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“Protest, elections and austerity politics in Greece”

by

Maria Kousis
Professor
Department of Sociology
University of Crete
kousis.m@uoc.gr

Kostas Kanellopoulos
Senior Researcher
University of Crete Research Fund
University of Crete
kanellopoulosk@social.soc.uoc.gr

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the impact of the (euro) crisis on the political system in Greece through a relational approach. Economic contention, democracy and economic voting have been accompanied by rapid distrust in national and European political institutions by Greek citizens. Aiming to understand and illustrate how repertoires of contention and the financial crisis regime have been shaping each other, the paper offers new findings based on protest event analysis of the large contentious events against Memoranda and austerity policies by Troika (European Commission, ECB, IMF) and the Greek state.

The sources used to code information on economic and political claims are major, national as well as international newspapers and alternative electronic media. Following Kriesi's (2011) conceptualization of economic voting in West European (WE) and Central & East European (CEE) countries vis-à-vis the economic crisis, the findings show that Greece stands somewhere in between: both centre-right and centre-left governments imposing austerity in the 2008-2012 period faced a severe electoral punishment like in most WE cases. However, unlike in WE, the political system in Greece changed radically. New political parties, especially of the far right, appeared and had an immediate success in the ballots like in many CEE cases. At the same time nevertheless, unlike both in CEE and WE, the political parties of the left were significantly empowered in Greece. Alternative paths of the May 2014 European and the regional elections in Greece will be discussed in relation to a spiraling economic and political process.

Key words: political parties, protest outcomes, eurozone crisis, Greece, conventional politics, elections, austerity.

1. Introduction

The severe economic crisis of the Greek state and the spiral of anti-austerity mobilizations, which followed, have deeply affected the political regime of the country. Within less than three years the basic features of the Greek political arena for over three decades have changed drastically, including voting patterns, as well as the status quo of political actors and their challengers, in and outside of the parliament.

Although economic factors had been neglected in the contentious politics literature of the North in the past two decades, they have recently returned in social movement discussions (Kousis and Tilly 2005, Goodwin and Hetland 2009, Kriesi 2014). For scholars of contention in Latin America and India however, economic factors had been a sustained issue (Uba 2005, Almeida 2007, 2010). Economic change and variation affect collective action in one or two ways, either by shaping responses to political threats and opportunities or by constituting themselves significant threats and opportunities (Kousis and Tilly 2005: 7).

Most students of social movements define opportunities either as “signals” to social or political actors to mobilize (Tarrow 1996: 54), or as the probability that social protest actions will lead to success in achieving the desired outcome (Goldstone and Tilly 2001: 182). In the latter form threats are not the exact opposite of opportunities but they are divided into two components: (1) a general threat – an exposure to a set of harms and (2) a collective action threat – the cost a social group must incur if it gets active or that it expects to suffer if it remains inactive (Goldstone and Tilly 2001: 183, Kousis and Tilly 2005: 3).

The Greek case is one witnessing rapid and sweeping transformations in both contentious and conventional politics. Transnational economic change, a deep global recession and a deep national economic crisis have destabilized the political regime of the country and they have created opportunities and especially threats for various social and political actors to mobilize more frequently in the crisis period of 2010 to 2013. Responding to SYRIZA members of parliament, in April 2014, the Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection announced, that since March 2010, there have been 20,210 protests in Greece. Protesters either aim to

ameliorate the impacts of the austerity measures and delay the structural reforms, or to protect themselves from the burdens of the crisis.

The contention in Greece does not only involve demonstrations, strikes, and riots but also conventional politics in the form of polarized electoral campaigns, party splits, and political realignments. Elections and social movements are the two major forms of political conflict and political participation in democratic systems (Goldstone 2003, Meyer and Tarrow 1998) but their interactions have seldom been specified in a systematic way (McAdam and Tarrow 2010). Most relevant studies either deduct movements out of social structures (e.g. Przeworsky and Sprague 1986) or give the party system a key role in determining whether and how social movements mobilize (e.g. Kriesi et al 1995). As McAdam and Tarrow have recently argued:

“...[f]ew citizens are deeply engaged in the party system as such. For most people, it is the proximate influence of the electoral *campaign* – and not the party system – that provides signals that guide them on public policy issues, that tells them how to judge the political elite, and that identifies potential coalition partners. Conversely, elections are the occasions on which parties are made aware of the presence and strength of social movements and can change course in order to appeal to these constituencies” (2010: 533).

In order to specify the relations between election campaigns and social movements, McAdam and Tarrow (2010) distinguish and propose six linkage mechanisms:

1. Movements introduce new forms of collective action that influence election campaigns.
2. Movements join electoral coalitions or, in extreme cases, turn into party themselves.
3. Movements engage in proactive electoral mobilization.
4. Movements engage in reactive electoral mobilization.
5. Movements polarize political parties internally.
6. Shifts in electoral regimes have long-term impact on mobilization and demobilization

Similarly, Kriesi (2011) emphasizes the need to pay equal attention to contentious reactions in the direct-democratic and protest arena which are closely linked to the public's electoral

reaction. He thus points out that in democratic countries one of the first signs of popular discontent are drastic shifts in voting patterns. Extending the literature on economic voting, Kriesi (2011) argues that depending on the party system, disaffected voters may turn to established opposition parties or, in the face of austerity cuts and job losses, they may opt to “exit” by,

1. Rejecting all mainstream parties, the established political elites, or the ‘political class’
2. Opting for new challengers in the party system, who typically adopt populist appeals - i.e. new populist right in Western Europe
3. Turning against all political parties, i.e. abstaining from voting.

Kriesi (2011) and Almeida (2010) both point out that pressure created through economic protests under the recent Great Recession and austerity policies in Latin America respectively, strengthens the opposition and other allies of the protesting groups in the political system. Confirming the expectations of the economic voting approach, Kriesi (2011) finds that:

1. *The relationship between real GDP growth in the year preceding the election and the change in the electoral support of the parties in the governing coalition turns out to be very strong for CEE countries, while it is virtually inexistent for WE countries*
2. *The electoral implications of high unemployment rates turn out to be rather strong in WE countries, but inexistent or even positive for the CEE countries*
3. *The gravity of the budgetary deficit in the year preceding the election year is best able to account for the incumbents’ electoral punishment*

In both CEE -Central & Eastern European countries and WE-Western European cases protest occurred against austerity policies and influenced the electoral outcomes. In WE countries the economic crisis triggered protest and most of the governments were ousted. In CEE countries the same happened, but there protest was in full swing when the crisis intervened due to corruption scandals and the malfunctioning of the party systems. In spite of these pressures austerity policies across Europe have not (at least yet) significantly altered. Protest however has gradually subsided and political participation has fallen, *“not because the discontented population starts to trust the government, but because it has lost faith in the effectiveness of protest and/or because it*

is forced to acknowledge the constraints imposed on the government. Given the constraints of the situation, resigned acceptance of the inevitable may replace contention” (Kriesi 2011: 2).

Furthermore, protest mobilization in ICE, IR, LV, HU led to significant changes for the electoral channel such as reshuffling of the cabinet (IR, ICE), early elections (IR, ICE), weak minority government (HU) or/and withdrawal of former PM’s party (LV). Although anti-austerity protests did not succeed to stop austerity policies, it did influence electoral outcomes. In both CEE countries and WE the economic crisis triggered protest and most of the governments were ousted (Kriesi 2011).

In our research we came across evidence supporting the emergence and the interplay of the majority of these linkage mechanisms. Thus, the aim of this paper is to, a) analyze and discuss large protest events related to the Greek financial crisis and their impact on the political regime, b) understand and illustrate how repertoires of contention and the financial crisis regime are shaping each other, and c) offer new evidence for the recent debate on economic contention and economic voting.

2. The Greek political regime

The contemporary Greek political system arose in the 1970s out of the transition to democracy and the formal recognition of the Communist Party (KKE) in 1974 (Mavrogordatos 1983a). It was consolidated in the early 1980’s with the rise of the Socialist Party PASOK that came into power for the first time in 1981 (Mavrogordatos 1983b). Bipartism, a feature of the pre-dictatorial period, was established in Greece with the 1981 elections (Mavris 2004) and climaxed with those of November 1989. An intense and enduring political competition took place between the two ruling parties, New Democracy (ND) of the ‘right’ and PASOK of the ‘anti-right’. PASOK and the conservative New Democracy actually had formed a two party political system by creating interchangeably strong single-party governments (Seferiades 1986).

The early 1980’s were also marked by another important change in Greek politics triggered by Greece’s full integration into the EEC. PASOK and the Communist Party were against the integration into the EEC but as soon as PASOK took office in 1981 it made a spectacular policy

shift towards the promotion of the integration process. PASOK was in office from 1981 until 2004 with one short break from 1990-1993 when New Democracy (ND) was in power. It was under PASOK that Greece entered the eurozone in 2001. For almost a decade Greece's economy did enjoy high rates of growth and went under a modernization process (Voulgaris et al. 2002). The state bureaucracy, politicians and most of the population perceived the EEC (and later the EU) as a "golden goat" that would benefit Greece forever by its policies and especially by its fiscal packages (Tsoukalas 1993, Karras 2011).

In 2004 PASOK did not do well in the national elections due to accusations of corruption and the malfunctioning of the state bureaucracy, and not due to economic policy failure. Moreover, the majority of the Greek electorate was not actually convinced of PASOK's claims of a "powerful Greece with a booming economy capable even for organizing costly events like the Olympic Games" (Portaliou 2006). In the 2004 national elections ND obtained 45.36% of the votes. PASOK remained a strong opposition party, obtaining 40.55% of the votes. The Greek left did retreat. Nevertheless, both of its parties (KKE and SYRIZA) maintained their parliamentary representation. ND was elected promising a new administration to fight corruption and renew the state. However, the new government was rather careful not to change the economic policies of PASOK based in high public expenditure and big budget deficits (Voulgaris 2011).

ND's legacy in office during the period 2004-2007 was highly disappointing – a series of new economic scandals, incapacity to reform the state and even a re-emergence of clientelistic practices. The result was an early election in 2007 and a significant loss of votes for the governing party. The important point though, is that the opposing PASOK did not benefit from ND's losses and it also lost a lot of its 2004 voters. The Greek left was reinforced. KKE achieved 8.15% of the popular vote and it remained the dominant party in the left and one of the strongest in the western world. SYRIZA also achieved a high number of votes reinsuring its decision for a leftist turn after the elections of 2004 and capitalizing its active participation in the 2006-07 students and academics movement against the planned government reforms in education. In the elections of 2007 it was not only the Greek left that saw its forces growing. The far right party of LAOS took 3.8% of the popular vote and elected some members in the Greek parliament for the first time in decades (Zafiropoulos 2008).

The 2007-2009 period of ND's administration was a disaster in many ways (Voulgaris 2011). Due to the global financial meltdown and due to its internal insufficiencies the national economy entered into deep recession; new scandals were revealed, and an incident of police aggression triggered a momentous riot in December 2008 (see Iakovidou et al. 2010, Kanellopoulos 2012a). ND's government was disintegrating and Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis (a nephew of ND's founder) called for another early election in October 2009. Karamanlis this time promised to balance the national budget by following a mild austerity policy. As a result ND obtained 33.47% of the votes, which was until that time its worst electoral outcome. In less than a 6 years period ND had lost over a million of its voters (see Graph 1).

Graph 1 here

By contrast PASOK's leader George Papandreou (the son of PASOK's founder) had promised to solve the problems of the national economy by following a mixture of expanding monetary policies and an innovative green policy. As a result PASOK triumphed once again in the elections obtaining 43.92% of the votes. KKE and SYRIZA more or less held their electoral positions (7.54% and 4.6% of the votes respectively) while LAOS rose to 5.63% of the votes. In less than three months, in January 2010 PASOK abandoned its promises and started imposing a severe austerity and structural adjustment program. Soon afterwards a series of mass protests ensued. In mounting these protests the role of the political parties of the left was very important (Kanellopoulos et al. 2013). To a great extent the Greek case resembles those cases of social movement partyism in Latin America where there is a wide disagreement with neoliberal policies and the political parties of the left actively support protests (Almeida 2010).

From the 1970s through the 1990s,¹ studies of the relationship between political parties and social mobilizations in Greece, like those of other post-dictatorial southern Europe regions (Diamandouros and Gunther, 2001), focused on civil society groups rather than social movements and activism, emphasizing political clientelism, party-dominated politics, and populism (e.g. Lyrantzis 1983, Mouzelis 1989), a 'hyper-', but in essence a 'hypo-', politicization (Tsoukalas 1977, Spourdalakis 1988) described as an intense illusionary and pragmatic adherence to the state

¹ This section draws in part from Kousis 2007pp

which is seen as a locus of private gains of security, resources, privileges and status (Demertzis, 1990). Especially up to the late 1980s, party-dominated politics witnessed intense competition with political parties seeking to integrate organized groups and trade unions under party control (Mouzelis and Pagoulatos, 2002). While anti-dictatorial mobilizations dominated in the early 1970s, socio-economic justice oriented mobilizations of the 1975–85 period took place when PASOK's domination was increasing. Since 1974, and especially with PASOK's entry in government, in 1981, new voluntary associations such as cultural associations, sports clubs, internal migrant clubs, students' and parents' associations, were established. This trend reversed from the mid 1980s, when the number of newly founded voluntary associations began declining (Sotiropoulos 1996). Although acknowledging that to a large extent, interest representation in Greece is dominated by state corporatism, Sotiropoulos argues that the consolidation of Greek democracy allowed for the emergence of multiple single-issue movements, such as the environmental, feminist, health, cultural and consumer (see also Kousis 1999, Botetzagias 2001, Simitis 2002).

The high interest in politics during the 1974–81 period (Lyrintsis 1983, Featherstone & Katsoudas 1987) subsided by the late 1980s as PASOK was tarnished by scandals, and political cynicism and alienation rose (Kafetzis 1994). Nevertheless, even since the late 1980s, parties continued to strive for control of newly founded NGOs. By the 1990s partitocracy lost ground to public cynicism, political de-ideologicalisation, and increasing professional opportunities in the private sector.

Based on research on public participation, volunteering and environmental activism, recent works on collective action of the post-dictatorial period tend to suggest reconsideration of the thesis that Greece has a weak civil society, dominated by party politics (Close, 1999; Kousis, 1999a, 1999b, 2003; Panagiotopoulou, 2003; Afouxenidis, 2004; Sotiropoulos, 2004), but systematic empirical work on political party representation in social movements is not developed. Exceptions are left parties and movements (Marantzidis 1996), and political parties and environmental movements (Kousis 2007).

3. Research Approach: Large Protest Events and Claims, A National Campaign

This section will analyse and discuss large protest events related to the Greek financial crisis and their impact on the political regime. While protest events depict one level of contention, the data set of 31 LPEs comprises an anti-austerity campaign. A campaign consist of a higher level of contention involving whole populations engaged in wider struggles, defined as *sustained, organized public efforts making collective claims on target authorities*, constituting one element (of three) of a social movement (Tilly 2004: 3, Tarrow 2008: 229).

“Unlike a one-time petition, declaration, or mass meeting, a campaign extends beyond any single event-although social movements often include petitions, declarations, and mass meetings. A campaign always links at least three parties: a group of self-designated claimants, some object(s) of claims, and a public of some kind. The claims may target governmental officials, but the “authorities” in question can also include owners of property, religious functionaries, and others whose actions (or failures to act) significantly affect the welfare of many people.”

(Tilly 2004: 4)

The study of contentious events is especially significant for periods of *“thickened history”* when *“the pace of challenging events quickens to the point that it becomes practically impossible to comprehend them and they come to constitute an increasingly significant part of their own causal structure”* (Tilly 1978, Beissinger 2002). It allows for the study of compact defensive actions and frames of a mobilized public confronting austerity and Memorandum policies of devastating impacts imposed by a delegitimized Greek state and powerful economic and political transnational agencies during the turbulent period 2010-13, following the 2007 financial crisis.

Given the focus on the national campaign as well as the high frequency of contentious events during this “thickened” period, choosing the Large Protest Events (LPEs) as the unit of analysis, facilitates the systematic tracing of all key events and synchronized actions at the national level, which constitute a national anti-Memorandum and austerity campaign sparked by neo-liberal adjustment and austerity policies in Southern European countries. Mostly involving demonstration-marches and national strikes with claims against troika’s Memorandum and

austerity measures, for the first three years of the Greek crisis (January 2010 to December 2012) the thirty-one (31) LPEs share the following features:

- 1) high numbers of participants (minimum 5,000 - maximum 500,000);
- 2) high number of parallel and synchronized actions;
- 3) focus on national level claims challenging Troika MoU and government austerity policies;
- 4) broad, cross-class coalitions involving a large number of groups and the general public;
- 5) based in Athens' Constitution Square, addressing the Parliament;
- 6) accompanied by smaller protests in cities and towns across the country with the same claims

These LPEs are widely covered by national and transnational media depicting the discursive content of claims-making, the repertoire of related actions, the embeddedness of movement groups in multi-organizational fields, the relations between opportunities and mobilization, as well as other dimensions of public sphere issues (Kousis 1999, Koopmans 2007). Thus, as in previous periods of "thickened history" the best strategy is a "blanketing strategy" (Beissinger 1998: 290-300), utilizing multiple available sources in order to enrich the data set. Therefore five major sources were selected: *Eleftherotypia*, leftist *Rizospastis* and *Avgi* as well as alternative e-media sites, like *Indymedia* and *realdemocracy.gr* (included minutes of meetings and referenda). They were supplemented by other Greek national news sources, e.g. *To Vima*, *Ta Nea*, *Kathimerini*, *Epohi*, *tvxs.gr*, international news sources (*Guardian*, *Reuters*, *BBC*), and blogs such as *iskra.gr*, as well as the official sites of the unions.

Based on the mentions drawn from 430 articles, twenty-four (24) of the thirty-one (31) large protest events (LPEs) brought together 25,000 to 500,000 participants. Seven (7) of the 31 are LPEs involved 5,000 to 24,000 participants, and were either carried out on national commemoration days, or on transnational action days. Five of these seven LPEs were occurred on dates commemorating: (1) the refusal of Greece to allow Axis forces to enter Greece, and beginning of the country's participation in World War II, on October 28, 1940, (2) the Polytechnic (*Πολυτεχνείο*) Student uprising against the military dictatorship on November 17, 1973, (3) the unprovoked fatal shooting of 15 years old Alexis Grigoropoulos by a policeman in the centre of Athens on December 6, 2008. Three of the five related large protest events adopted new,

transnational forms of action, while also making claims concerning economic system/crisis born injustices: one following the Occupy movement on October 15, 2011, a second creating a new solidarity campaign for the Greek people, i.e. “We Are All Greeks”/ “Je suis Greque,” on February 18, 2012, and a third on the first anti-austerity strike by European unions across member states, on 14 November 2012.

The Large Protest Event-Claims approach created for this analysis draws from protest event, protest-case, as well as political claims analysis and uses national newspaper and alternative electronic media reports to code information on economic and political claims (Tilly 1978, Rucht and Neidhardt 1998, Koopmans and Statham 1999, Statham et al 2005, Kousis, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2012d).

4. The Anti-Austerity Campaign and its political outcomes

The period before the large-protests of 2010-2012 was not a period without protests and heightened contention. Quite the opposite, in the run up to the national elections of October 2009 a significant number of protest events took place. These protests were mainly about economic issues and industrial relations but they also concerned immigration, urban planning, environmental issues and international affairs (Kanellopoulos 2011). A variety of political organizations and social movement groups across the political spectrum participated, confirming in a way the “social movement society” hypothesis for Greece (see Meyer and Tarrow 1998).

The analysis that follows will illustrate and discuss how repertoires of contention and the financial crisis regime are shaping each other. The findings draw on 430 articles from the national newspapers mentioned above, covering the first years of the Greek crisis, i.e. from February 2010 to November 2012. It also reflects the major features of an anti-austerity campaign, comprised of 31 large protest events and the related claims; they are all linked to a number of parallel, significant action forms, such as strikes, marches, public meetings, demonstrations, rallies, blockades, and others.

Contenders demand that the rich are taxed, jobs are created, and social welfare (health and education) is provided. They also demand the resignation of those politicians who are responsible for the crisis, the ceasing of privatizations, and the annulment of the externally imposed austerity

policies. (Kousis 2012d). Their major claims of the protesting groups are against the unprecedented austerity laws-measures which include dramatic wage and pension decreases, tax increases, privatization of public enterprises and education, in addition to other neoliberal structural reforms. Claims stress serious concerns about the impacts of these austerity measures, especially those as regards the economy, society, sovereignty and democracy (Kousis 2012d). Protesters view the Greek government (including the parliament and the police force) as their primary target, followed by the European Commission. The second in importance, targeted group are international organizations, i.e. the Troika, IMF, the European Central Bank and Foreign Banks. The third challenged group includes financial institutions and credit agencies, the rich, and local government agencies. Least mentioned are capitalist markets, and the G20/G8. Finally, in one fifth of the events Germany is considered as a targeted state, especially in the second year, since June 2011 (Kousis 2012d).

Graph 2 depicts the participation of political parties of the left. These include KKE, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA)², the Democratic Left (DIMAR)³, and the Front of the Greek Anti-capitalist Left (ANTARSYA)⁴. Over the two-year period there is a steady increase in their participation, with SYRIZA leading, followed by KKE, ANTARSYA and DIMAR (only participating in the second year), respectively. In almost all the LPEs KKE, SYRIZA, and ANTARSYA participated separately. SYRIZA participated in the protests organised by the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) and the Greek Confederation of Public Servants (ADEDY), KKE along with the unions it controls (PAME) organised its own protests usually some hours before and some meters away from the main GSEE-ADEDY sites, while ANTARSYA and some independent unions gathered in separate sites but at the course of the demonstrations mixed with GSEE-ADEDY protestors (Kanellopoulos et al. 2013). In June 2011 KKE participated only in the general strikes and abstained deliberately from the Indignados protest camps. Coalition building proved difficult in the Greek campaign but the above findings are clearly supporting the social movement partyism case. Trade unions called the general strikes and the demonstrations but the political parties of

² SYRIZA is a coalition formed before the national elections of 2004. It comprised the old eurocommunist party, a split of KKE in 1968, another split of KKE in 1991, and some tiny extra – parliamentary Maoist, Trotsky, and autonomous groups.

³ DIMAR is a SYRIZA split in the summer of 2010 (after the beginning of the LPEs against the austerity measures).

⁴ ANTARSYA is an anti-capitalist coalition formed in 2009 (just after the December 2008 events) by extra-parliamentary groups – NAR (a split of KKE in 1989), some Trotsky and Maoist groups.

the left where those that actually supported these events due to their access to useful resources in the political system and membership overlap between oppositional parties and trade unions.

Graph 2 here

Table 1 here

4.1 The pace of Large-Protests

Just a few weeks after the 2009 elections it was announced that the public deficit of Greece was much bigger than expected. The big size of the deficit affected the probability of manipulation for the also big size of the public debt. In order to avoid bankruptcy Greece should have made use of a set of monetary policies but as a part of a monetary union this could not be done without the agreement of the rest members of the union. As a result an intense interplay between the Greek government, the EU authorities and the “markets” represented by the major rating agencies began.⁵ PASOK’s government promised to cut the public deficit by passing an austerity budget in order to have the support of the EU and “calm” the markets.

In February 2010, in response to the Greek government’s budget cuts and stability measures, a general strike by GSEE and rallies were carried out in Athens and other cities, while in March, both GSEE and ADEDY carried out a general strike against the 2nd budget cut and the new package of financial measures. At the end of April, credit rating institutes gave junk status to Greece’s main debt rating. Greece could no longer borrow from the international markets and on May 5, 2010, Papandreou signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Troika (ECB, EU, IMF) with a series of austerity measures and structural adjustment requirements as conditions for a 110bn euro loan. The Greek oppositional political parties resisted the Memorandum of Agreement intensely. KKE asked once again the exit from the eurozone and the EU and SYRIZA asked for the cancellation of the Memorandum and for an alternative EU rescue policy. ND under its new leader Antonis Samaras opposed the Memorandum in the Parliament and asked for a structural adjustment program without austerity measures. Only LAOS voted along with PASOK the Memorandum in a probable attempt to be represented as “responsible” centre-right political party. On the same day a third national strike and huge demonstrations across the country took

⁵ Timeline of the eurozone crisis, GGCRISI internal report 2014.

place against the Greek Bailout package, as well against the related Greek government pledges and measures for their implementation. Politicians and union leaders were harshly criticized in public and violence was escalating. The LPE of May 5 is also a date marked by the death of three employees in the fire – caused by a molotof bomb – that burned the bank they were working.

This period of tense political contention was succeeded by a relatively long period without LPEs that lasted until late autumn 2010. Four factors offer a possible explanation for this:

- (a) During the period of summer vacations (July-August) and on official breaks (i.e Christmas and Easter vacations) there are no LPEs. On these periods we have of course observed the emergence of various and sometimes numerous protest events (see Kanellopoulos 2011) but these events tend to be local and partial and thus do not qualify as LPEs.
- (b) The escalation of violence, and especially the death of 3 people on May 5, posed a very real collective action threat that appears to have eventually slowed down the pace of insurgency.
- (c) Until the summer of 2010, anti-austerity protests were mostly proactive. Greek economy was already in recession and unemployment was rising but the dramatic consequences of the crisis had not yet arrived in 2010. In a way the fear for the forthcoming of these consequences mobilized the protestors of the first LPEs in the spring of 2010. On the other hand the government could still claim that the Memorandum with the Troika will cure the maladies of the Greek economy.
- (d) The regional and municipal election in Greece took place in November 2010. The political parties initiating the LPEs in the previous period now gave priority to their electoral campaigns. Greek political parties traditionally control these elections and almost always those who get elected are from within the ranks of the official candidates from each party (Lyrintsis 2000, Nikolakopoulos 2002). In 2010 PASOK tried to confine the elections to their regional character whereas all the other parties gave them a “referendum against the Memorandum and the government” character. PASOK faced some serious losses comparing to the national elections of the previous year but managed to remain the first party in electoral strength by carrying 8 out 13 regions and gaining the municipalities of Athens and Thessaloniki. ND gained the remaining 5 regions. KKE retained its place as the third party in the political system. SYRIZA and DIMAR slightly improved their position whereas ANTARSYA

and far-right candidates managed to gain for the first time a nationwide electoral audience by obtaining an average 1% of the vote across almost all regions respectively.⁶

It was because of the commemorations of the 1973 University Student uprising against the military junta on 17 November and the December 2008 uprising, in reaction to the killing of a 15yrs old pupil by a policeman on 6 December, that LPEs organized and participants voiced strong claims against the 1st Memorandum. In December 15, 2010 the fourth national general strike – against the voting of the annual budget – took place in an LPE that witnessed increasing violence and citizens' bodily attack on a member of the parliament and a former ND minister. The general public became a more visible participant in the LPE.

After a short break during Christmas a new wave of LPEs started in 2011. In the February 2011 LPE, with demonstrations and the fifth national strike against the 1st Memorandum and the 3rd package of economic measures large amounts of tear gas and related chemicals were used by the police. Tradesman and self-employed citizens, immigrants and environmental activists were included in the protests. The country was deeply in recession. The number of the major actions peak in May and June 2011, due to novel as well as conventional action repertoires attracting very broad cross class coalitions – the Greek Indignados – following to a large extent the Spanish Indignados (Kanellopoulos 2012b, Stavrou 2011). Police repression subsided until early June, violence decreased and political party affiliation and references were not visible. During the LPE of the 15th of June PASOK negotiated with ND the formation of a large coalition government. Finally, Papandreou did not resign but changed several ministers of his government, offering the crucial post of the minister for economics and finance to his major party rival Evangelos Venizelos. On June 28 & 29, the seventh national strike fortified the LPE and the protestors blockaded Parliament, aiming to stop MPs from passing austerity and bailout related legislative measures, voicing their opposition to Troika's 2nd Greek Bailout package (21-6-2011). Protesters faced high levels of police repression and tear-gas, violence erupted at the end of the peaceful protests. Amnesty International calls the state to restrain police repression.

⁶ [http://ekloges-prev.singularlogic.eu/dn2010/public/index.html#{"page":"synoptiki","params":{"mode":"snom"}}](http://ekloges-prev.singularlogic.eu/dn2010/public/index.html#{)

Towards the end of July 2011 the Indignados protest camps were vanished away. Summertime once more proved to be an effective break for the development of LPEs. But this time the break was very short since the protestors were determined to return to the streets. The rate of unemployment that had doubled and the heavy taxation were posing a general threat to the wellbeing of numerous people across the country. It was precisely a case where the cost a social group must suffer if it gets active was much lower than the cost it expects to suffer if it remains inactive (Goldstone and Tilly 2001). Additionally, there were no elections ahead and the oppositional political parties didn't have to focus on electoral campaigns.

October 2011 began with a peak in the types of major actions, which included the eighth and ninth national strikes, is reached on 5 and 19-20 of October 2011, related to Troika's 3rd Greek Bailout package of "hard restructuring" (27-10-2011) and the accompanying measures. In November, just after the 28th of October commemoration of the Greek resistance against the Nazi occupation were many violent episodes occurred against government and other state officials across the country, Papandreou decided to call a referendum for the Greek people to judge whether to accept Troika policies or not. Papandreou's proposal was opposed fiercely within his own party and within core EU governments. Eventually, Papandreou stepped down as prime minister and was replaced by former ECB vice president Lucas Papademos. The newly formed coalition government backed by PASOK, ND, and LAOS was formed to sign in February 2012, a new rescue package with the Troika, – the Memorandum 2 – and lead the country to another early national elections in the Spring of 2012. Samaras justified his decision to sign the Memorandum 2 on the grounds of the fear of a Greek exit from the eurozone and because the new agreement involved a serious "hair-cut" of the public debt. The tenth 48 hours strike was carried out in the 10-12th of February 2012 LPE against the voting of the 2nd Memorandum. This LPE included approximately half a million protesters, violent clashes with the police, lootings and arsons of numerous buildings in the centre of Athens.

Since February 2012, such LPEs have not appeared, given the national elections of May 6, 2012 and June 17, 2012, where economic voting (see e.g. Kriesi 2011) was clearly reflected in the dramatic drop of the previous two ruling parties of the post-dictatorship period, especially PASOK, which ruled during the period of the crisis. Neither have they appeared in the June to August period following the elections.

However, a new series of LPEs seems to start again. SYRIZA, KKE and the general unions organized a major anti-austerity protest in the beginning of September, on the occasion of the annual international fair in Thessaloniki. On September 8 it took place a protest with over 20,000 participants in Thessaloniki. On the 26th of September GSEE and ADEDY organized the eleventh strike against the newest Troika package. The demonstrations across the country were not that big comparing to those of the previous year but the participation to the LPE of the self-employed and the small shop-owners was impressive.⁷ On October 9 and on October 18 GSEE and ADEDY with the active support of SYRIZA and KKE organised the 12th and the 13th strikes against the new measures respectively. On both occasions the number of participants to the demonstrations was well over 100,000 people.

The elections of May and June 2012 slowed down the pace of LPEs but this seems to be happening only temporarily. It is also plausible to argue that many anti-austerity protestors after some many months are tired and perhaps frustrated but it is also true that in protest cycles there are ups and downs (Tarrow 1995). The continuous austerity packages are posing a very serious threat to the well being of millions of people in Greece and elsewhere in Europe. As a result new contentious actors are formed, older ones are been reactivated and masses of people enter contentious politics. In this background the electoral campaigns should not been seen differently from the contentious repertoire. The Greek repertoire of contention 2010-2012 is merging with the electoral campaigns of the same period creating an overall crisis repertoire that fundamentally transforms the regime.

The results of May 6 and June 16 national elections

In the national elections of May 2012 ND and PASOK gathered on aggregate a 32% of the votes (ND 18.85% and PASOK 13.18%) when until then both parties were used to gather in the national elections around 80% of the votes. LAOS was also faced an electoral punishment by obtaining a mere 2,9% of the votes and loosing its parliamentary representation. The newly formed party of "Independent Greeks" – a populist split of ND parliamentarians who opposed the signing of Memorandum 2 – obtained an impressive 10.61% of the votes. However the most spectacular

⁷ As the authors of this article have observed in small cities and towns across Greece, even tobacco shops, restaurants and bars were closed.

realignment in the far-right political spectrum was the rise of the neo-nazist group of Golden Dawn that obtained almost 7% of the votes (Georgiadou 2013).

In the left political spectrum, the new party of the Democratic Left (DIMAR) – a split in 2010 of old euro communist cadres of SYRIZA who opposed its leftist turn – obtained 6.11 % of the votes. KKE arose to 8.48% of the votes but for the first time in its long history lost its position as the biggest party of the Greek left. This happened because SYRIZA, the actual winner of the national elections of May 2012, obtained an impressive 16.78% of the votes.

In the aftermath of the elections no government could be formed and a new election was called for June 2012. SYRIZA's strategy for these elections was the formation of a left government out of a coalition of all left parties. KKE refused any such possibility. As a result SYRIZA show its electoral strength to advance even further by obtaining 26.89% of the votes – the best ever outcome for a left party in Greek politics – while KKE lost almost half of its electoral power and became the smallest party of the Greek Parliament. DIMAR kept stable its electoral power (6.26%) as PASOK did (12.28%). Independent Greeks lost many voters to ND but they managed to secure a 7.51% of the votes. Golden Dawn also managed to retain its electoral strength (6.92%) despite the negative campaign against them held by the other political parties and most of the Greek institutional channels. ND eventually won the elections by obtaining 29.66% of the votes. ND's win had certainly to do with an unfrequented international pressure and a last minute alignment of the conservative voters (see also Mavris 2012).

Another crucial parameter for the result was that the participation in elections has significantly fallen reaching a historical low in the elections of June 2012 of 62.47% (see Table 2)

Table 2 here

After the election of June 2012 DIMAR accepted to join the coalition of ND and PASOK and a new government was formed under Antonis Samaras but the political spectrum in Greece had been altered dramatically. On the right-wing political spectrum for the elections of May 6 seven political parties claimed the space once dominated by ND. On the political and economic liberalism wing three parties colPEted with ND: Drasi (a party led by an ex ND minister),

Democratic Coalition (a party led by Samara's main party rival – and daughter of a former ND prime minister), and Creation Again (a newly found political platform). On the populist right wing ND had to compete with LAOS, Independent Greeks, and Golden Dawn. LAOS was the only opposition party to support the first Memorandum and later participated actively in Papademos caretaker government. But it didn't vote the second Memorandum; as a result LAOS was split with some of the party cadres joining ND.

"Independent Greeks" was formed as a political platform in February 2012 when many ND MPs split from their party because Samaras decided to change the party policy and vote for the Memorandum 2. The new party claimed itself as a movement against the "New Order" and the "Occupation" of Greece by the Troika. The ideological roots of this movement could be traced back first to the initial anti-memorandum rhetoric of Samaras and in part to the Greek Indignados campaign in June 2011. As we found in our research the Greek Indignados campaign was largely divided in two camps: the upper Syntagma camp were nationalists and conservatives in general had the lead and the lower Syntagma were leftists were experimenting with direct democracy (Stavrou 2011). It was in the upper Syntagma that a nationalistic and populist discourse about the economic crisis was manifested. This discourse was expressed in the ballots one year later through the support for Independent Greeks and to a lesser extends for Golden Dawn.

The rise of Golden Dawn has certainly to do with the economic recession but not only with that. Golden Dawn attracted voters from the whole political spectrum on the grounds of an openly racist, anti-immigrant, and anti-parliamentary campaign (Ellinas 2012, Xenakis 2012).

On the center and center-left political space the impact of the LPEs was impressive. PASOK, the dominant party after the transition of 1974, was abandoned by many of its cadres and mainly by millions of its voters. After each austerity package a number of MPs were refusing to support the government and were leaving PASOK to join either SYRIZA or DIMAR. Main trade unions traditionally controlled by PASOK agreed then to support SYRIZA. As a result PASOK and the center-left was sidelined to a narrow 12% to 15% while the left (in all its variations) was launched to an impressive overall 35% to 38% of the popular vote.

A first hand conclusion on the impacts of the Greek debt crisis would be that it has drastically changed the political system. However, as this research tried to show, this was only possible

through the active intervention of an impressive series of LPEs. The tense interaction between challenger and challenged groups caused major realignments in the Greek political system and the successive mobilizations against the austerity packages polarized internally the Greek political parties (see table 3).

Table 3 here

As is shown in Table 3 the pattern of the Greek political crisis is as follows: The government passes a package of austerity measures, strikes and demonstrations often led by the political parties of the left opposing the measures, some governmental MPs do not back-up the measures, recession ensues, rises in unemployment rates, growing distrust of the wider public towards the political system, new austerity measures, new demonstrations, new MPs losses, etc.

If we follow Kriesi's (2011) conceptualization on economic voting the Greek case stands somewhere in between the cases of WE and CEE countries: both ND that attempted to impose austerity measures in 2009 and PASOK that imposed austerity in 2010-2012 faced a severe electoral punishment like in most WE cases, but unlike WE the political system changed radically. New political parties, and especially far right parties, appeared and had an immediate success in the ballots like in many CEE cases.

Nevertheless, at the same time unlike both CEE and WE the political parties of the left in Greece were significantly empowered. The Greek left took advantage of its already established institutional position and along with the Greek trade unions and many small SMO's played an important role in the mounting of the large-protests against austerity and structural adjustment policies.

The "government constraint" hypothesis was only partially confirmed. In the first elections of 2012 the voters indeed evaluated incumbents on the basis of fluctuations in economic growth and especially on evaluations of their personal economic situation. Not only they punished the incumbents PASOK government but also did the same to ND and LAOS as integral parts of the Greek power block of the last decades. In the second elections of 2012 where the question of power was at stake and enormous pressures from international institutions were held upon Greek voters (Mavris 2012) the "government constraint hypothesis" was in part confirmed. The

pro-establishment political forces managed a narrow victory and formed another coalition government but on the other hand the anti-establishment forces also advanced in the ballots. If this empowerment will lead to a radical policy change at odds with international pressures and the “will of the markets” remains to be seen.

As for the exit hypothesis the Greek case seems to support the argument: participation to the elections has dropped sharply in a country where used to significantly high. Even participation in protests as an indicator of interest in politics has fallen. Protest since February 2012 and during the summer of 2012 seemed to subside.

The repertoire of contention merged with economic voting and altered the Greek political system (see also McAdam and Tarrow 2010) but an automatic return “to the streets” in the short run seems rather improbable. Participation in strikes has become unbearable for many workers due to rising economic cost and many people are probably disappointed since austerity policies are still in force besides all oppositional efforts. In 2013 general strikes and LPEs lost their momentum. PASOK cadres managed to remain in office in GSEE and ADEDY administration blocking the support to various sectoral strikes and protest that broke out. But, it seems to us that the main reason for the retreat of LPEs is the rise of SYRIZA as the major oppositional party. SYRIZA a typical case of social movement party is leading in the polls and is widely expected to win in the forthcoming elections. And through SYRIZA’s rise to power is expected by many for the Memorandum and austerity policies to be altered.

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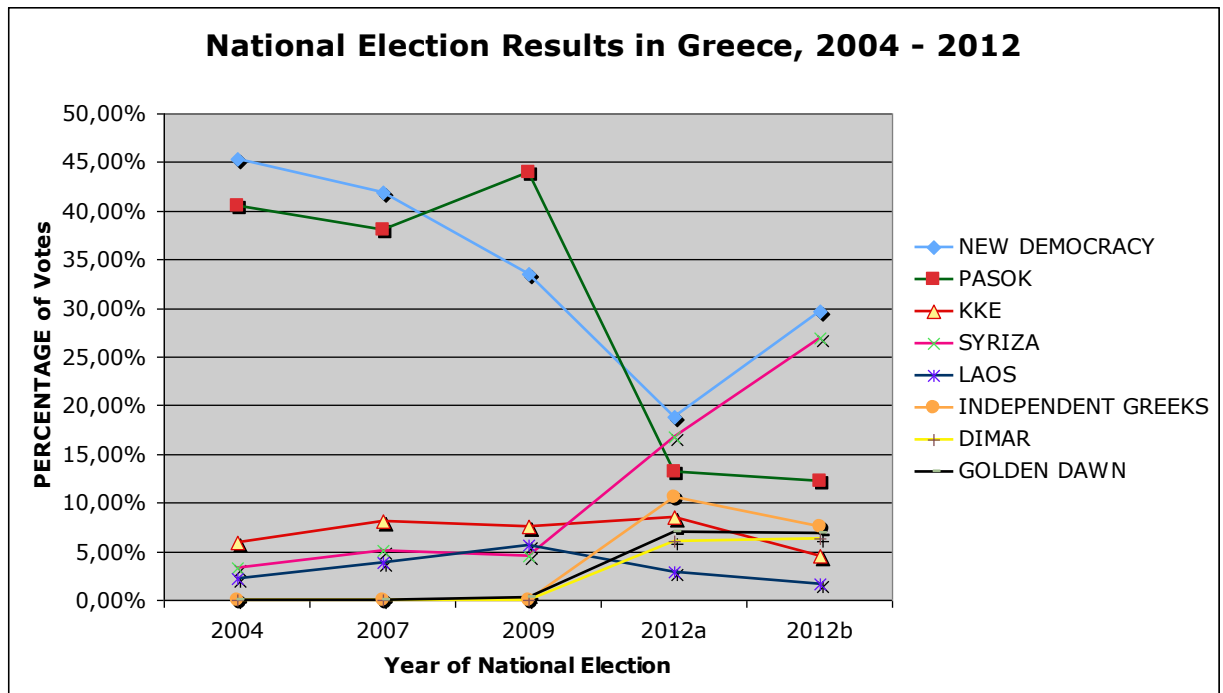
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Graph 1. National Election Results in Greece, 2004-2012 (Source: Ministry of Interior)



Graph 2. Political Party participation in the LPEs, 2010-2012

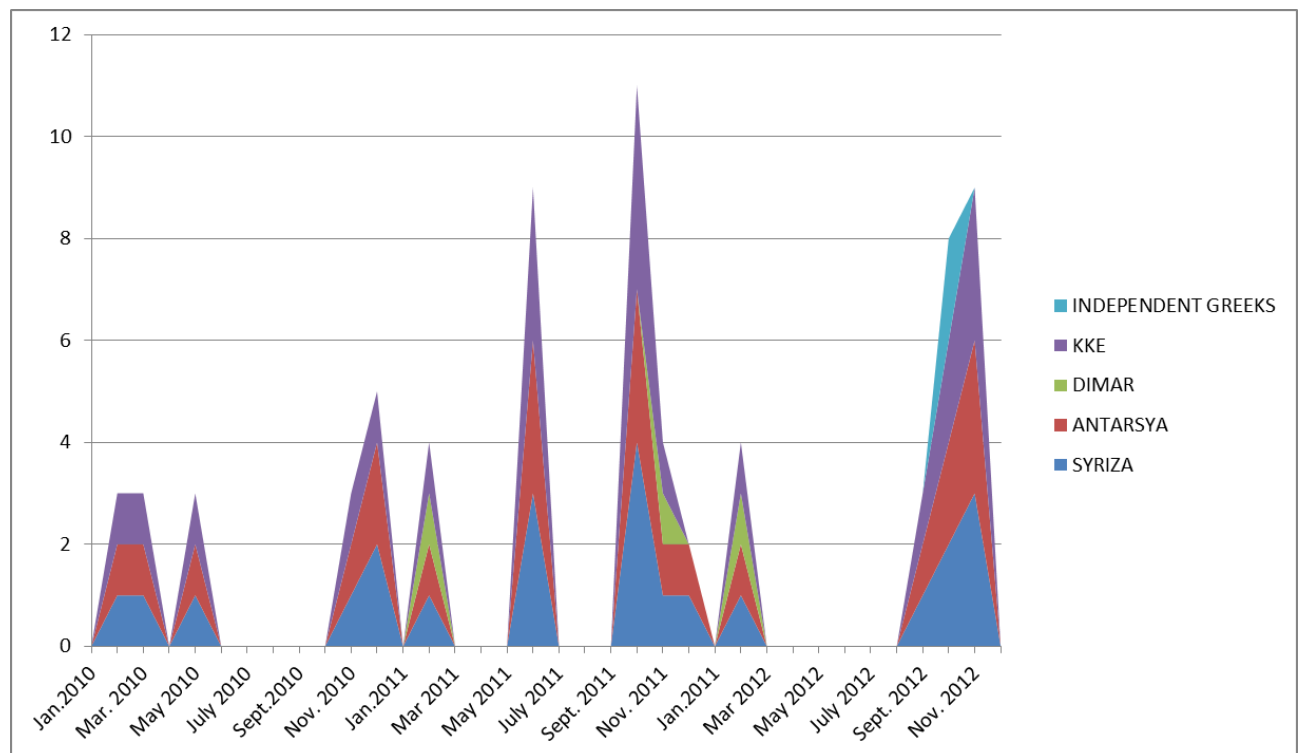


Table 1. Political Party affiliation of 1st Primary Protest Actor

Primary/Initiating/Organizer Protest Actors	Participation	
	in No. of LPEs	Percent
ANTARSYA	15	46.90%
DIMAR	3	9.40%
KKE	16	50.00%
PASOK	6	18.80%
SYRIZA	20	62.50%
Total N of LPEs	32	100.00 %

Table 2. Participation in the Greek National Elections, 2004-2012 (%)

National Election Years (participation %)	Percent Change
2004 - 2007 (76.50-74.15%)	-3.00
2007-2009 (74.15-70.95%)	-4.31
2009-2012 May (70.95-65.10%)	-8.25
2012M- 2012 June (65.10-62.47%)	-4.04

(Source: Ministry of Interior)

Table 3. Economic, Political & Social Aspects of the Greek Crisis

Y E A R	Troika imposed & Government approved and promoted Neo- liberal policies & measures	No of new parti es	% Un- emplo yed	% SME closu res	No. of SME closures	% change of GDP [econo mic growth]	% trust in Greek govt	No. of MPs dismi sed	No of LPEs
2 0 1 0	1 ^o , 2 ^o stability measures	2	11.7	18.0		-0.36	25	3	6
	1 ^o Memorandum								
	Multipurpose Act		13.3	23.4		-6.78	21	1	
2 0 1 1	Μεσοπρόθεσμο	2	16.1	24.4	64,000	-7.57	16	1	15
	Multipurpose Act		19.2	29.6		-6.24	8	1	
2 0 1 2	11 άρθρα Multipurpose Act	2	23.1	31.0	90,000	-6.71	6	45	9
	2 ^o Memorandum PSI								
	Μεσοπρόθεσμο “3 ^o Memorandum”		24.8		120,000	-6.90	7	8	