

## The recent elections may have only postponed Greece's default and Eurozone exit.

Jun 21 2012

*Last Sunday's elections in Greece saw the pro-bailout New Democracy party gain the largest share of the vote, reassuring many commentators who had been fearing a default by Greece or even its ejection from the Eurozone. [Daphne Halikiopoulou](#) and [Sofia Vasilopoulou](#) argue, however, that anti-bailout parties in Greece received widespread support – there is still a deep division in Greek politics. This cannot be solved until the underlying problems of corruption, nepotism and clientelism in Greece are addressed.*



On June 17<sup>th</sup> the Greek electorate cast a pro EU vote by opting for the New Democracy party. So it looks like Greece will stay in the Eurozone, but for how long? Uncertainty still looms large. Despite New Democracy's success, anti-establishment forces also experienced electoral gains to a great extent confirming the trends of the previous election round. For now, default is on hold but not averted. Greece's place in the Eurozone and the European Union is still at stake, largely depending on the stability of the new coalition government and their ability to tackle corruption which is by and large the underlying cause of the failure of the austerity measures to produce viable economic solutions for Greece.



New Democracy increased its vote by 10 per cent, gaining 29.66%. This grants it a total of 129 seats in the Greek parliament (including 50 extra seats for coming in first place), which means that despite being the first party it is still unable to form a strong majority government. Having increased its number of seats from the previous round however gives it the ability to form a pro-bailout coalition government as together with PASOK's 33 seats they enjoy a Parliamentary majority.

However the results are far from stable as they confirm the trends of party system fragmentation, electoral volatility and the rise of anti-establishment forces. The sum of the anti-bailout vote is high; if we include the unclear stance of the left-wing Democratic Left (DEMAR) as anti-bailout, then that amount to over 50% of the vote. This confirms that the pro and anti-bailout cleavage still defines Greek politics, and that the electoral result is not as clear cut as some may think.

In the anti-bailout camp, the radical left SYRIZA also increased its support by 10 per cent, gaining 26.89% of the votes cast. It was the second party, only 3 per cent behind New Democracy. Increased support for SYRIZA meant losses from the entire left-wing camp, ranging from the mainstream PASOK to the communist KKE which lost almost half of its previous support gaining a mere 4.5%.

Similarly forces of the right rallied around New Democracy, taking away support from other right-wing parties, from the Independent Greeks who lost 13 parliamentary seats to the small liberal parties which remain without parliamentary representation. Worryingly however, the only right-wing party that did not experience any losses was the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn which received a disturbing 6.92% (compared to 6.97% in the previous round). They lost marginally in some constituencies, for example Corinth where they had received 11.98% of the vote in May, whereas now this fallen to 9.99%. But the losses are minor, and the fact that they have 3 seats fewer than the previous round is largely due to the electoral system. This result came contrary to expectations and assessments that the Golden Dawn would decline, especially after an incident of violent behaviour on behalf of one of its MPs against a representative of KKE on national television. This raises the issue of the legitimisation of violence casting a shadow on the future of democracy in Greece- a country which prides itself for being a cradle of democracy, having fought fascism in the 1940s and overthrown its own junta in 1974.

The day after presents a new parliamentary configuration with the question of responsible opposition. On the one hand, much of the opposition consists of parties that are associated with radicalism and violence. The

main opposition party SYRIZA has in the past often been associated with violent anti-police demonstrations. The radical left motto “ΕΑΜ-ΕΛΑΣ-ΕΠΟΝ/ο δρόμος των λαών” alluding to the left-wing armed resistance during the Greek civil war reveals the underpinning violent and anti-establishment sentiments among the SYRIZA electorate. The maintenance of such politics is likely to fuel anti-bailout sentiments and increase instability.

On the other hand, for policies to be implemented successfully, opposition must present the coalition with viable alternatives that operate within the democratic process without recourse to violence and extremism. Even though SYRIZA is now not in a position to prevent the formation of a coalition between New Democracy, PASOK and DEMAR, it can affect its ability to govern and implement new policies. Will SYRIZA retain its anti-systemic elements by taking the debate to the streets or will it make an effort to become a responsible opposition party, which may consolidate its position in the party system? Already Aleksis Tsipras has been likened to Andreas Papandreou in the 1980s- the leader that made PASOK a main contender in the Greek two party system for decades.

The pro and anti-bailout cleavage conceals the core structural problems facing the Greek economy, i.e. the embedded clientelistic system of nepotism. The very debate detracts attention from a [deeply flawed political system](#) in which consensus is completely absent, and which is based on an elaborate network of favours. Austerity is bound to fail if it continues to be selective, absolving those associated with the corrupt political system. Political parties, anti-establishment or not, need to significantly reform their internal structures and composition, as many politicians associated with this clientelism are being recycled within different party configurations, thus remaining MPs, albeit with a different party.

Tackling these issues is what will determine the success of the bailout plan and austerity measures. It remains to be seen how long the coalition will last, whether Greece will plunge into more extremism, the extent to which they will be able to remain in the Eurozone, and the extent to which the situation in Greece will have a knock-on effect on the future of the Eurozone as a whole. Although the election results endorse the Euro, uncertainty remains.

[Please read our comments policy before commenting.](#)

*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

Shortened URL for this post: <http://bit.ly/KI7ZNC>

---

## **About the Authors**

### **Daphne Halikiopoulou – LSE Government Department**

Daphne Halikiopoulou is Fellow in Comparative Politics in LSE's Department of Government. She obtained her PhD from the LSE in 2007. Her area of expertise is in comparative European politics, British politics and qualitative methodology. Her research focuses on the sociology of religion, nationalism and its relationship with the extreme right and extreme left, immigration and the criteria for inclusion in the nation. She is author of *Patterns of Secularization: Church, state and Nation in Greece and the Republic of Ireland* (Ashgate, 2010) and (with Sofia Vasilopoulou) of *Nationalism and Globalisation: Conflicting or Complementary?* (Routledge, 2011).



### **Sofia Vasilopoulou – University of York**

Sofia Vasilopoulou is a Lecturer at the University of York. She was previously a Fellow in Comparative Political Analysis in the School of Public Policy, University College London, and a Teaching Associate in Politics at Aston University, UK. She has taught extensively modules on Comparative Politics and Government, European Union politics, Political Parties, Political Economy and Quantitative methods. She is the Editor (with Daphne Halikiopoulou) of *Nationalism and Globalisation: Conflicting or Complementary?* (Routledge, 2011).



Related posts:

1. [If Greece does not do enough to convince its creditors to maintain the flow of funding, it will be in default. But this does not necessarily mean a Euro exit. \(16.8\)](#)
2. [New elections in Greece seem increasingly likely, further damaging the country's credibility \(14.4\)](#)
3. [Socio-economic volatility and the rise of anti-establishment politics will characterise Greece's most important election in nearly 40 years. The likely outcome is a coalition government, but will it be able to undertake the substantive reforms Greece badly needs? \(12.4\)](#)

This entry was posted in [Daphne Halikiopoulou](#), [Elections, party politics and government across Europe](#), [Sofia Vasilopoulou](#), [South Europe](#), [The Euro](#), [European economics, finance, business and regulation](#) and tagged [austerity](#), [bailout](#), [elections](#), [Greece](#), [New Democracy](#), [SYRIZA](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

[Edit](#)