

Political Barometer

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Party system at crucial turning point

One year after the socialist PASOK party came to power, and six months after the adoption of the Memorandum, serious cracks have appeared in the ruling party's electoral base and the image of George Papandreou. The monthly survey conducted by Public Issue reveals the lowest percentage of electoral support for the governing party in the 12 months since it took office (42.5%) and the comparatively smallest lead over the main opposition conservative New Democracy (ND) party (14.5 points). Although the gap, compared to the previous month, has narrowed significantly, by 2.5 percentage points, it nevertheless remains at 'safe' levels for the ruling party and, equally important, at levels higher than those recorded at the last parliamentary elections (10.4%).

Meanwhile, for the first time in two years the prime minister's popularity again shows a slight deficit (with positive opinions just 47%, against 49% negative). The magnitude of the change that has come about in the past 12 months can be better understood in the context of the following two figures: 1) in the Barometer's first post-election measurement, the prime minister's popularity had stood at 82%, while negative opinions of his person approached just 16%. 2) The popularity of his predecessor, Costas Karamanlis, stood at 46% in his last month in office.

The rise of **New Democracy** (28%, +1%) recorded in the past month is in no way impressive. This figure is lower than its electoral support (33.5% in parliamentary elections of 2009) and the party has made up only half of the losses it incurred (after the elections) due to its losing power, its crushing defeat at the polls and the ensuing split within the party. As a consequence, while 'second-order' elections, such as those at local government level, generally constitute a favorable playing field for the opposition and a 'political Golgotha' for the government of the day, the electoral battle in November may prove to be an exception.

While the electoral support for the right wing LAOS remains unchanged (5.5%), the **Communist Party** (KKE) *continues to gain* (11%) from PASOK's decline and now with a percentage of 21% is again vying with ND (22%) for the title of 'best opposition party'.

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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 October 2010 survey was carried out: 1-4/10/2010. Published by: SKAI / KATHIMERINI.

Despite its 'introversion' and lack of unity, left wing **SYRIZA**, appears to retain a significant percentage of its electoral support (4.5%), while the strength of the **Greens** remains unchanged (2.5%), but is below the 3% nationwide vote tally required to elect members of parliament. Lastly, the popularity of the newly formed **Democratic Left** party, which when it first appeared last July garnered support of 3.5%, now seems to be waning (1.5%).

One month before local elections in November, the picture being shaped is one of seeming stabilization (at least at an electoral level) of the party system, accompanied however by very strong trends toward its further dislocation. It is perfectly clear that the anti-party sentiment of citizens is intensifying, the popularity of the political parties and political leaders is falling (with the exception of KKE general secretary Aleka Papariga), the trend toward apoliticization continues unabated, while the trend that sees citizens dropping out of the electorate appears to be holding steady, with one-third of voters (33%) insisting that they intend to abstain in the next parliamentary elections.

In view of the above, what conclusion can be drawn about the forthcoming electoral battle on 7 November? For many reasons, the electoral support evident in the Barometer under no circumstances portends – directly or indirectly – the November local and regional election result. This is due to another important factor that influences electoral preferences, i.e. a candidate's personality. Nevertheless, it does provide a **strong indication** of the 'political subsoil' on which the elections will be held. Why strong? Because these regional elections constitute a new type of electoral contest in Greece, regarding which there is no historical experience of voter behavior. However, it is more than likely that regional elections will function in the same way as the prefectural elections, namely as 'quasi national' elections. Indeed, the size of the electoral district (region, as opposed to prefecture) facilitates – at least to some extent – the preservation of party identification.

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