

Elections

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Greek regional elections of 7 November 2010

The poll result of 7 November may prove to be a watershed in the history of elections in Greece since the restoration of democracy in 1974 and a turning point in the process of transition from the traditional two-party system of the past decades to a new type of 'bipolarity'. The protest vote, which was recorded last Sunday, is an expression of disapproval for both government parties, although not to the same degree. Due to the widespread electoral decline of the ruling party, PASOK's massive lead, as recorded in the most recent parliamentary elections, within just 12 months has all but disappeared. The contraction of the party's electoral support is considerable, its overall losses being 70% higher than those incurred by New Democracy. Compared to the parliamentary elections, PASOK's regional electoral support, calculated in terms of number of votes received (1,884,310), represents just **63%** of its support in the national polls, while for New Democracy, although it too sustained significant losses, the corresponding figure stood at **77%** (1,774,778 votes). As a result of this 'disproportionate contraction', the relative strength of the two parties appears to have more or less equalized, although it should be noted that this has occurred with the historically lowest level of support for the two main parties, just **67.3%**.

What is particularly striking is that today's electoral map has more similarities with the European elections of last summer than with the parliamentary elections that followed. The support within Greek society for the two main parties has, in effect, reverted to those levels, while at the same time, the multidirectional electoral shifts observed can – without exaggeration – be described as tectonic. Put differently, the present picture of enfeeblement and fragmentation of the party system emits a '**scent of Euro elections**', i.e. it smacks directly of second-order elections. From the viewpoint (solely) of electoral geography, it makes the parliamentary elections of last October look like a 'parenthesis'. As if they were elections of an 'extraordinary nature', with characteristics not of enduring but of 'momentary' political representation.

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Moreover, the trend toward abstention is becoming established as an ideologically and politically legitimate election practice for a large segment of the electorate, surpassing $\frac{1}{4}$ (27.3%) in the regional elections.

Party support in regional elections

Regional candidates supported by PASOK received a total of 1,884,310 votes (34.6%), while those with the backing of New Democracy garnered 1,774,778 (32.6%). The difference between the first and second party was eventually **2%** (figure 1). The decline in support for the ruling party is clearly of greater magnitude and significance than the corresponding losses of the main opposition party. In thirty-five (35) electoral battles of all kinds since the restoration of democracy (1974), PASOK obtained a smaller number of votes only in the first two (1974, 1977). In contrast, on the basis of the number of votes it received, ND managed to hold steady at just above the levels of the 2009 European elections.

This fact, in conjunction with the electoral collapse of PASOK, enabled the main opposition ND party to reap substantial benefits, winning the crucial battle of appearances. Nevertheless, its current performance still remains very close to the levels of the 2009 Euro elections, which marks the nadir of the party's electoral support since 1974.

In the 2009 European elections, PASOK – for the first time since its defeats in 2004 and 2007 – won in 34 of the country's 56 electoral districts, while ND was confined to 22. In the national elections that followed, last October, PASOK prevailed in 50 and ND won just 6. Today, on the basis of the strength of the parties recorded in the regional polls, the picture is much the same as for the European elections, but reversed. ND now leads in **32** and PASOK in only **24** electoral districts. With the exception of Rodopi, Grevena and Thesprotia, ND is ahead of PASOK in all of northern Greece (Thrace, Macedonia, Epirus) and the greater part of Thessaly (Larissa, Trikala). In addition, ND is in front in 3 of the 5 electoral districts of Central Greece (Fthiotida, Evrytania, Fokida), in three districts of the Peloponnese (Messinia, Laconia, Corinthia), as well as in the Ionian Islands and the Northern Aegean (figure 2). In several of the aforementioned regions, the onset of an electoral shift is apparent, particularly in Central Macedonia. In contrast, PASOK retains its (traditional) primacy in Western Greece, Attica (although markedly diminished relative to parliamentary elections), the Southern Aegean and Crete.

On the other hand, ND's strength is offset somewhat by significant losses that are geographically focused. From a quantitative point of view, ND's bigger deficit compared to PASOK, relative to parliamentary elections, apart from Western Greece and Attica, due to the weakness of its candidate, can be seen also in Crete, due to the split caused by the candidacy of Dimitris Giannoulakis. The latter, garnering 57,735 votes (17.5% in Crete and 1.1% nationwide), took 2nd place, pushing the ND-backed candidate into 3rd place.

Decline in electoral support for LAOS

Calculating the regional electoral support for LAOS presents certain difficulties. The party of Georgios Karatzaferis supported candidates for governor backed by New Democracy in five regions and PASOK's candidate in one region. In these regions, LAOS received 72,600 votes in the most recent parliamentary elections (2009), which represented 19% of its overall strength. As for those regions in which LAOS had its own candidate, the party garnered 220,550 votes nationwide, or **4.05%**. On account of its cooperation with the candidates of other parties, this figure may be lower than the actual electoral support for LAOS in the regions. However, even if the votes it received in parliamentary elections are arbitrarily taken into account in the regions in which LAOS cooperated with another party, it is most likely that its electoral support has declined, not only relative to the European but also to parliamentary elections. It should also be noted that the votes received by LAOS in these regional elections are even lower than the number garnered alone by Karatzaferis in 2002 (223,796), when he ran as an independent candidate in the so-called 'super-prefecture' of Athens-Piraeus, before he founded the party.

The Left make gains

Of all the parties represented in parliament, only the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) registered a rise, not only as a percentage but also in real terms (number of votes). The party's regional electoral support is estimated at **10.89%** (592,977 votes). In contrast, SYRIZA, in the throes of a two-pronged split, from the Democratic Left (121,635 votes, or **2.23%**, in regions where its own candidate was running) and from Alekos Alavanos, who received 30,926 votes in Attica (equivalent to 0.57% nationwide), managed to hold steady at the levels of the Euro elections, garnering 244,990 votes, which corresponds to **4.5%** nationwide. Particularly impressive, however, was the rise of the main grouping of leftist parties not represented in parliament (ANTARSYA), which for the first time nationwide (in 11 regions) received almost 100,000 (97,499) votes. Overall, the rise of the Left recorded in the elections is the biggest since 1981.

Shrinking electorate

These elections also saw a continuation of the constantly increasing number of voters choosing to abstain, a trend observed since 2004, the result of which is the ongoing contraction of the Greek electorate. The number of voters who cast their ballot in the regional elections did not surpass 6,000,000. Compared to the most recent national elections, in which 7,045,000 voted, this means that over 1 million citizens joined those who have adopted abstention in order to express their political disapproval.

According to Public Issue, the percentage of **true abstention** (i.e. which can be calculated on the basis of the country's actual population rather than the non-updated electoral lists) in the first round of regional elections is estimated at **27.2%**, and although this figure is markedly lower than the corresponding percentage in the most recent European elections (36.1%) it is nevertheless almost double the figure recorded in recent parliamentary elections (14.5% - [figure 3 & 4](#)).

Abstention hit both PASOK and New Democracy. However, the losses of each party to abstention were not equal, standing at a ratio of **2:1, at the expense of PASOK**. More specifically, the overall (double) losses of PASOK to abstention are estimated at approximately **638,000** voters in the parliamentary elections, compared to **321,000** for ND. According to one calculation, between parliamentary and regional elections, the total number of votes lost (i.e. either to other parties or to abstention) from voters who had supported PASOK in the parliamentary elections was around **1,262,000**. Of these, the losses to rival parties/candidates (49%, about 624,000 voters) and to abstention (51%, about 638,000 voters) were roughly equal. A small percentage of PASOK's total losses was offset by new supporters (approximately 174,000 voters). Correspondingly, the total losses for ND between parliamentary elections in 2009 and regional elections in 2010 are estimated at 727,000 votes, with 406,000 (56%) voting for other parties/candidates and 321,000 (44%) abstaining. The number of new incoming votes for ND is estimated at around 236,000.

The new crisis of the two-party system

The present crisis of the two-party system is proving to be much deeper than the previous one in the 1990s. The aggregate support of **67.3%** ([figure 5](#)), as recorded in the regional elections, in the period since the restoration of democracy has similarities only with the early elections called in 1977, i.e. before PASOK had become established as a strong political force.

Even in the European elections of 1994, a period in which the early crisis of the two-party system became apparent, the two main political parties had not fallen below 70% (70.3%), while the number of voters taking part in the elections was then 6,756,000, i.e. almost 800,000 more than in these regional elections. The greatest gains from the substantial decline of the two-party system have accrued to the Left, mainly KKE, but not only: The overall 'leftist anti-Memorandum' vote in the regional elections, i.e. the aggregate number of votes for KKE, SYRIZA and the leftist parties not represented in parliament (ANTARSYA, Alavanos), without taking into account – for the sake of simplification – the votes received in Attica by Yiannis Dimaras, is almost 1,000,000 (966,400), which represents **17.75%**. Since 1974, such a percentage was registered by the Left only in the European elections of 1981 (18.1%).

In these latest elections, the two large government parties together received approximately **3,660,000** votes. In the 1990s, when PASOK returned to power (1993), it won the elections by alone receiving **3,235,000** votes. In the 2000s, when New Democracy in turn won the elections of 2004, it garnered **3,359,000** votes, which represents the best result for any party since the restoration of democracy in 1974. If abstention is taken into account, then the real electoral support for the two government parties, as a percentage of the country's actual electorate, now stands at only **44.5%**.

FIGURE 1: ELECTORAL SUPPORT OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS OF 7 NOVEMBER 2010

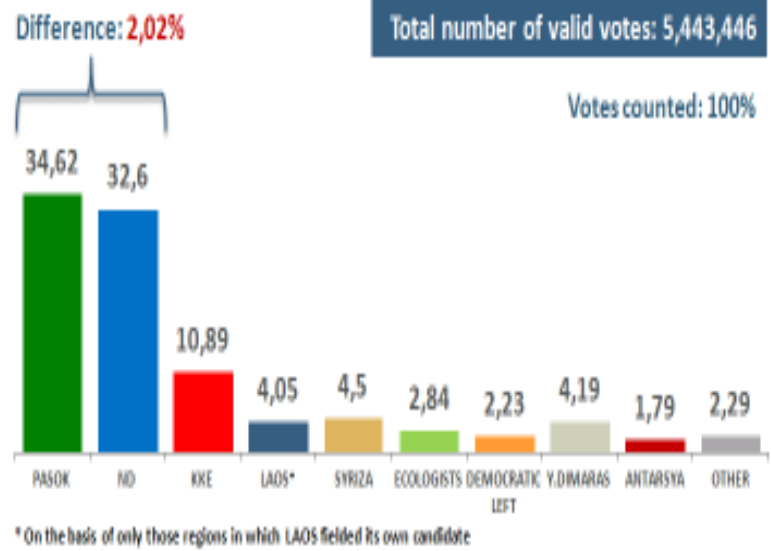
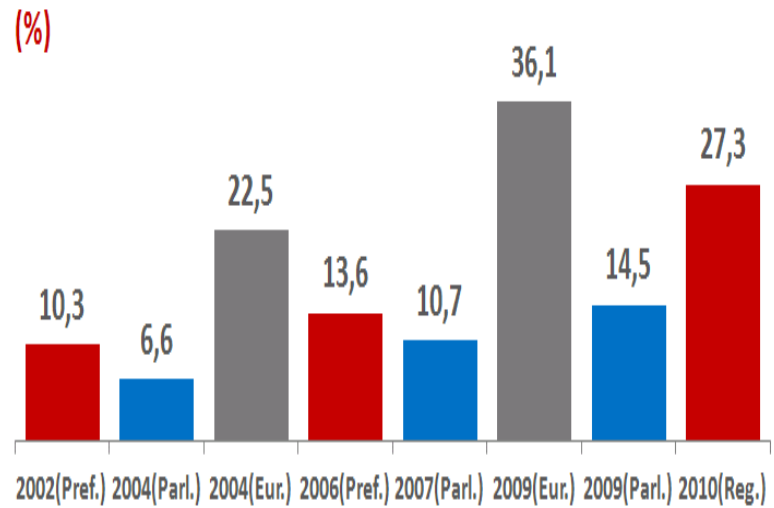


FIGURE 2: WINNING PARTY BY ELECTORAL DISTRICT



**FIGURE 3: ESTIMATED ABSTENTION IN GREEK ELECTIONS, 2002-2010
PARLIAMENTARY, EUROPEAN, PREFECTURAL, REGIONAL**



**FIGURE 4: INCREASE (%) IN ABSTENTION BETWEEN PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIONS '09 & REGIONAL ELECTIONS '10, BY PREFECTURE**

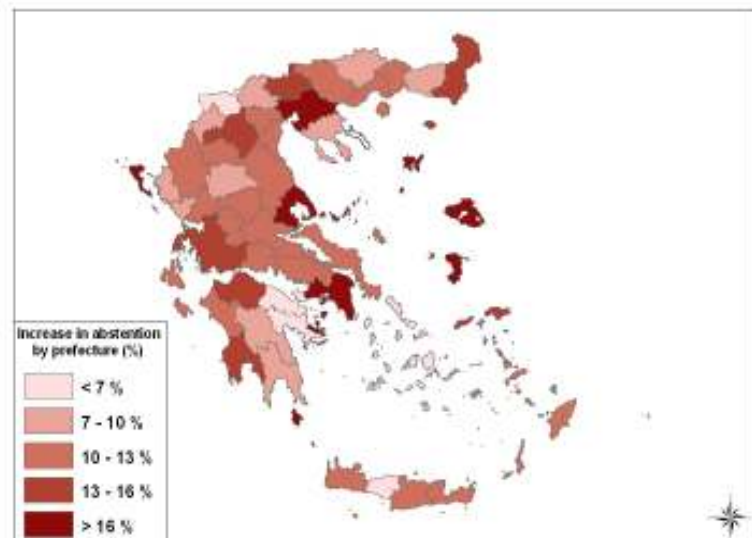


FIGURE 5: THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM IN GREECE, 2000-2010
ELECTORAL SUPPORT (%) IN PARLIAMENTARY, EUROPEAN,
PREFECTURAL & REGIONAL ELECTIONS

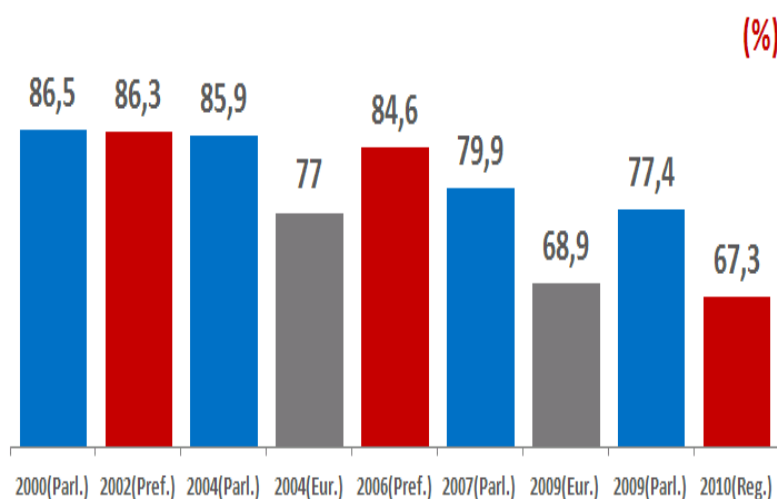


FIGURE 6: GAP BETWEEN PASOK & ND BY REGION.
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2009 – REGIONAL ELECTIONS 2010

	2009(Parl.)	2010(Reg.)	Change
Eastern Macedonia – Thrace	11.1	0.7	↓
Central Macedonia	2.2	-12.5	↓
Western Macedonia	1.5	-7.9	↓
Epirus	7.4	-6.1	↓
Thessaly	5.1	-3.7	↓
Ionian Islands	10.8	-4.9	↓
Western Greece	19.9	16.6	↓
Central Greece	11.4	3.8	↓
Attica	12.3	3.6	↓
Peloponnese	1.4	0.8	↓
North Aegean	11.9	-2	↓
South Aegean	17.9	19.8	↑
Crete	32.6	35.4	↑