not resolved in June 2012. One year on, the period we are currently going through continues to be transitional. The crisis of representation is being prolonged. The new form of the party system which is emerging can be considered neither crystallized nor final.

Support for the new 'quasi' two-partyism (ND, SYRIZA) is **shrunk** – hovering at levels below 60% (55.5% in the May Barometer) – and finely **balanced**.

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¹ The literal meaning of the term Metapolitefsi is a polity or regime change. However, it has come to be used in Greece not only for the moment in time or the process of the transition from dictatorship to democracy (1974) but also to characterize the entire period since then.

On the basis of Public Issue's vote estimate, neither of the two biggest parties presently exceeds 30%. Support for the two parties over the past six months has been impressively equal, with ND between **26% and 29%**, and SYRIZA between **27.5% and 30.5%**. (The current survey shows a slight lead of half a percentage point in favor of SYRIZA – [figure 1](#)). This has resulted in the ranking of the two parties changing four times in six months. On account of the electoral law in force (the amendment of which appears unlikely at the present time), such a balance of electoral strength, if maintained, may heighten political uncertainty, whilst at the same time consolidating the need for party alliances.

The spectacular rise in SYRIZA's electoral support, seen last Autumn, was halted in equally spectacular fashion in December. SYRIZA has not managed to retain the political and electoral gains it made during the period of rising social discontent, last October-November, nor has it been able to convince Greek citizens that it offers an alternative solution for the country's governance. Following the Eurogroup's decisions on Greece (26-27/11/12), the political climate changed. It should be noted that, in contrast with the disruptive impacts for the governing parties which were caused by the first two memorandums, the adoption of the third does not appear to have dealt a crucial blow to ND's electoral support. The **Cyprus crisis** also had a significant impact on the mood of the Greek electorate by fuelling economic insecurity and concern. As in June 2012, the fear worked to the detriment of SYRIZA, and there can be no doubt that it can work in the same way in the future too.

The holding back of ND and the lack of momentum observed in the fluctuations of SYRIZA's voter support leave room for a rekindling of anti-party sentiment among the electorate. Electoral support for the new two-partyism again declined in the past two months, whilst disapproval of the political parties, as a whole, is illustrated not only by the consolidation of the phenomenon of far-right Golden Dawn (11.5%), but also by the reappearance of a significantly high percentage for parties not represented in Parliament, which totals an aggregate of 8.5%. And although this figure is much lower than the unprecedented levels of May 2012 (19%), it is clearly above the levels recorded in June (6%).

FIGURE 1: VOTE ESTIMATE FOR ND & SYRIZA

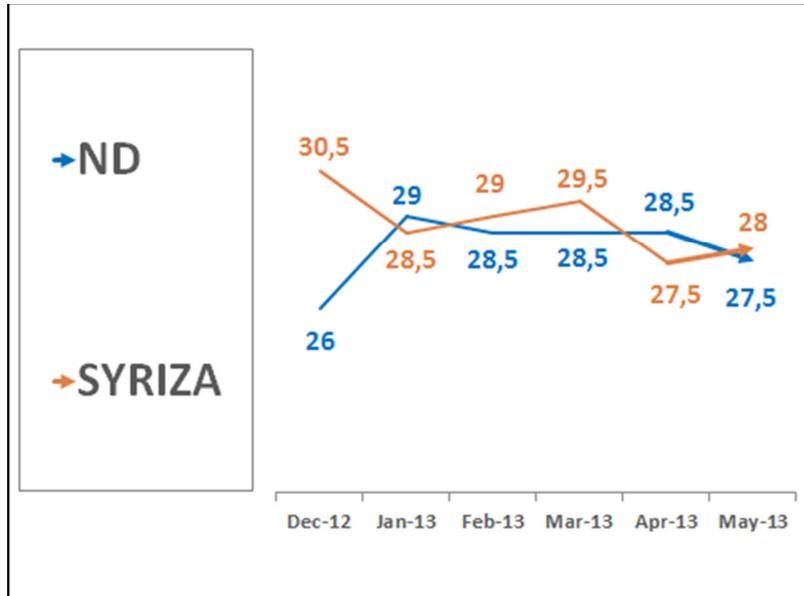
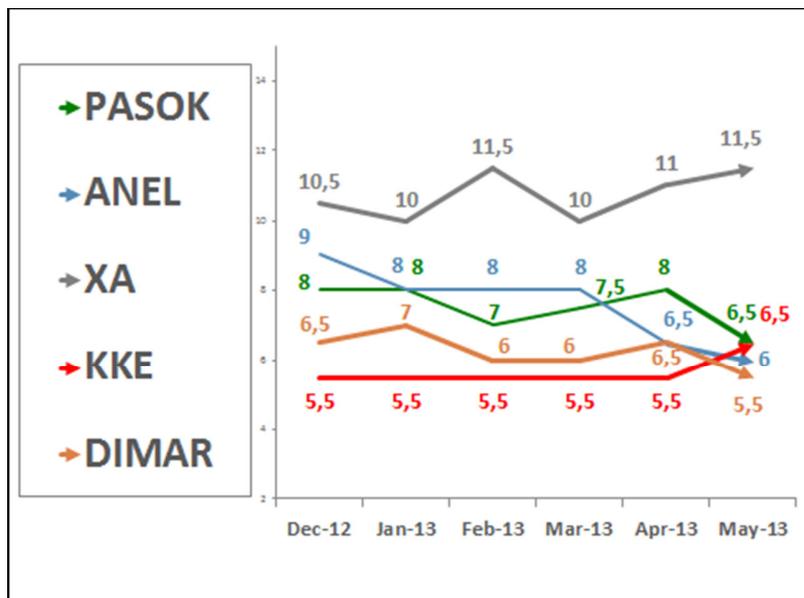


FIGURE 2: VOTE ESTIMATE FOR PASOK, ANEL, XA, KKE & DIMAR



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