

# POLITICAL BAROMETER

## Vote estimate

Trends among  
the electorate  
during the three-year  
governance by  
SYRIZA-ANEL  
2015-2018

January  
2018



**Public Issue was established in 2001.**  
**It specializes in political and election opinion polls, as well as media,**  
**social and consumer behavior surveys.**  
**In early 2004, for the first time in Greece, Public Issue began to monitor trends in**  
**public opinion systematically using the method of telephone surveys.**  
**Member of: Greek National Council for Radio and Television (ESR),**  
**Association of Greek Market & Opinion Research Companies (SEDEA).**

**The variables and indexes included in this edition are based on monthly**  
**nationwide telephone interviews with 1,010 individuals, aged 17 and over,**  
**as well as on the available time series of the Political Barometer of Public Issue.**

**Field work: 8-18/1/2018.**

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## A. ESTIMATED VOTER SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

January 2018

### The 'gap' is closing, but remains wide

- On the basis of Public Issue's vote estimate for January 2018, the following main conclusions emerge:
- During the final quarter of 2017, **voter support for SYRIZA rose by 2.5 percentage points**, from 19% last October to **21.5%** at present. The change observed in the general political, economic and social climate, in combination with the distribution of the 'social dividend', to some extent explain this rise. By way of indication, Public Issue's survey shows that **20% of households** (1 in 5), i.e. a significant proportion of the electorate, report having received the so-called 'social dividend' (Figures 1A, 2A).
- In contrast, **voter support for New Democracy during the same period showed a marked decline, of 4 percentage points**, with the result that for the first time since summer 2016 the party has found itself – again – **below the level of 40%, at 37%** (Figures 1A,2A).
- The difference between the first and second parties (the so-called 'gap') **remains in double digits** at an estimated **15.5%**. It should be noted that a greater difference than this has been recorded historically only in the first two general elections of the post-dictatorship period (1974, 1977). At the same time, as a result of the opposite trend in support for the two parties, **the decline seen in ND's lead in the second half of 2017 is impressive**: from **24%** in October 2016 and **22%** in October 2017, it has today been cut to **15.5%** (decrease of 8.5 percentage points in 18 months – Figures 1A and 3B).
- The balance of electoral strength, as estimated by Public Issue, points to a **'converse' result in relation to September 2015**, but with one essential difference: the **recovery of the center-left** and its return to the voter support levels for PASOK in 2012.
- The wave of the Political Barometer, on which PI's estimate is based, was carried out prior to the rallies and political tension sparked by the rekindling of the Macedonian issue. There is no doubt that this is a matter of major political importance. In this sense, it constitutes an extremely significant **uncertain factor**, the consequences of which may have a strong impact on the party system and electoral competition, perhaps changing the given – at the present time – balances of strength.

# A. ESTIMATED VOTER SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

## January 2018

Figure 1A: Telephone survey, (8-18/1/2018)

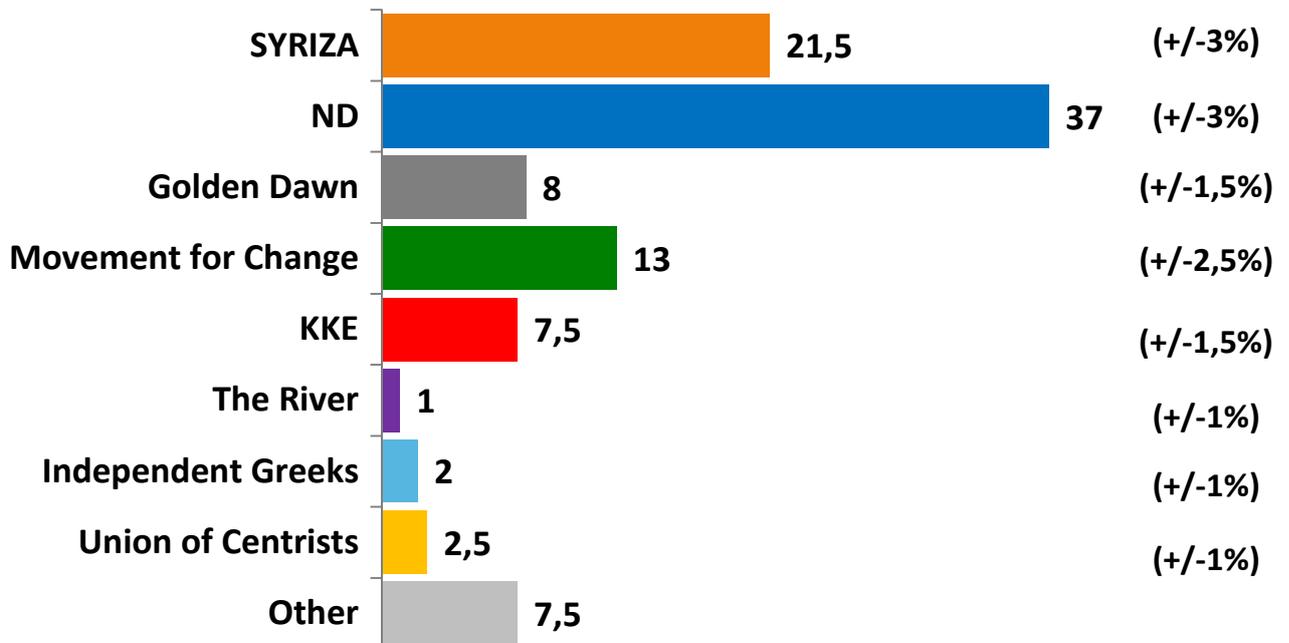
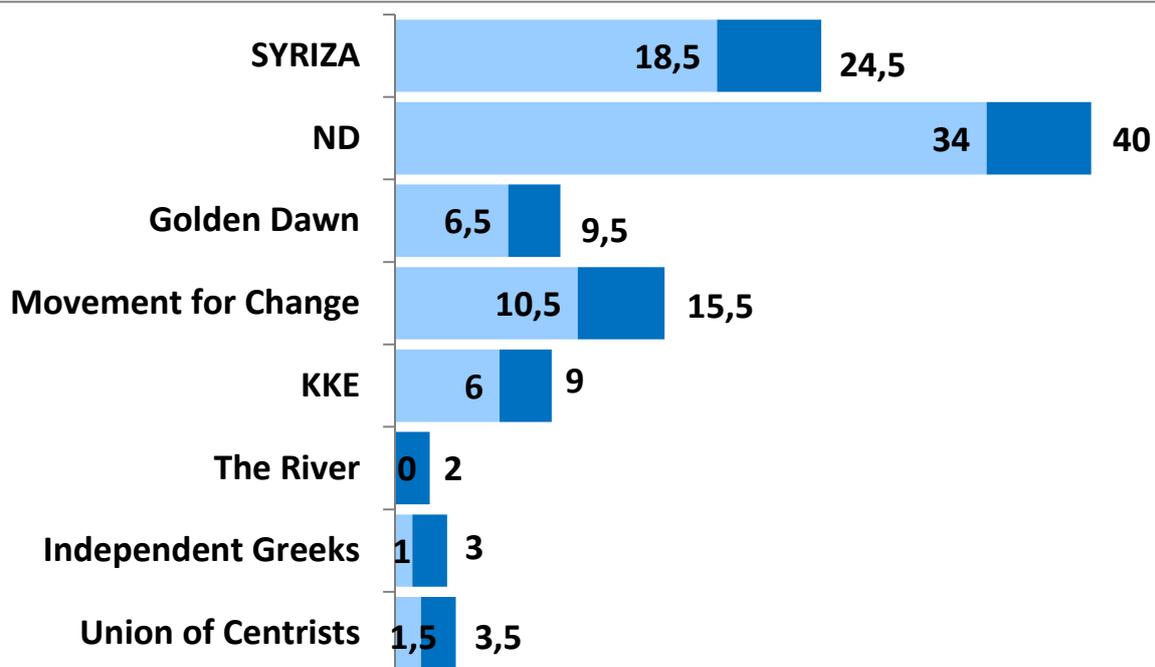


Figure 1B: Telephone survey - 95% confidence interval



## B. ESTIMATED VOTER SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

January 2015 – January 2018

Figure 2A: Vote estimate for SYRIZA, ND, PASOK | DHSY | Movement for Change

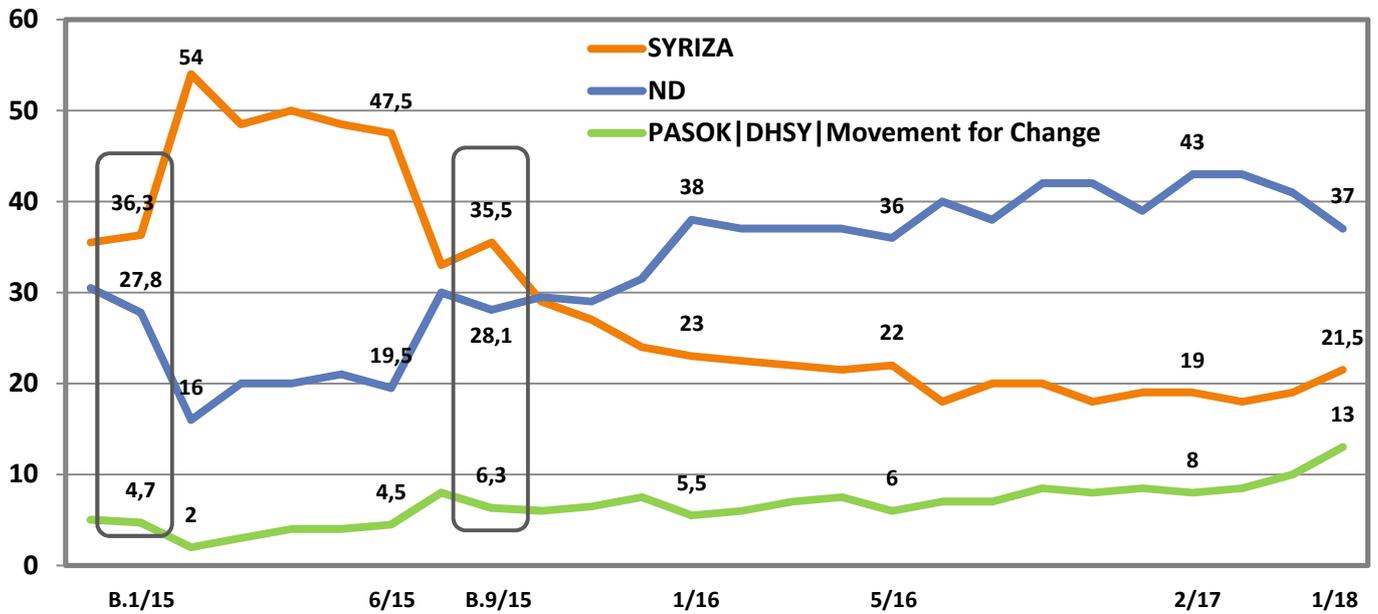


Figure 2B: Vote estimate for Golden Dawn, KKE, Independent Greeks

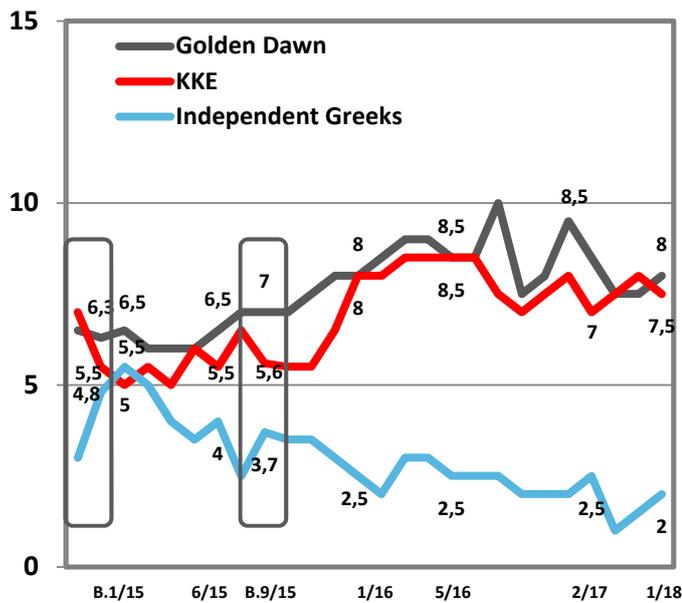
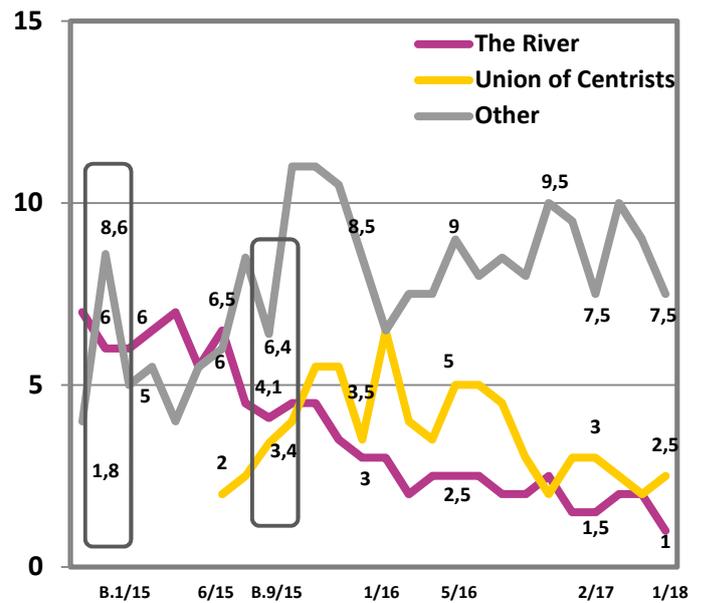


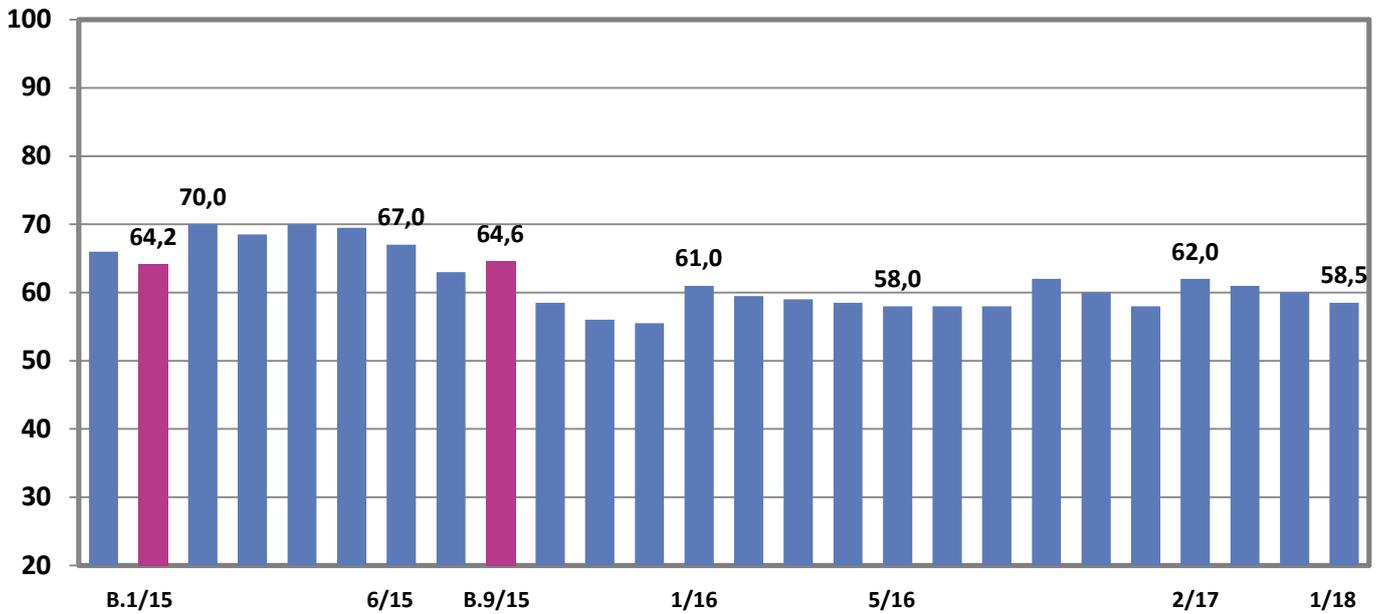
Figure 2C: Vote estimate for The River, Union of Centrists, Other



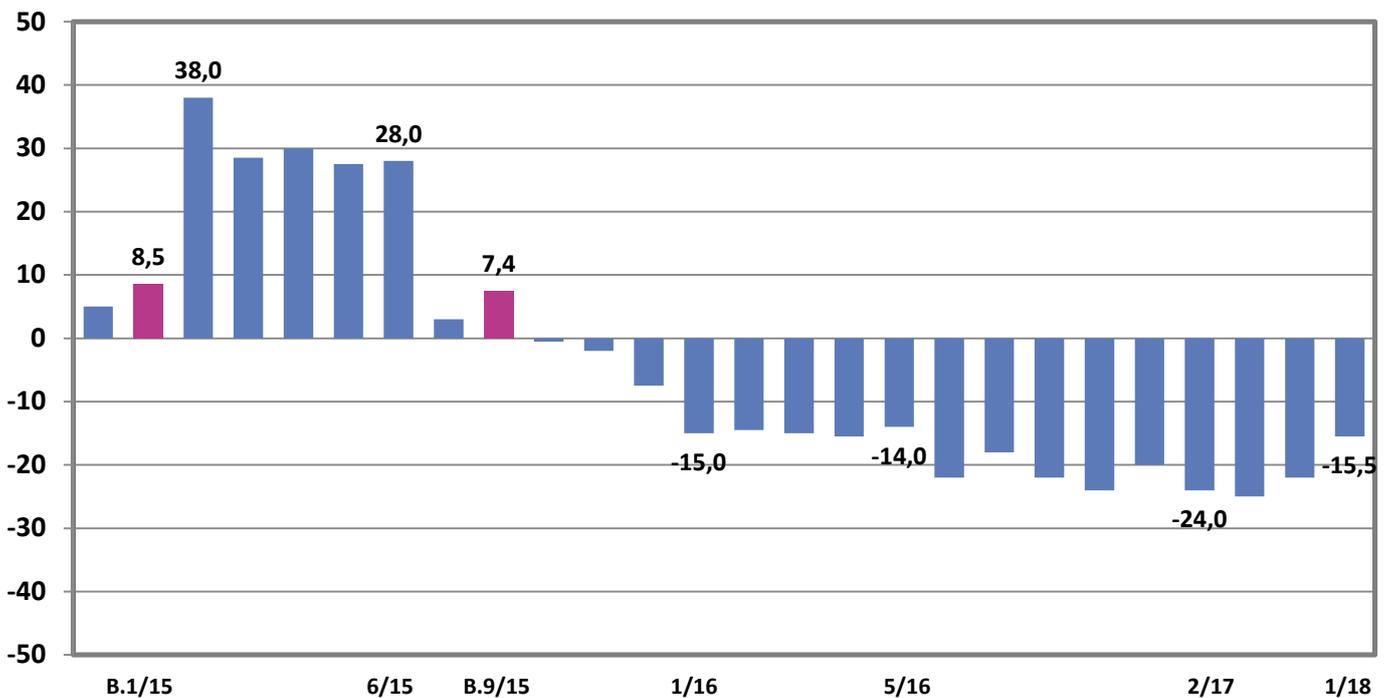
## C. TOTAL SHARE OF TWO LEADING PARTIES (SYRIZA + ND) & GAP BETWEEN TWO LEADING PARTIES (SYRIZA - ND)

January 2015 – January 2018

**Figure 3A: Total share of two leading parties, 2015-2018**  
(SYRIZA + ND)



**Figure 3B: Gap between two leading parties, 2015-2018**  
(SYRIZA - ND)



## D. CERTAINTIES & UNCERTAINTIES

### SURROUNDING THE NEXT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

From the estimate of voter support for parties, a number of firm conclusions ('certainties') emerge, in the event that an early general election is held in the near future:

- a. **ND is expected to come first**, since the estimated upper limit of voter support for SYRIZA (24.5%) is 9.5% less than the estimated lower limit of voter support for ND (34%) (Table 1).
- b. **The next Parliament will have fewer parties than the present one**. According to the estimate, it is most likely that only **five** (5) parties will secure seats in Parliament: ND, SYRIZA, Movement for Change, Golden Dawn and the Communist Party of Greece. Two (2) parties still have strong possibilities: Union of Centrists and Independent Greeks. In contrast, neither The River nor any of the parties not currently represented in Parliament (Popular Unity, Course of Freedom, etc.) appear likely at the present time to win seats. Consequently, the number of parties in the next Parliament is expected to be definitely fewer than the current number.
- c. **The party system is being re-stabilized**. The signing of the Memorandum in 2010 provided the catalyst for the reconstitution of the two-party system. After the 'twin' elections of 2015, it appears that a new balance is being created. The new shrunken two-partyism (ND-SYRIZA) seems to be becoming consolidated, at levels which in the past year have been limited to around **61%-62%** (Figure 3A).

ND, while recovering significantly after the elections of September 2015, again approaching voter support levels of 2007 (43% in summer 2017), did not manage to remain at these levels and in January this year reverted to the levels of early 2016 (37%).

On the other hand, SYRIZA, following its rapid decline up to the first half of 2016, stabilized in the 18-month period 7/2016-12/2017 at levels of around 18%-20%, before 'breaking' this barrier in the measurement of the first month of the present year, when it rose to **21.5%**.

At the same time, several of the parties that were formed or became more prominent during the period of the Memorandum (Democratic Left, Independent Greeks, The River) have already been absorbed or are in constant decline, while support for Golden Dawn shows no change at the present time (Figures 2B,2C).

- d. **Movement for Change in third place**. It now clearly emerges from the vote estimate that the new party entity that resulted from the process of reconstitution and transformation of the Center-Left appears to be the main candidate for third place in the electoral competition. At the same time, the election of *Fofi Gennimata as head of the party has significantly strengthened her leadership image (+5%), recording the lowest negative balance of popularity of the past two years*.
- e. **Abstention will be around the levels of January 2015**. The average intention to abstain and anti-party vote (blank/void) during the current electoral cycle is 21%, very close to the levels of the 2012-2015 electoral cycle (18%). The significant decline in intention to abstain in the current survey (8.5%, down from 15% last October) is worth noting. At the same time, the levels of undecided voters (11.5%) are the same as those in the 2012-2015 electoral cycle. Consequently, on the basis of the polling data to date, the level of abstention is not expected to exceed that of January 2015 (24.9%).

## D. CERTAINTIES & UNCERTAINTIES

### SURROUNDING THE NEXT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

On the other hand, the estimate of voter support for parties leaves unanswered certain important 'questions', which create uncertainties with respect to the next parliamentary elections:

#### a. Will ND gain an overall parliamentary majority?

At the present moment it is quite close – but such a likelihood has diminished and has become more uncertain as compared to the preceding three-month period.

#### b. How many parties will win seats in Parliament?

The estimate of voter support for Union of Centrists falls short by just 0.5%, while in the case of Independent Greeks 1% from the threshold for parliamentary representation (3%).

Bearing in mind the margin of error, **it is impossible to determine the exact number of parties that will eventually pass the 3% threshold** and therefore secure their representation in the next Parliament.

#### Likelihood of ND gaining an overall majority

The purpose of each electoral contest is to elect a government for the next four years. As is known, according to the electoral law in force, the percentage of votes obtained by parties that do not manage to win seats in Parliament is the sole factor that determines whether the first party is able to achieve an overall majority (Table 3). In order to examine the likelihood of ND securing an overall majority in Parliament (151 seats), the possible limits of its parliamentary strength were estimated in **three scenarios**. In the first scenario – which derives from the point estimate of voter support – it is considered that five (5) parties pass the 3% threshold. The other two (2) scenarios derive by each time adding, from the parties which in the previous scenario did not win any seats, that party which had obtained the highest percentage of votes (Table 2). In the first scenario, **ND is very close to achieving the target of an overall majority**, since with **37%** it is expected to win **156** seats, while it may secure an overall majority, albeit by a slim margin, **provided its voter support surpasses 35.5%**. The target of an overall majority becomes more distant in the case where there are six parties in the next Parliament, since in order to secure an overall majority of seats, ND's voter support would have to exceed 36.5%.

In the hypothetical case of a seven-party Parliament, the threshold for an overall majority rises to 37% (Table 3). It is quite clear that if ND's voter support is close to the estimated lower threshold of 34%, it will be extremely difficult for the party to secure an overall majority, even in the case where only five parties are represented in the next Parliament.

#### The electoral outlook for the Center-Left

The January survey was carried out after the leadership election of the Movement for Change, the new political grouping of the Center-Left.

In the preceding period, voter support for Democratic Alignment had been constantly rising since summer 2016, in the current month reaching **13%**, for the first time since May 2012 (Figures 1A, 2A). The formation of the new grouping and the procedure for electing the new leadership served to further boost the already upward momentum of the percentages recorded by Democratic Alignment.

The further rise in voter support for the new grouping of the Center-Left is one of the most important factors which could change the balance of strength between ND and SYRIZA and weaken the chances of ND gaining an overall majority. It constitutes, that is, a 'key factor' in the next electoral contest. And the origin of voters who choose the new Center-Left grouping is considered to be of particular importance.

The fact that voter support for ND fell in January for the first time below 40% may be due to the fact that a segment of 'anti-SYRIZA' voters of the middle ground, who after the September elections turned towards abstention, not having an outlet for political expression, now seem to have acquired a choice, to the extent that the new grouping appears as an alternative opposition solution. This trend, from a polling perspective, is clearly reflected by **the sudden and significant decrease in intention to abstain**.

## E. SEAT SCENARIOS (January 2018) Based on vote estimate

In the most likely – at the present time – scenario of five parties being represented in the next Parliament, ND has every chance of gaining, albeit by a slim margin, a majority of parliamentary seats, provided its voter support surpasses 35.5%. In the case where at least one more party manages to pass the 3% threshold, the target of an overall majority becomes more difficult.

**Table 1: Estimate of seats based on voter support (1/2018) – Five-party Parliament**

Party	Percentage	95% Confidence Interval	Seats <sup>(2)</sup>
SYRIZA	21.5	18.5 – 24.5	53 – 70
ND	37	34 – 40	148 – 165
Golden Dawn	8	6.5 – 9.5	19 – 28
Movement for Change	13	10.5 – 15.5	30 – 44
KKE	7.5	6 – 9	17 – 26
The River	1	0 – 2	-
Independent Greeks	2	1 – 3	0 – 9
Union of Centrists	2.5	1.5 – 3.5	0 – 10
Other <sup>(1)</sup>	7.5		

(1) 'Other' includes all parties not represented in Parliament.

(2) In the current measurement, the number of parties whose point estimate is greater than or equal to 3%, and consequently would appear to win seats in Parliament, is five (5). That is, the next Parliament is likely to be **five-party**. The number of seats calculated in Table 1 above is based on this hypothesis.

**Note 1:** The indeterminate vote, i.e. the aggregate of undecided voters, those intending to abstain, blank/void & refusals in the measurement, amounts to **27,5%**.

**Note 2:** Due to the rounding of percentages which is applied in the estimate of voter support (to an accuracy of one-half percentage point), the estimate of seats may vary by approximately one (1) seat. The seat limits for each party derive from the corresponding limits of confidence intervals of voter support, based on the hypothesis that the total percentage of parties that do not win seats in the next Parliament remains unchanged (13%, Tables 1 & 2).

**Table 2: Seat scenarios for the first party (ND), according to the number of parties represented in the next Parliament**

Forecast number of parties in Parliament	7-party Parliament	6-party Parliament	5-party Parliament <sup>(1)</sup>
Parties not represented in Parliament (with percentage < 3%)	The River	The River & Independent Greeks	The River, Independent Greeks & Union of Centrists
Total percentage of parties not represented in Parliament (< 3%)	8.5	10.5	13
ND seats	143 – 159	145 – 162	148 – 165

(1) On the basis of the January 2018 vote estimate, the 5-party composition is the most likely scenario for the next Parliament.

**Note 1:** The number of seats for ND has been calculated under the hypothesis that the percentage for parties which, in each scenario, win seats in Parliament, does not affect the percentage for Other parties.

## F. PERCENTAGE REQUIRED FOR OVERALL MAJORITY OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> PARTY, ACCORDING TO THE AGGREGATE PERCENTAGE FOR PARTIES NOT REPRESENTED IN PARLIAMENT

**Table 3:**  
Percentage required for overall majority,  
according to the aggregate percentage for parties not represented in Parliament

Total percentage for parties < 3%	5	5.5	6	6.5	7	7.5	8	8.5	9	9.5	10
Percentage of 1 <sup>st</sup> party	38.5	38.5	38	38	38	37.5	37.5	37	37	37	36.5
Total percentage for parties < 3%	10.5	11	11.5	12	12.5	13	13.5	14	14.5	15	15.5
Percentage of 1 <sup>st</sup> party	36.5	36	36	36	35.5	35.5	35	35	35	34.5	34.5

On the basis of the electoral law in force, the aggregate percentage of votes for parties that do not win seats in Parliament determines the threshold for a parliamentary majority. As can be seen in [Table 3](#), above, the higher this percentage, the lower the threshold for an overall majority of the first party.

However, this particular percentage has historically shown high variance. The most extreme example is provided by the elections of May 2012, when it reached **19%**, resulting in the threshold for an overall majority of the first party falling to exceptionally low levels, namely **32.7%**.

In the most recent parliamentary elections in September 2015, the percentage of votes for parties that did not win seats in Parliament was just **6.3%**, which increased the threshold for an overall majority of the first party to **38%**.

Regarding this issue, see the article by Yiannis Mavris and Yiorgos Symeonidis: "Six answers on the new electoral law", published in the newspaper *I Kathimerini tis Kyriakis* (27/05/2007) and posted on the website of Public Issue: <http://www.publicissue.gr>

[/43/six-answers-on-the-new-electoral-law/](http://www.publicissue.gr/43/six-answers-on-the-new-electoral-law/)

# G. METHODOLOGY APPLIED BY PUBLIC ISSUE TO ESTIMATE VOTER SUPPORT FOR PARTIES

## 1. The three main methodological innovations

Since the 2004 election, Public Issue has introduced three main innovations in its estimate of voter support for political parties, which is based on voting intention surveys:

- The **telephone survey** method (in cooperation with the company RASS), as opposed to the previously used survey method with *face-to-face* interviews and "use of the ballot box", which constitutes a controversial, purely Greek invention.
- An end to the **weighting** of the sample with the past vote and its replacement with the methodology of **time-series analysis** of surveys and, lastly
- A change in the way that polling results are presented, with publication of the **vote estimate** in each survey, instead of presenting results with the so-called 'indeterminate' vote, a practice adopted by most companies in the polling industry.

The term **vote estimate** is used in the sense of the recalculation of percentages for parties (repercentage), excluding undetermined responses (i.e. the options: "I will not vote", "blank/void", "undecided" and "no reply"), so that the results of each poll can be compared to the election results. This is so because the so-called **indeterminate vote** in reality does not exist and is never recorded by the election ballot box. It constitutes an imaginary concept, "constructed" by the polling question on voting intention.

Vote estimate should not be confused with the simple elimination of the indeterminate vote, which is recorded in a poll, a practice usually referred to as 're-weighting' or 'valid vote' of poll responses. The estimate of voter support is not equivalent to 'valid responses', because the allocation of the indeterminate vote, which results, is not proportional. Put differently, the estimate is significantly different to a simple presentation of poll results. It is self-evident that, although based on the raw data of polls, it is the result of secondary processing based on complex statistical techniques.

Following international practice, Public Issue presents the percentages for parties in the vote estimate to an accuracy of **one-half percentage point**. This particular choice protects public opinion against the misleading impression about the accuracy of surveys, which leads to an erroneous and futile overestimation of the polling tool's capabilities to describe trends among the electorate.

**Since September 2015, the vote estimate has been based solely on the analysis of short-term voting intention trends.**

# G. METHODOLOGY APPLIED BY PUBLIC ISSUE TO ESTIMATE VOTER SUPPORT FOR PARTIES

## 2. Analysis of short-term trends

The term *short-term voting intention trends* in the levels of a party's voter support over time describes the trends shaped during a particular electoral cycle. To study the short-term trends in voter support for each party, the time-series of valid responses to the voting intention question in the telephone surveys of Public Issue's Barometer has been used since the elections of January 2015, given that PI considers the period of the country's governance by SYRIZA to be unbroken and politically coherent.

The estimate of voter support for parties, on the basis of short-term voting intention trends, is carried out in two stages. In the first stage, the *Kalman smoothing method* is applied to the time-series of valid responses of voting intentions for each party. Kalman smoothing is used in a series of *tracking polls*, in order to reduce the effect of sampling error in each survey and consequently it enables the real change of a percentage, which takes place between two points in time, to be distinguished from the change due to sampling error.

In the *second stage*, the smoothed percentages for parties are "corrected", in order to eliminate the voting intention bias. The calculation of voting intention bias is based on *linear regression models*. These models forecast the bias in voting intentions for a party on the basis of: a) the percentage of respondents who, to the voting intention question, spontaneously reply "undecided" or avoid answering (undecideds & refusals), b) the percentage of respondents who (spontaneously) state that they will abstain or will cast a blank/invalid ballot (abstainers) and c) the deviation of the actual from the sample past vote. The models are assessed for the four parties (ND, SYRIZA, PASOK and Communist Party of Greece) for which polling data are available over a long period. With regard to those parties which were formed or became more prominent after the signing of the Memorandum (Golden Dawn, Independent Greeks, The River) it is not possible to estimate the bias with the use of a model. In these cases, the elimination of bias is based on the deviation of voting intention from the actual election result, which was observed in pre-election surveys for parliamentary elections since 2012, compared to the bias of the past vote and the percentage of respondents who, to the voting intention question, spontaneously reply "undecided" or avoid answering.

## G. METHODOLOGY APPLIED BY PUBLIC ISSUE TO ESTIMATE VOTER SUPPORT FOR PARTIES

### 3. The reduced importance of long-term trends

The term *long-term voting intention trends* in the levels of a party's voter support over time describes the trends shaped in a period of time beyond one election cycle. To study the long-term trends in voter support for each party, the time-series of valid responses to the voting intention question has been used in all surveys since June 1995, carried out by Public Issue and earlier by VPRC. However, since the 2012 elections, the impact of long-term trends in the shaping of electoral results has steadily decreased. The main reasons for this decrease are the constant change of the party system and the irregular duration of election cycles during the Memorandum period. Moreover, the vote estimate on the basis of long-term trends is becoming increasingly difficult, given that the signing of the Memorandum in 2010 constituted a **structural break** in the development over time of voter support for parties. For all the above reasons, long-term trends have not been taken into account in Public Issue's vote estimate since September 2015.

### 4. Margin of error in the estimate

The margin of error of the vote estimate derives from the margin of error of the smoothed, with the Kalman method, percentages for parties and is not the same as the familiar sampling error. The margin of effort of the estimate is affected by many factors, such as: the size of the valid sample, a party's percentage in the valid responses, the fitting of time-series data, and the specific model used for smoothing. It reflects the impact of factors that cannot be forecast by time-series dynamics (innovations) and the impact of the sampling error. The margin of error of the estimate is smaller than the sampling error of the corresponding raw percentages.

A detailed description of the methodology applied over time by Public Issue to estimate voter support for political parties is included in the volume: Yiannis Mavris and Yiorgos Symeonidis. 2016. *Opinion Polls and Election Forecasting in Greece, 2004-2015*. Athens: Public Issue. See in this regard: "Part three: The vote estimate methodology", 293-337.

The entire volume is available online at:

[http://www.mavris.gr/wp-content/uploads/Forecasting\\_Elections.pdf](http://www.mavris.gr/wp-content/uploads/Forecasting_Elections.pdf)



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