

Political Barometer

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Trend toward 'exit' from the electorate, strong jolt to two-party system and strengthening of the Left

The political impacts of the Government-IMF-EU agreement

The dynamics of the new period for the political scene in Greece following the coming of the IMF are manifested in three directions (in order of importance):

First, by the great surge in voters' intentions to abstain and exit the electorate. **Second**, by the significant weakening of the two major governing parties, not only at the level of their leadership, but also in terms of their support within society. **Third**, by the increase in electoral support for the Left.

At the same time, society's preference for single-party governments has declined markedly. It is notable that only 1 in 5 citizens (19%) is today in favor of majority government solutions, while in contrast, half the electorate prefer either coalitions (35%) or all-party governments (15%). Moreover, in the space of one month the percentage of citizens wanting the formation of new political groupings has doubled (10%).

Post-election dynamic exhausted. The ruling PASOK party's capacity to govern is being questioned. Satisfaction with the government (22%) has plummeted (-9%) and is fast approaching the critical social acceptance level of 20%. It has been shown, historically, that if a party falls below this level, its ability to remain in power will be tested. In the 'best government for the country' index, PASOK showed greater decline (-11%, now estimated at 30%), while its popularity has fallen sharply to 44%, from 59% in April (-15%).

Thus, its public image has again reverted to the low levels recorded prior to the national election. PASOK and its leader, George Papandreou, appear to have eliminated any beneficial impact deriving from last October's election result. The political 'capital' gained from the crushing defeat of the incumbent New Democracy (ND) party has disappeared. The post-election dynamic has dissipated.

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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 1,000 adults (18+) from across Greece. The May 2010 survey was carried out: 6-10/5/2010. Published by: SKAI / KATHIMERINI.

FIGURE 1: Expectations for the economy

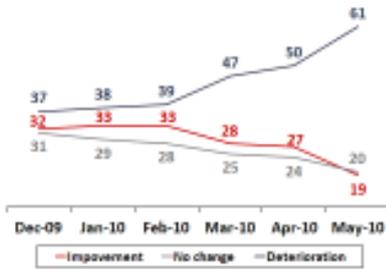


FIGURE 2: Political leaders popularity
Positive opinions

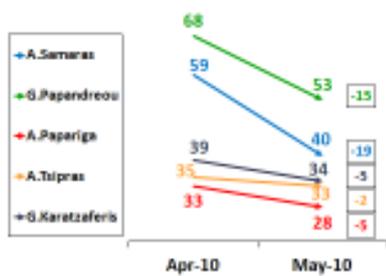


FIGURE 3: Best prime minister

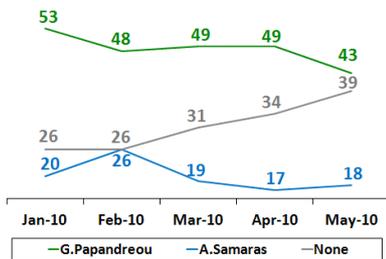
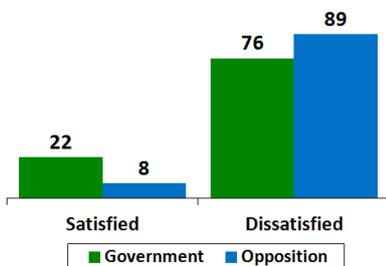


FIGURE 4: Satisfaction with government & main opposition



ND: Picture of disintegration. The picture regarding the main opposition party is much worse, since it is one characterized literally by disintegration. Satisfaction with its operation is now below 10%. Indeed, it has been halved (just 8%, from 16%). Its ability to govern has fallen almost to rock bottom (4%, down from 6% in the previous month).

The popularity of Antonis Samaras has declined sharply (-19%) and for the first time since he was elected party leader has fallen into negative balance, while his relative position in the best prime minister (BPM) index remains very low (18%, against 43% for Papandreou). The formalization of the leadership rift within the party, following Dora Bakoyannis' refusal to tow the party line and her subsequent expulsion, has created clearly centrifugal trends among the party base. As a result of this, the already poor public image of the party has deteriorated further (-8%, just 27% positive responses, against 44% for PASOK).

Rise of the Left. The weakening of the two major political parties (the aggregate loss for both parties is 4.5%) and more importantly the contraction of the potential electorate, due to the trends toward abstention, appear to have benefited the Left the most, particularly the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). The strengthening of the parties of the Left is not only in terms of percentage but also reflects a (slight) increase in their actual social influence.

On the basis of current circumstances, the two-party system appears to be fast approaching the point of 'impact'. However, the situation that is presented does not constitute – at least at the present moment – 'collapse'. The unequal weakening of its two poles emerges as an important element of the crisis. The neutralization of the main opposition for the time being favors the governing party and allows it – for the moment – to keep the relative initiative, despite the dismal situation in which it has found itself on account of the indignation within society.

Exit from the electorate. However, the main direction taken by the burgeoning social protest is different. Between parliamentary elections in September 2007 (when 7,355,000 citizens voted) and October 2009 (when 7,044,000 voted), the real abstention in Greece rose from 10.7% to 14.5%, while in the European elections last June which preceded national elections, it surged, for the first time in Greece, to 36% (as calculated by Public Issue).

FIGURE 5: Best government

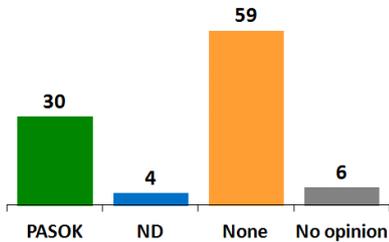


FIGURE 6: Political parties popularity
Positive opinions

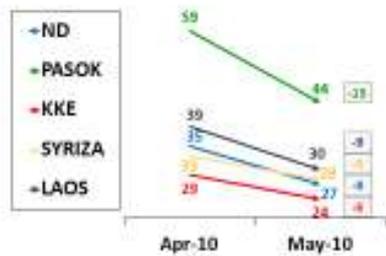
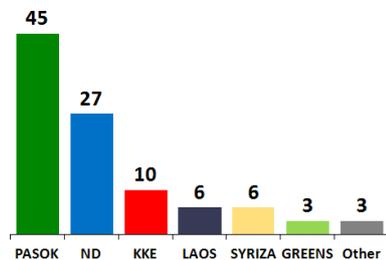


FIGURE 7: Anti-party voting intention
Abstention, blank & spoilt vote
May 2010



FIGURE 8: Vote estimate - May 2010



The current ‘snapshot’ of the electorate has more similarities with what happened in the most recent European elections. In the May measurement, the relevant index of the barometer, which is used to estimate abstention, shot up to 34%, from 21% in April (+13%, or an increase of 62%), while since the beginning of the year it has more than doubled. This means that there is a much greater likelihood that the electorate will contract in the next parliamentary elections, e.g. to 5,000,000 voters, which is precisely what happened in the European elections.

Put differently, over 2,000,000 disappointed and/or angry citizens are today seriously considering whether they will vote in the next election or whether they will turn their back on the political system. Whether this constitutes a real threat to the latter, or serves to increase social acquiescence and alleviates the crisis facing the system, cannot yet be estimated.

Founded in 2001 Public Issue specializes in public opinion research on political, economic and social issues in Greece and Cyprus. Member of the World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR) and the European Society for Market Research (ESOMAR).