

Ruling New Democracy wins Greek elections, far-right make gains, pseudo-left Syriza routed

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The conservative New Democracy (ND) won Greece's general election by a landslide on Sunday, with Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis remaining in power for a second four-year term.

In a second round of elections, after the first in May, ND won just over 40.5 percent of the vote, finishing almost 23 points ahead of the pseudo-left Syriza (Coalition of the Radical left—Progressive Alliance). The rout was the largest margin of victory for any party in half a century, since the fall of the fascist regime of the colonels in 1974.

The vote was held under conditions of acute social crisis with millions of Greek workers and youth turning their back on all the parties standing. The first round of the election had to be suspended for a month due to the mass protests and strikes in opposition to the preventable deaths of 57 mainly young people in February's Tempi valley train crash. The second round was held under the shadow of the June 14 deaths of over 600 refugees who perished in a boat sinking off the coast of Pylos, an event leading to further nationwide protests.

Barely half the 9.9 million registered electorate voted, with turnout just under 53 percent—a record low and 8 percent lower than the 61 percent recorded in the last round. *Kathimerini* reported, “In the northern constituency of Florina, the abstention rate reached 66.76%, followed by the Ionian island of Kefalonia (62.48%), Evrytania in Central Greece (61.37%) and the Peloponnese constituency of Laconia (61%).” Since May ND lost approximately 330,000 votes; Syriza 270,000; PASOK 70,000 and the KKE 33,000.

This is the case even though voting in elections is compulsory.

Having just failed to secure an overall majority in the May elections, when it finished 20 points ahead of Syriza to take 146 seats, this time ND took 158 seats in the 300-seat parliament in a ballot based on semi-proportional representation. Election legislation determines that the largest party in the second round is awarded a sliding scale bonus of between 20 and 50 seats. As it won more than 40 percent of the vote, New Democracy won all 50 bonus seats available.

As it did in May, ND won 58 out of 59 of Greece's electoral districts. The sole electoral district won by Syriza was the Thracian constituency of Rodopi.

With over 99 percent of votes counted Monday morning, ND had 40.5 percent of the vote (2.1 million), up just under 1 percent on the May vote. Syriza had 17.8 percent (929,355) down over 2 percent, and 48 seats; the social democratic PASOK won 617,300 votes (11.8 percent and 32 seats); the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece (KKE) won 400,808 votes (7.6 percent and 20 seats).

Steeped in betrayal during and after its four year in office from 2015-19, when Syriza ditched every pledge to reverse years of savage austerity—and shifting further to the right as the main opposition party over the last four—Alexis Tsipras's party haemorrhaged support among workers. It won the 2015 election in a landslide, winning over 2.2 million votes and the support of the working class in every major urban centre nationwide.

Four other parties surpassed the three percent barrier required to enter parliament, with the far-right benefitting from the absence of any genuine socialist political alternative for the working class.

The fascist Spartans did not participate in the first round and was only allowed to participate in the second

round by Greece's Supreme Court on June 8. They received over 241,000 votes, taking 4.6 percent and 12 seats, coming fourth overall. The Spartans were founded in 2017 by Vassilis Stigas, who described immigrants as "illegal invaders who have settled in Greece", responsible for the "ethnic alteration of the population".

The Spartans have taken on the mantle of the fascist Golden Dawn which was outlawed as a criminal organisation in 2020. With the main far-right National Party-Greeks barred from standing in the May and June 2023 elections, its main figure Ilias Kasidiaris, a former Golden Dawn leader imprisoned for 13 years, announced his "full support" for the Spartans from his jail cell.

The far-right Greek Solution and the Democratic Patriotic Movement—Victory (Niki) parties won 4.4 percent (12 seats) and 3.7 percent (10 seats) respectively.

The only nominally left party to enter parliament was Course of Freedom, a splinter of Syriza, which scored 3 percent—up from 2.8 percent in May—and took eight seats. The party is the vehicle of former parliamentary speaker, lawyer and Syriza member Zoe Konstantopoulou and was listed on the ballot paper as Course of Freedom—Zoe Konstantopoulou.

Konstantopoulou was first elected to parliament as a Syriza candidate in 2012 and re-elected when Syriza won its 2015 landslide. She only broke with Syriza in June 2015, as part of a nationalist, Eurosceptic faction within the party to found Popular Unity, when Syriza—after it had already agreed with the European Union, International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank "troika" to continue imposing austerity—was ready to sign a formal agreement to carry it out. With Popular Unity's failure to enter parliament in the September election, Konstantopoulou founded in 2016 what she described as the "neither Left nor Right" Course of Freedom.

Following Syriza's rout on Sunday, Tsipras indicated, after overseeing two successive general election defeats that he would have to stand down as party leader in the coming weeks, saying, "I will be judged by the members of the party." He added, "Syriza assumes the responsibilities assigned to it by the popular vote, starting today," stating that the party "will initiate procedures for the final decision... A big

and creative historic cycle has come to a close for Syriza. We have to look upon that with pride".

The other major architect of the devastating situation facing the working class is Yanis Varoufakis, Tsipras's former finance minister, who also stood down in July 2015, as Syriza signed its austerity agreement with the troika. But this was only after he played a key role in Syriza agreeing to continue to impose austerity. Varoufakis stressed that he wanted only a slightly modified version of austerity based on "standard Thatcherite or Reaganesque economic policies".

Varoufakis went on to found MeRA25 (European Realistic Disobedience Front), which won nine seats in the 2019 general election. But with workers viewing him as equally toxic as Tsipras, MeRA25 was unable to pass the 3 percent threshold in May or Sunday's second round based on its narrow base of support in the upper middle class.



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