The Greek Left in the 2012 Elections: The Return to the Class Vote

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The elections on May 5 and June 17, 2012 have opened, in Greece, a period of profound change in the political scene. The two-party system has been shattered and been replaced by a complex and fluid multi-party system, with powerful tensions between two poles — the left and the right. These elections have dissolved all the key components of the 1974 change of regime, and especially PASOK, which has been at the centre of Greek political life for the last 35 years. In particular, the two years between 2010 and 2012, the period during which the two Memoranda and extreme austerity measures were implemented, has overturned all the structures and representativeness of the established political parties. At the same time, important ideological re-alignments have emerged inside all areas of politics. A significant side effect was the demobilisation of practically all the country's traditional political activists, mainly PASOK's.

This political and electoral earthquake on the Greek political scene is linked to the rapid aggravation of social and economic inequality that has occurred in the country in the recent period. The poverty of Greek households jumped 20% from 2000 to 2011. The unemployment rate, which had been stable at about 10% for several years climbed to 24% in April 2012. The average drop in wages and pensions reached about 45% compared with 2009. Labour relations have been dissolved by the elimination of collective bargaining agreements while the adoption of flexible labour at very low wages has spread. About 40% of the small to medium-sized trading firms have ceased to operate while the average delay in wage payment in the private sector (for both large and medium-sized firms) has reached 5 months. The 2012 elections took place in the context of the destruction of the social structures of health, education, and the welfare state in general. Far from being occasional and random, suicides and suicide attempts have increased by 1000%, as has the emigration of the most highly-trained 24-40 year olds. This social context has had a strong and divisive political impact: the country's political organisations have been "objectively" divided into those for and against the Memorandum, with the parties of the old two-party system (ND and PASOK) included among the former while the smaller ones, particularly those of the left, constitute the second group. The explosive illegitimacy of the Memorandum policies was the defining factor in the electoral rise of the left and the spectacular fall of PASOK and ND.

Within this new set of social circumstances, the Greek elections indicated a different political reality and revealed a new structure of political representation. Indeed, the party system is still in a transition phase. At present, it could be defined as a "polarised multiparty system" since this seven-party parliamentary scene is characterised by two major and simultaneous splits: a) the split between left and right (above all defined by the opposition between SYRIZA and ND) and b) a split between those political forces that are against the Memorandum and those that are in favour, defined essentially by the position taken by political organisations on the priorities of the coalition government. Among the anti-austerity political forces are SYRIZA, KKE and ANEL (Greek independents) (a party of the populist right resulting from the

breakup of ND and close in terms of its economic and social programme to the left). Among the parties in favour of severe austerity policies are ND, PASOK, and DIMAR (Democratic Left). The seventh political party, Golden Dawn, is close to Nazism and is trying increasingly to claim a special role within the "family" of the right, as shown by the slow change in its ideological agenda on issues such as immigration and an "anti-left" rhetoric, which positions it among the political forces in favour of the Memorandum.

To be more precise, the social structure of the June 17 vote shows three superimposed polarisations: by age, by profession/class and by geographical area.

Polarisation by age

The June 17 electorate can be divided into two quite distinct categories as is presented analytically in Table 1: on the one hand, people between 18 and 54 years of age and, on the other, those over 55 (and particularly over 65).

The first group voted for SYRIZA first and ND second and gave a very low score to PASOK, whereas the second group saved PASOK by giving it a final score of 12%. Indeed, if one compares the youngest (18-24) with the oldest (over 65 years) the divergence is even more striking. The 18-24 year olds expressed their preference by giving SYRIZA 45.5% while the over 65s gave ND 49.5%. The 18-24s gave PASOK barely 2.4% while the over 65s increased its score to 19.1%. In general the old ND — PASOK two-party system managed to survive in the oldest age group but collapsed among the youngest of the working population.

Table 1

AGE	ND	SYRIZA	PASOK	ANEL	GOLDEN DAWN	DIMAR	KKE	OTHER
Final total percentage	29.7	26.9	12.3	7.5	6.9	6.3	4.5	5.9
18-24	7.3	45.5	2.4	10.6	8.1	8.1	5.7	12.2
25-34	21.8	30.1	7.0	10.1	9.9	6.8	5.0	9.1
35-44	25.3	30.7	7.8	8.6	11.9	5.5	3.3	6.9
45-54	23.4	32.4	11.0	8.2	6.7	7.9	4.4	6.0
55-64	31.6	24.1	17.8	5.7	3.8	6.4	6.3	4.4
65+	49.4	13.8	19.1	4.6	2.5	4.5	3.6	2.5

Source: Institut VPRC, pre-election and post-election polls.

The vote by "profession or class"

The second important division in the electorate concerns the difference by profession or class. In the June elections there was a strong class polarisation, a polarisation that had been much attenuated since 1995 thanks to PASOK's "modernisation" trend. This is clearly seen in Table 2 in ND's case and, more generally, for the right as a whole, to which the business classes and employers allied themselves (35.9%) while also

giving a striking 29.3% to Golden Dawn. In this category of the active population, PASOK managed to win its best electoral score with 17.2%. ND's second best electoral score was with the independent farmers (39.5%) — a group that, at the same time give a substantial 7.5% to Golden Dawn. Overall we see that ND's electorate consists of an alliance of the business and employing classes, farmers, especially those with medium-sized farms, and the inactive population. This is seen by its clear lead among retirees, whether from the public or private sectors.

The opposite is true of SYRIZA. This is the first time in its long history that it has gotten votes of such an intensely popular and class character, to the point that its electorate has become obviously transformed into a political configuration completely different from what its electorate had been up to the last two elections. Among the wage earners of the private and public sectors, SYRIZA won 32.5% and 32% respectively, becoming the top political choice for them. Among the unemployed it won 32.7% of the vote, while among the small and medium artisans it scored 32.6%.

Alongside this overall rating, it is very interesting to examine certain sub-categories as shown in Table 2, in which we see that SYRIZA scored 27.1% among public sector skilled workers and 34.9% among the public sector middle-level managers. Among the lower level staff of the private sector, SYRIZA won 34.2% while winning 30.2% among skilled workers. Overall, SYRIZA today, judged by its electoral composition, is a coalition between wage earners (especially middle and low level wage earners), the unemployed and small independent artisans and professions

Table 2: Vote distribution by socio-professional categories

Profession	ND	SYRIZA	PASOK	ANEL	GOLDEN DAWN	DIMAR	KKE	OTHER
Final total percentage	29.7	26.9	12.3	7.5	6.9	6.3	4.5	5.9
Employers-heads of firms	35.9	10.9	17.2	1.6	20.3	4.7	1.6	7.8
Independent farmers, livestock farmers, fishermen	35.3	24.1	9.8	8.3	7.5	6.0	4.5	4.5
Liberal professors (scientists)	26.8	26.1	9.4	8.0	8.7	7.7	2.8	10.5
Artisans, low-wage earners	27.2	32.6	10.0	7.3	9.1	2.7	4.2	6.9
Public sector wage earners	26.3	32.0	10.1	8.4	4.7	7.7	4.4	6.4
Public sector middle management	24.8	34.9	7.0	9.3	2.3	7.0	5.4	4.9
Private sectror	20.3	32.5	8.9	8.7	10.2	7.7	6.1	5.7

Profession	ND	SYRIZA	PASOK	ANEL	GOLDEN DAWN	DIMAR	KKE	OTHER
wage earners								
Private sector middle management (salespeople)	17.2	34.0	10.7	7.0	12.6	6.0	6.5	6.0
Skilled workers	25.4	30.2	1.2	11.1	11.1	11.1	4.8	4.8
Unskilled workers/casual workers	9.1	27.3	4.5	9.1	24.5	9.1	4.5	12.0
Unemployed	16.2	32.7	7.1	9.6	12.2	8.1	4.3	7.4
Unemployed who have lost jobs	17.0	32.9	6.8	9.0	11.5	8.2	6.8	7.7
Housewives	33.8	24.0	15.9	9.0	3.6	5.1	3.3	7.7
Retired (public sector)	45.7	16.2	23.1	3.0	1.7	5.1	3.0	2.1
Retired (private sector)	43.2	17.6	17.5	5.4	2.8	1.0	4.8	3.0
Students	7.1	51.2	1.2	10.7	3.6	7.1	6.0	13.1

This class vote can also be brought out by using the Alford index, a classical index used by political science for indicating class, but which is not completely reliable due to its simplifications. The Alford Index is calculated by subtracting the percentage of non-manual workers who voted for "left" parties from the percentage of wage earners who voted for the same parties. The Alford index measures the class vote using a scale of 1 to 100.

In Table 3, this index is applied based on the voting of the bourgeois classes and the middle bourgeoisie (employers, heads of firms, upper management of the public and private sectors) as against the voting of the wage earners and unemployed.

Table 3: An index of class voting in the June 2012 election using the Alford index (in percentages).

Political Party	Wage earners N=1,124	Bourgeoisie N=137	Class vote index (1-100)
ND	19.7	35.0	-
SYRIZA	33.0	18.2	14.8
PASOK	8.1	16.0	-
ANEL	9.0	2.2	6.8
GOLDEN DAWN	10.0	10.2	-

DIMAR	7.6	8.0	-
KKE	6.0	2.9	3.1
"Right" (ND - ANEL - GOLDEN DAWN)	38.7	47.4	-
"Left" (SYRIZA - KKE - DIMAR)	46.6	29.1	17.5
Pro-Memorandum parties (ND - PASOK)	27.8	51.0	-
Anti-Memorandum parties (SYRIZA - KKE - ANEL)	65.6	41.5	24.1

Source: Institut VPRC, before and after polls.

This table shows the high level of class voting in SYRIZA's electorate. At the same time, it indicates the important class element in the electorate of the popular right ANEL (Independent Greeks), which shows an electoral base convergent with that of SYRIZA's social base. KKE's votes exhibit less class voting.

Polarisation according to regional and class criteria

Categorising the votes by social class and profession can also serve for an analysis of regional criteria, based on the socio-professional appearance (s/p) of the locations. Table 3 clearly indicates the distribution of the vote among all the parliamentary parties in the fundamentally bourgeois, middle bourgeois, medium-salary regions of the country's major urban agglomerations.

Table 4: The geographic distribution of the vote

Political party	ND	SYRIZA	PASOK	AN.EL	GOLDEN DAWN	DIMAR	KKE
National percentages	29.66	26.89	12.28	7.51	6.92	6.26	4.50
Urban areas	25.7	29.8	10.7	7.8	6.8	7.2	4.9
Regions with an upper-level physiognomy (s/p)	59.7	10.8	5.0	4.0	3.9	6.6	1.1
Regions with an upper-middle physiognomy (s/p)	32.0	27.5	8.5	6.8	5.0	9.2	3.6
Regions with a middle-level physiognomy (s/p)	25.0	31.0	9.5	7.5	5.2	8.9	6.0
Wage-worker regions	18.5	37.5	7.5	10.5	9.5	5.5	7.0

Source: The Ministry of the Interior: election results of June 2012

Some preliminary conclusions regarding these results by regional criteria can be drawn:

a) In both ND's and SYRIZA's votes, a fairly strong degree of class voting can be confirmed. ND was preferred by regions whose dwelling locations had a middle-upper and upper level social-political physiognomy. On the other hand, it was above all the popular regions – workers and middle strata – that voted for SYRIZA, the latter being under-represented in the upper-middle and upper-level regions.

b) PASOK succeeded in holding on to comparatively good percentages in the upper and middle regions, which reveals the radical change in its electoral base. Indeed, in all categories it lags behind the average rate it had previously scored in urban regions, showing that PASOK's support was, above all, from the rural outskirts rather than the major urban agglomerations.

c) The composition of ANEL's (Greek Independents) electorate is particularly interesting: it exhibits a powerful base at the core of the popular regions and among wage workers (its percentages surpass the average percentages of the urban regions); whereas it is not at all strong in the upper and upper-middle regions, and is under-represented in the middle-level regions. The regional vote of this party is instead close to that which a "left" party would have and to that of a typical right or extreme-right party, despite that fact that previously, in certain particular cases, strong popular influences were seen in right-wing parties. What is probably involved here is a party that presents a "transitory choice" for the popular/working classes of right-wing tradition who may in the years to come either turn to the left or to a kind of ideological rhetoric related to the fascist extreme, such as Golden Dawn's.

d) Golden Dawn also scored a "popular class vote", similar to that of ANEL. It had a quite strong electoral score in the popular-working class regions. This differentiates it markedly from Greece's oldest extreme-right party, LAOS, which was a pluralist party with strong influence in upper and upper-middle class regions. With a tougher agenda, Golden Dawn clearly has a more popular support. Golden Dawn's "geography" reflects a configuration within the political system, which is by no means incidental.

e) DIMAR is centred on the upper-middle regions, with very little representation in working class/popular regions. This party seems to have a particular ideological-political audience that is oriented more toward the moderate centre-left camp. It is located in the same social space as PASOK.

f) Finally, KKE had the same electoral base in the 2012 elections, which it had throughout the whole period of return to democracy: an electoral alliance of the middle classes and the popular/working classes in which the former tend to dominate. During the last legislative elections, its internal "direction" has shifted toward the wage workers without modifying the overall image of this party.