

Comparison of Elections for the European and the National Parliament: the case of Greece*

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Introduction

The elections for the European Parliament have some common characteristics in most countries of the European Union. Based on these characteristics the elections for the European Parliament have been described as second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). The most important of these common characteristics relates to the abstention percentages which are much higher in the European elections than in the preceding elections for the National Parliament. This observation is open to different interpretations but the most prevailing is the one which supports that the voters find the outcome of the elections totally unimportant. Indeed, according to Heath et al (1999) voters believe that the outcome of the elections for the European Parliament are even less important than the outcome of local elections and do likewise, i.e. their participation to the European elections is lower than their participation to the elections of the local (sub-national) authorities.

Two other common features of the elections for the European Parliament observed frequently in most countries of the European Union are related to loss of power for categories of parties. In the elections for the European Parliament we usually observe loss of power of the major parties and loss of power of the parties participating in the national government. For the major parties this loss can be interpreted easily because voters do not hesitate in European elections to move temporarily from larger to smaller parties since this movement will have no significant effect on the national political system. With regard to the losses of the parties participating in the government, we must take into account the timing of elections in relation to the time the national government was formed, since the popularity of the parties involved in the government follows an electoral cycle. Their popularity begins with increased values (compared to their electoral strength) immediately after forming a government, then their popularity declines until the middle of the electoral period, followed by ascending path until the next election. According to Schmitt (2005) this cycle of popularity is met in Western democracies but not in the new democracies of Eastern Europe.

Freire & Teperoglou (2007) analyzing the European elections until 2004 in Greece, Spain and Portugal argue that in the future we will need to interpret not the differences but rather the lack of differences between European and National elections. Although in the future this may happen, at least the two elections held in 2009 in Greece show that there are still significant differences between electoral behaviour in the elections for the European Parliament and the elections for the National Parliament. In the 2009 European elections, the turnout in Greece was

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significantly reduced compared to the previous parliamentary elections of 2007 and to the parliamentary election of 2009 that took place only a few months after the European elections with the same electorate. In this paper we analyze the results of the Parliamentary and the European elections of 2009 and we attempt to present factors which may explain the high abstention rate from the European elections and the characteristics of the abstainers.

European Parliament elections

In the European elections of June 7, 2009, marked by unprecedented low turnout, votes were approximately 2.1 million fewer than the parliamentary elections of 2007 and approximately 1 million fewer than the previous European elections of 2004. PASOK received 36.6% of the votes and left ND in the second place with 32.3% of the votes, a figure reduced by more than 10 percentage points compared with what ND received in 2004.

Table 1 Official results of the 2009 elections for the European Parliament

	2009			2004		
	%	N	Seats	%	N	Seats
PASOK	36,64%	1878982	8	34,03%	2083327	8
ND	32,29%	1655722	8	43,01%	2633574	11
KKE	8,35%	428282	2	9,48%	580396	3
LAOS	7,15%	366637	2	4,12%	252429	1
SYRIZA	4,70%	240930	1	4,16%	254447	1
Ecologists	3,49%	178987	1	0,67%	40873	

Source: Ministry of the Interior, <http://www.ypes.gr>

The total number of seats in the European Parliament distributed to Greece was reduced to 22 by 24. Despite this reduction PASOK maintained the same number of seats in comparison with 2004. ND has lost three seats and KKE has lost one seat. SYRIZA (SYN for the 2004 elections) remained with the same number of seats. LAOS added one more earned seat to the seat it had earned after the 2004 elections, and Ecologists have won one seat.

Chatzipantelis and Andreadis (2009a), analyze separately the electoral behaviour of those who voted for each of the two major parties in the parliamentary elections of 2007. According to their estimates, these two groups of voters (PASOK₀₇ and ND₀₇) appear with the same national abstention rate (about 30%) from the European elections. The differences between these two groups of voters are found at the local level. Abstention from the European elections of voters who voted for PASOK in 2007 (PASOK₀₇) appears more uniform, without significant variability. For example, in most constituencies (32 out of 56) the abstention rate of PASOK₀₇ voters ranges between 28% -32%. ND₀₇ voters' abstention is less than PASOK₀₇ voters' abstention in Macedonia. The opposite is observed in Attica and Crete with particular intensity in the constituency of Heraklion where abstention from the European elections between those who had voted ND in 2007 is estimated at 31%, while the equivalent rate in the PASOK₀₇ is estimated at about 22%.

The same analysis shows that the national loyalty rate for ND is 54% that is 10 points below the corresponding rate of PASOK (64%). Apart from the abstention rate of 30% estimated for ND₀₇ voters we should also mention the transition rates of ND₀₇ voters to PASOK (3%) and LAOS (5%). Thus, PASOK keeps 64% of those who had voted PASOK in 2007, loses 30% of its power due to abstinence and only 6% of PASOK₀₇ voters have moved to other parties (mainly to SYRIZA and Ecologists). On the other hand, ND, apart from the 30% loss owed to abstention, had to cope with the high defection rate of its voters that reach 16% of those who had voted ND in 2007.

National elections

In 2004, Kostas Karamanlis won the election, promising administrative and economic reforms and openness. In 2007, he called a snap election. Karamanlis attributed his decision to the necessity to renew the popular mandate to move forward in implementing the new state budget and the Constitutional Review on education, justice, and transparency issues.

ND won the 2007 elections. However, the difference between the two major parties declined to around 3.7 percentage points from approximately 4.8 in 2004, and ND occupied narrow majority (152 of 300) of seats in the parliament. Despite this narrow majority, the dominance of the ND in the political scene was overwhelming, mainly due to the failure of PASOK to exploit the reduction of the strength of the ND by around 3.5 percentage points since the strength of PASOK decreased by approximately 2.5 percentage points.

Although the Government of ND in 2004 had taken power promising fight against corruption and interlocking, several of the government executives supposed to involve in scandals that occupied public opinion even before ND won the parliamentary elections in 2007. New scandals emerged after the 2007 elections, but they did not affect the positive image of public opinion to the Prime Minister. The popularity of Prime Minister dropped substantially after the full coverage he provided to the members of his government that seemed to be involved in scandals in September 2008. After this crucial moment, according to opinion polls, PASOK came in first place in terms of voting intentions, and it remained first, even widening the gap with ND until the last polls published 15 days before the election on October 4, 2009.

The parliamentary election of October 4, 2009, is the 13th election for the Greek parliament since the fall of junta in 1974. The elections were called early after a personal decision of the incumbent Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis. Karamanlis cited the global financial crisis and that he was enforced by the decision of PASOK to lead the country to mandatory parliamentary elections after declining the proposal for a common candidate for the election of the President of the Republic in March 2010.

The elections of October 4, 2009, have closed a cycle of governance of Greece by ND, which started after the elections of March 7, 2004. PASOK won a broad parliamentary majority of 160 of the 300 seats in the parliament that allows PASOK to form autonomous government, and the difference ND exceeded 10 percentage points.

PASOK got some 3 million votes, or about as many it got in the parliamentary elections of 2004 and about 300 thousand votes more than it got in the parliamentary elections of 2007. Therefore, the closure of the cycle of ND government finds PASOK with the same absolute number of votes. The figures that change the image of PASOK between 2004 and 2009 are twofold: the first has to do with the number of votes cast, which fell from approximately 7.5 million to approximately 7.04 million. This means that while in 2004 the 3 million votes of PASOK accounted for 40.55% of the valid votes; in 2009, the same absolute number represents nearly 44% of the valid votes. The second element is the dramatic decline of the strength of ND.

Table 2. Results of the parliamentary elections in Greece, 2007 and 2009

	2009			2007		
	N	% of valid	Seats	N	% of valid	Seats
PASOK	3,012,373	43.92%	160	2,727,279	38.10%	102
ND	2,295,967	33.48%	91	2,994,979	41.84%	152
KKE	517,154	7.54%	21	583,750	8.15%	22
LAOS	386,152	5.63%	15	271,809	3.80%	10
SYRIZA	315,627	4.60%	13	361,101	5.04%	14
Ecologists	173,449	2.53%		75,502	1.05%	
Other	157,620	2.30%		144,586	2.02%	

Source: Ministry of the Interior, <http://www.yypes.gr>

The vote share of ND is the lowest it got in any election for the parliament since the establishment of the party in 1974. From more than 3.3 million votes in 2004, ND fell just under 3 million votes in 2007 and around 2.3 million in 2009. As a result in about 5.5 years, ND lost nearly one in three voters who voted for it in 2004.

The percentage of ND in 2009 is lower than that in 2007 and in all 56 constituencies. While in 2007, ND was at the first place in 43 constituencies; in the elections of 2009, ND ranks first in only 6 constituencies. Three of them are located in the Peloponnese (Argolis, Laconia, and Messenia), and the remaining three are in Macedonia (Kastoria, Pieria, and Serres). In almost all the constituencies of Macedonia, the decline in the percentage of ND from 2007 to 2009 is less than the decline occurring at national level (8.4%). Finally, crucial for the low vote share of ND is the dramatic decline of ND power in all 5 constituencies in Attiki, where ND seems to have lost more than 1 in 4 of 2007 ND voters and approximately 4 in 10 of 2004 ND voters.

The combined vote share of both major parties is limited to 77.5%, which is the lowest combined vote share since 1981 when PASOK formed government for the first time in Greece. However, the reduction does not benefit any of the parties of the left that appear with reduced strength compared with that in 2007. Of the five parties that elect representatives to the parliament except PASOK, only LAOS appears with increased power. LAOS increased the total number of its votes by 110 thousands and the number of seats by 50% from 10 in 2007 to 15 seats in 2009. Finally, the growing power of the Ecologists–Greens is notable. Although they have not managed to overcome the 3% threshold to elect representatives to parliament, Ecologists–Greens have got more than double the absolute number of votes they have got in the 2007 election.

Data and Methods

For the analysis of the electoral outcome of October 4, 2009 the data of the exit-poll organised by five channels (NET, Mega Channel, ANT1, Alpha and Alter) and five polling companies (GPO, Opinion, Alco, MARC, Metron Analysis and MRB-RASS) have been used. According to the design of the survey, data have been collected from 150 sampling points. A total of 11,553 voters were approached. From these, 9956 (response rate 86.2%) have answered the exit poll questions.

Diagram 1 shows that there are differences of non response rates to the exit poll between different age groups. In particular, it appears that more than 9 out of 10 voters aged 18-24 were willing to participate to the exit poll since the non response rate is estimated at 8.7%. In the 25-34 age group the non response rate is increased to 11% while in age groups covering the range from 35 to 64 years the non response rate is about 14% -15%. The largest non response rate was noticed in the group of voters that have surpassed the 64 years.

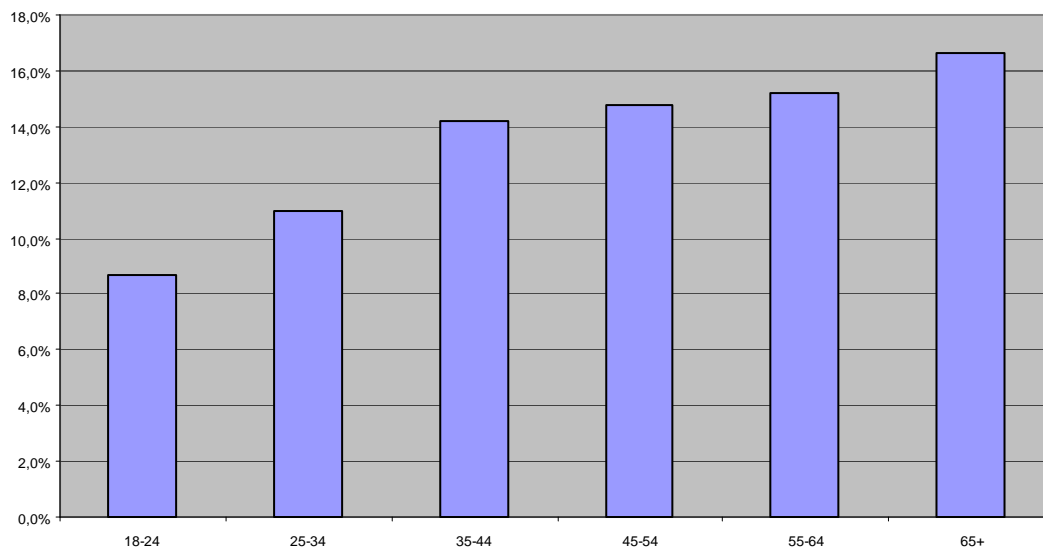


Diagram 1 Non response by age group

Results

From the analysis of the time of voting decision we have the following findings: The majority of Greeks has already decided what to vote before the beginning of the pre-election period. More specifically 45.4% of those who participated in the poll answered "I always vote the same" and 28,2% answered that they have decided what to vote a long time ago. On the other hand, 11.4% waited until the Election Day to decide, while 14.4% decided before the last day but within the 30 days preceding the Election Day.

In all age groups there are some voters who do not decide which party they will vote until the Election Day. The probability for someone to wait until the Election Day to decide what to vote depends strongly on the age group to which he/she belongs. For example, while more than one out of five young voters aged 18-24 decide what to vote on the very last day, this applies to fewer than one in 20 voters aged over 64

years. Observing the corresponding rate for the other age groups we conclude that the older the voter the smaller is the likelihood to decide what to vote on the last day.

A similar conclusion is reached for voting decision within the last month before Election Day. More generally, if for each age group we add the percentages of those who had decided what they would vote the last day, the last week, the last 15 days and the last month, it occurs that 42.6% of young people aged 18-24, 38.8% of voters aged 25-34, 30.3% of voters aged 35-44, 21.4% of voters aged 45-54, 15.4% of voters aged 45-54 and 11.6% of voters who are older than 64 years have decided what to vote some time in the last 30 days before the Election Day.

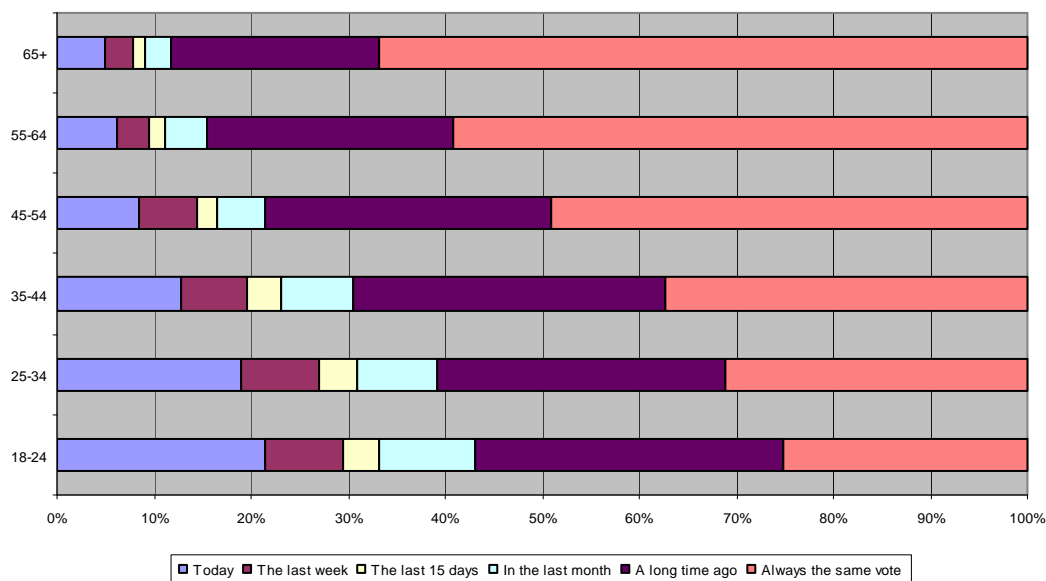


Diagram 2 Decision time by age group

Exactly the opposite result is observed in the percentages of voters in each age group who gave the answer that they always vote the same political party. This response was given by fewer than one in four voters aged 18-24. In the age groups 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64 the percentage of those who always vote the same political party raises respectively to 30.9%, 37.1%, 49.0%, 59.0 %, to reach a 66.1% among voters over 64 years.

The distribution of vote motive is presented in Table 3. Half of the voters voted to support the political party they like. Overall, around three out of four voters choose the positive vote, since those who voted in support of the party they like, are complemented by those voting to choose the best prime minister (18%) and those who vote to elect the Member of Parliament they prefer. In negative voting we include those who voted to disapprove the current government (14.2%) and those who wish to disapprove the party or parties they do not like (4.9%).

Table 3 National elections 2009. Vote motive

Vote motive	Count	Percent
support the party you like	4994	50,2
disapprove the current government	1415	14,2
choose the best Prime Minister	1795	18,0
disapprove the party (or parties) you do not like	491	4,9
support the candidate MP(s) you like	767	7,7
No answer	494	5,0

Table 4 show the voter transition rates between the 2007 and 2009 elections for the national parliament. PASOK enjoys a very high loyalty rate (94.7%) among the voters who voted for PASOK in 2007. It also has significant earnings from the entire political spectrum. PASOK earns mostly from Ecologists and SYRIZA but it also earns from the group of voters who had voted ND in 2007. About one in ten of ND₀₇ voters moved to PASOK in the 2009 Parliamentary elections. The influence of PASOK is particularly high among voters who were not entitled to vote in the 2007 elections. In this group of new voters PASOK attracts 42.4% of the preferences. Finally, it is remarkable that PASOK wins 37.5% of those voters who had chosen to abstain from the 2007 Parliamentary elections.

Table 4 Voter transition rates. National elections 2007-2009

2007 - 2009	ND	PASOK	KKE	SYRIZA	LAOS	Ecologists
ND	78,3%	9,7%	1,5%	1,7%	5,1%	1,7%
PASOK	1,7%	94,7%	1,0%	1,0%	,7%	,6%
KKE	2,2%	11,6%	78,2%	3,3%	1,2%	2,4%
SYRIZA	1,9%	20,4%	3,2%	64,2%	1,3%	6,7%
LAOS	15,1%	12,3%	2,7%	1,8%	63,9%	1,2%
Ecologists	5,1%	27,5%	2,2%	4,3%	1,4%	55,1%
New Voter	20,1%	42,4%	8,9%	5,8%	7,6%	4,9%
Abstained	19,6%	37,5%	8,8%	6,7%	5,8%	7,1%

ND in addition to the aforementioned loss to PASOK, it also loses about 5% of its voters who move to LAOS. ND displays losses towards other parties as well. On the other hand, ND wins about 15% of LAOS₀₇ voters and about one in five voters who had not participated in the elections of 2007 (either new or abstained). The limited earnings in conjunction with the small profits from PASOK (1.7%) cannot balance the aforementioned large losses, resulting in substantial reduction of the percentage of ND.

Abstention from the European Elections

Of the 9956 voters who voted on October 4, 2009 for the Greek Parliament and participated in the exit poll, there are 2018 (20.3%) voters who have abstained from the elections for the European Parliament. Diagram 3 shows that the abstention rate depends on the age. The turnout of the European elections decreases as the age increases. More specifically in the age groups 18-24, 25-34 and 35-44 abstention rates are 33.2%, 30.3% and 23.1%, i.e. above the overall average abstention rate. On the contrary older people appear with abstention rates below average, and specifically the voters aged 45-54 and 55-64 abstained from the European elections with percentages

17.4% and 13.2% respectively, and from those who are older than 64 years less than one in 10 (8.5%) has abstained from the elections for the European Parliament.

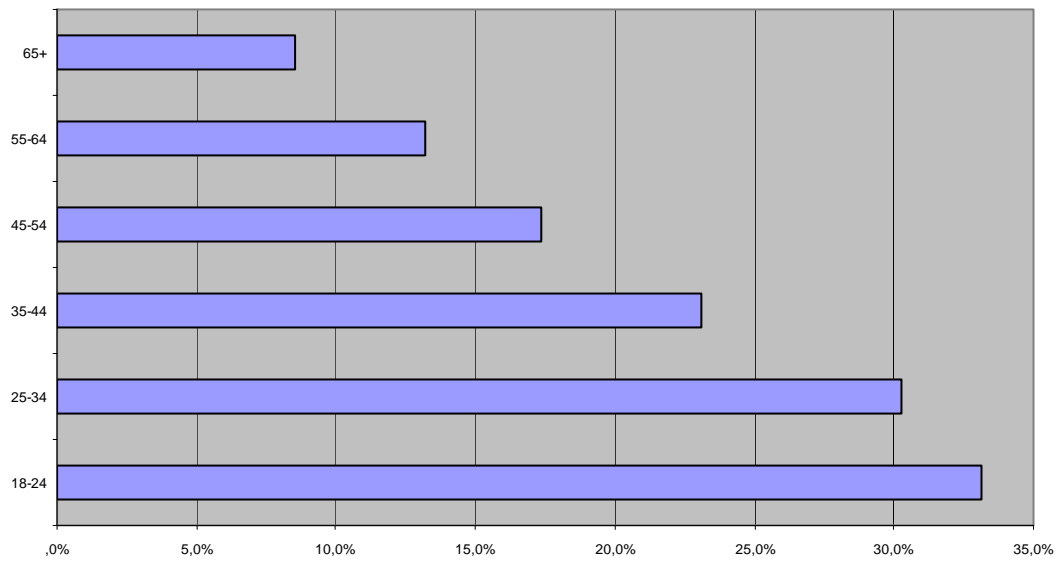


Diagram 3 Abstention from EP elections by age group

The abstention from the elections for the European Parliament is greater among graduates of secondary and higher education (about 23%) and is significantly reduced (11.7%) between those with lower levels of education. Also, the abstention rate depends on the current occupation. Smaller abstention rates from the European elections are observed among those who are Retired (9.7%) Farmers - Fishermen (11.1%), Public Sector Employees (13.2%), Housewives (16.5%), while the highest percentages of abstention appear to Private Sector Employees (28.7%), Unemployed (29.0%) and Students (35.7%). Due to election system many students who study in Universities away from home (circa 200,000 out of 600,000) aren't able to vote in their University town. Considering June is the month of their semester exams, this is something we should take into account.

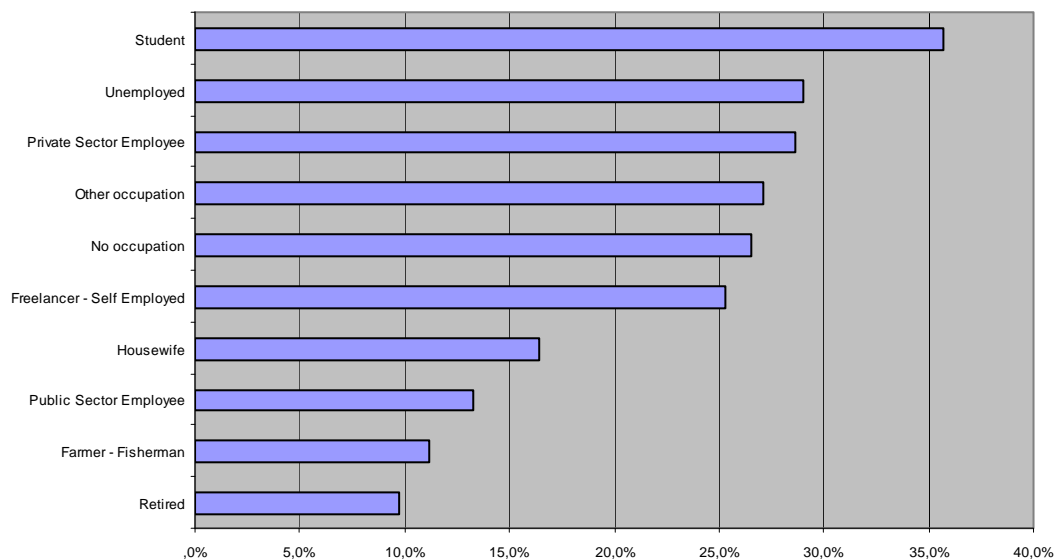


Diagram 4 Abstention from EP elections by occupation

Diagram 5 shows the abstention rate from European Parliament elections by 2007 vote. The study of the attitude of abstention from the elections for the European Parliament compared to the choice of vote in parliamentary elections of 2007 shows that the greatest abstention rates are observed among those who in 2007 had voted SYRIZA (26.4%), Ecologists (24.6%) or some other of the smaller parties (25.7%). On the other hand, the abstention rate of ND (18.7%) is less than the abstention rate of KKE (19.7%) and slightly higher than the rates of abstention observed among PASOK voters (14.5%) and LAOS voters (14.8%). After the announcement of the results of European elections the government of New Democracy had tried to justify its reduced rate, arguing that the voters of ND have not left ND, or moved to another party but had preferred temporarily to abstain. The data presented in this project and the reality of the outcome of the 2009 parliamentary elections dispute ND interpretation of the outcome of the European elections.

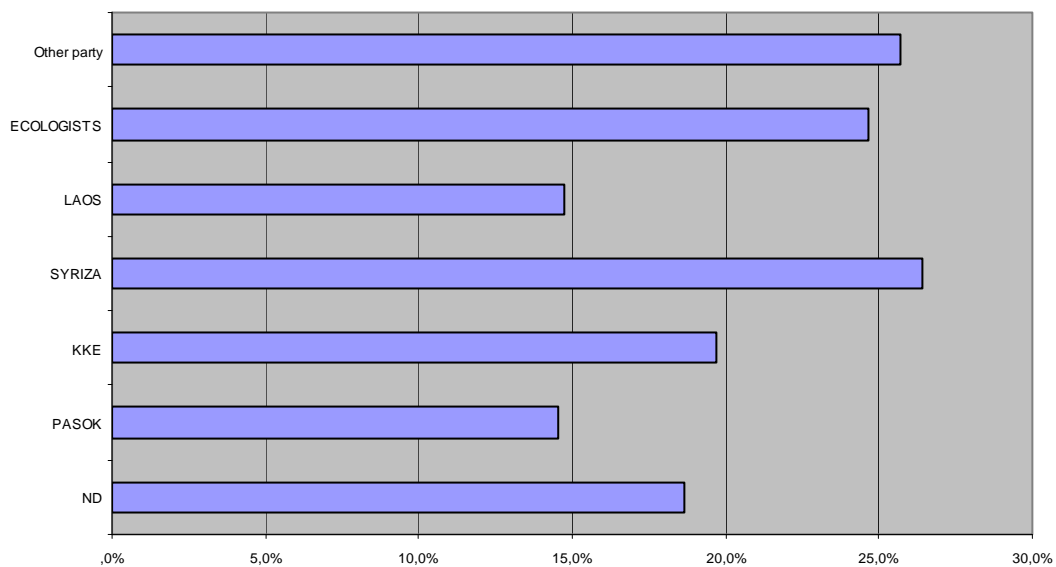


Diagram 5 Abstention from EP elections by 2007 vote

Comparing the electoral behaviour, in the parliamentary elections of 2009, of those who abstained and those who participated in the European Elections, we reach the conclusion that in the group of those who abstained from the European elections the percentages of both major parties are reduced by 6% (ND from 30.2% to 24.1% and PASOK from 46.8% to 40.5%). In the same group the percentages of the smaller parties appear higher. Particularly strengthened seems to be the party of Ecologists which in the group of abstainers nearly triples its power in relation to the power it has among those who participated in the 2009 European elections. (Diagram 6)

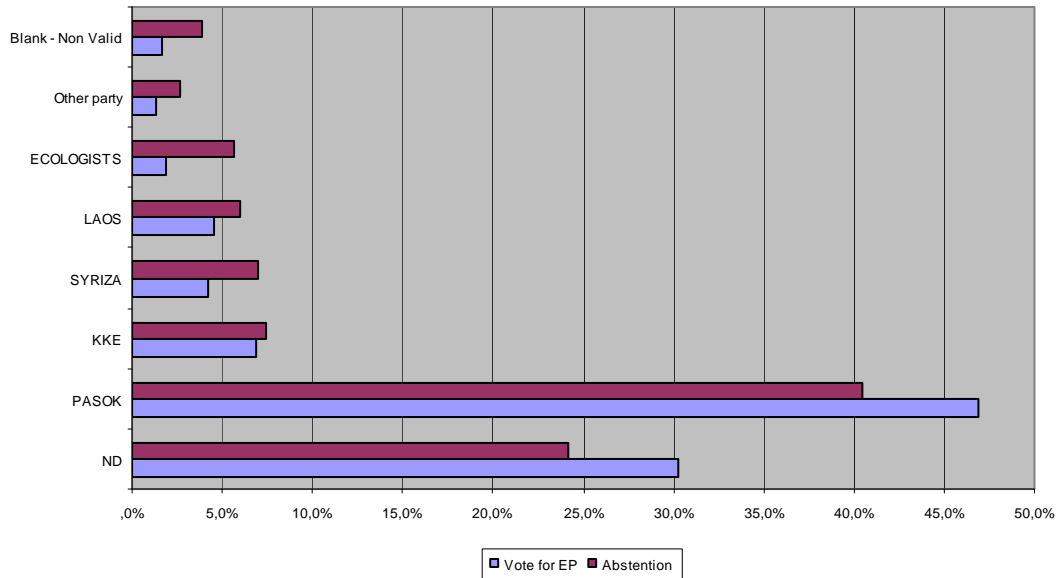


Diagram 6 Comparison of national elections voting distributions

According to Diagram 7, there is a significant difference between those who abstained from and those who participated in the European elections in terms of vote motives in the parliamentary elections of 2009. From those who participated in the 2009 European elections only 16.7% voted in the parliamentary elections motivated by the need to express their disapproval to some person or some parties. In the group of those who abstained from the European elections this percentage increases to 28.7% and the percentage of those having voted in the parliamentary elections motivated by the need to support their party significantly reduces from 54% to 35.6%. To sum up, those who abstained from the European elections went to the polls for the parliamentary elections on October 4, 2009 more willing to disapprove other parties and less inclined to support one party than those who had participated in the 2009 European elections.

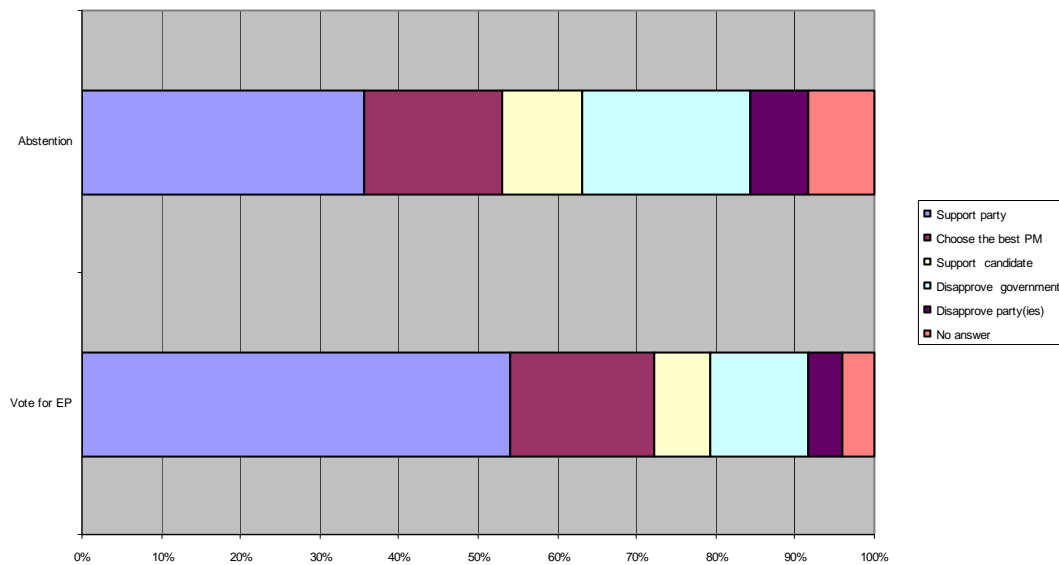


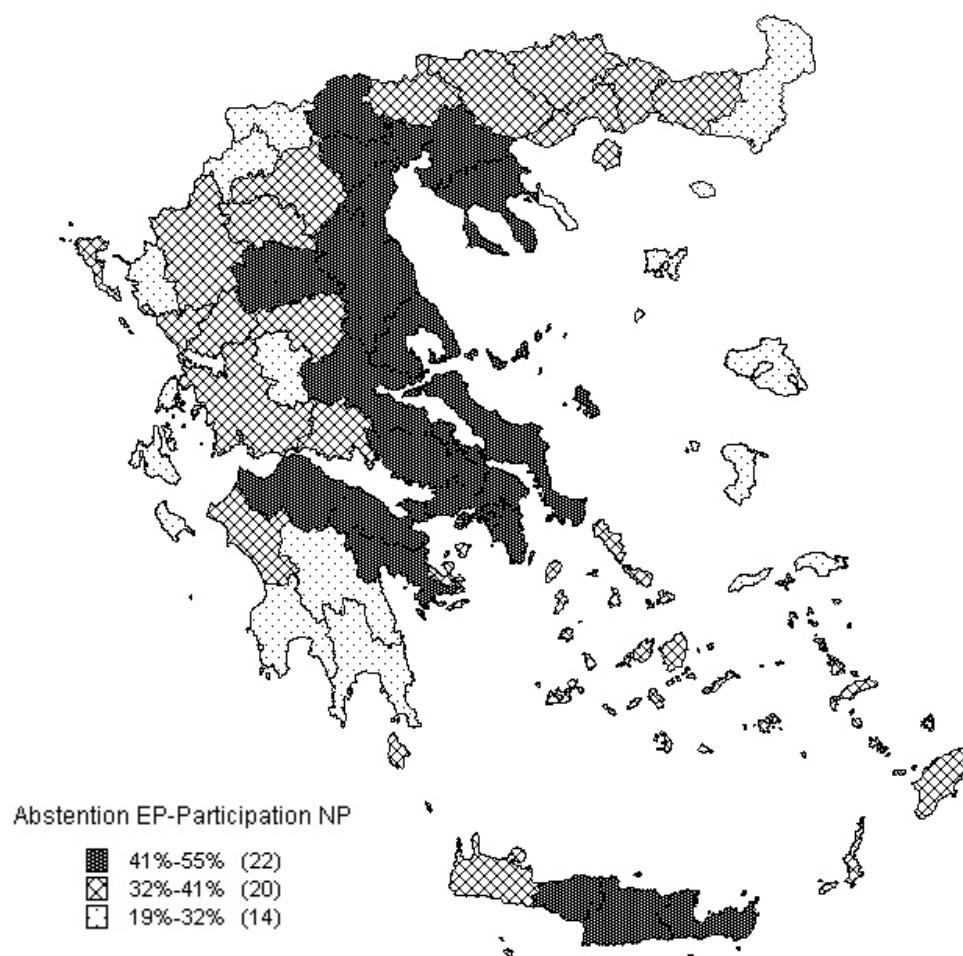
Diagram 7 Comparison of vote motives

Ecological inference estimates

In this section the VTR algorithm (Andreadis and Chadjipadelis, 2009b) is used to estimate how many of the voters who have abstained from the 2009 elections for the European Parliament, have chosen to participate in the 2009 Parliamentary elections. The method has been used successfully for the estimation of voter transition rates in various elections. For instance, Chadjipadelis and Andreadis (2007b) provide estimates of voter transitions towards the Centre Union in the Greek parliamentary elections of 1963 and 1964 and they present (2007a) how Cypriots have voted in the 2004 referendum for the Annan Plan in Cyprus. Using the results of the 2009 elections for the European Parliament in Greece and the Greek Parliamentary elections of 2009, the estimated percentage of abstainers from the EP election who have participated in the Parliamentary elections is 40%. In addition to the national level estimate, VTR algorithm provides estimates of the aforementioned percentage in each constituency. These estimates are displayed in Map 1.

The map shows three groups of constituencies. The first group includes the constituencies where abstention rate from the parliamentary elections is significantly lower than the abstention rate from the European elections. This group consists of constituencies in which more than 41% of people having abstained in the European elections went to the polls and voted for the Parliamentary elections. The constituencies are spread around the larger cities of Greece: Athens, Thessaloniki, Patra, Heraklion, Larisa. The second group includes the constituencies in which people who abstained from the European elections voted for the Parliamentary elections with a percentage ranging from 32% to 41%. The last group consists of zones of related constituencies i.e. the constituencies of the Ionian Islands (Lefkada, Zakynthos and Cephalonia) and the North Aegean (Samos, Lesbos, Chios), the neighbouring constituencies of southern Peloponnese (Messinia, Lakonia and Arcadia) and Western Macedonia (Kastoria, Florina). In this group of constituencies the percentage of those who have abstained from the 2009 European elections and voted for 2009 parliamentary elections starts from 18% and does not exceed 32%. In these constituencies the abstention from European elections is not an occasional phenomenon associated only with the reduced interest of citizens for the European elections but it is a phenomenon with more permanent characteristics. All areas of the third group include constituencies that are associated with high levels of external and internal migration. This fact partly explains the permanent observations of high abstention rates..

Map 1 Abstention EP 2009 – Participation NP 2009



Discussion

Comparative observation of the results of both 2009 elections reinforces the view that the European elections are faced by Greek voters as second order elections. Reduced participation, observed mainly in urban areas and younger ages. There was almost a balanced reduction of turnout according to party preference. ND has tried to interpret the electoral results considering that among the voters who have abstained from the European elections, its share was high. The results however prove that the relative share of PASOK was increased by 58% between the European and National elections (almost 1.1 million of votes), ND share was increased by 35% (600.000), the share of KKE by 20%, LAOS 5%, SYRIZA 33%, the Ecologists remained stable and the overall increase was almost 40%. In the European elections LAOS and Ecologists had already taken their total earnings in relation to previous elections. The mere juxtaposition of the figures shows that a significant proportion of voters moved to PASOK from ND and secondarily from KKE between the two elections (European and Parliamentary). The flow of voters towards PASOK in the 2009 Parliamentary election can be explained in terms of the governance issue, which is a strong determinant in parliamentary elections and a weak one in European elections. The choice for the 2009 parliamentary election was formed long before the Election Day

for 75% of the electorate and the victory of PASOK was also determined a long time ago.

Abstention from the 2009 European elections has geographic, age and party preference characteristics. A large part of those who chose to abstain from the European elections turned to PASOK. Especially this part of the electorate shifted from its previous selection (in 2007) to PASOK in 2009 by widening the difference between PASOK and ND to 11%. We should point that this change took place the first half of 2009 and it was not expressed in the European elections mainly because the flow of voters toward PASOK concerns the demand for governance and not general structural features of partisan identification.

The elections of October 4, 2009, mark more than the change between PASOK and ND to power. Essentially, PASOK dominates the political scene, and it is able to govern with a comfortable majority of 160 members. In this way, with the departure of ND of the power, a two-year cycle of a government with a very narrow majority that began in September 2007 with the election of 152 ND MPs and continued with 151 ND MPs has closed.

ND was the big loser in the election. From absolute and undisputed master of the political landscape of 2004, in the parliamentary elections 2009, ND has reached the lowest power level since the establishment of the party.

The Greek Parliamentary Election of 2007 was marked by a considerable amount of protest voting and voter transitions from the two major parties towards the smaller parties. At the aftermath of the election, political analysis in Greece was dealing with the question if the smaller parties would manage to convert the aforementioned protest vote to a solid electoral base. The answer seems negative for KKE and SYRIZA. For both left parties, the outcome of the ballot box cannot be pleasant. However, SYRIZA went to the Parliamentary elections after a period of internal turbulence that eventually put even the entrance of SYRIZA to the parliament in question. On the other hand, LAOS, having 15 members in the new parliament, has the ability to cause a roll call vote without the consent of other parties. Finally, Ecologists saw their power increasing significantly and created expectations on entering the parliament in future elections.

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