

After a decade of crisis, Greek politics are turning normal and more technocratic

The election seems to have consolidated competition.

By Harris Mylonas

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Greek voters [just elected](#) the first government in which a single party won a parliamentary majority since the economic crisis began in 2010. On July 7, a little fewer than 6 million people voted in more than 21,000 polling stations to elect the 300 members of the Greek parliament and install a new government. Twenty parties ran; only six of them got more than 3 percent of the vote, which is the threshold required to place a member in parliament.

Here's what happened

So, who won? It was New Democracy's leader, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the son of former prime minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis, who served from 1990 to 1993, and the brother of former New Democracy minister and former mayor of Athens Dora Bakoyanni. Mitsotakis managed to bring the party back to power after a difficult decade, with an impressive 39.85 percent of the vote and 158 seats in a 300-member parliament.

Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, leader of the leftist Syriza party, lost, but he managed to keep his party's vote share above 31.53 percent. As a result, New Democracy got a smaller lead than it had in last month's European Union parliament elections, contrary to expectations. This result fortified his place at the helm of the main opposition party.

Together, the two top parties received more than 70 percent of the vote. As a result, many are suggesting Greece may be seeing the consolidation of a new two-party system.

Syriza had to run on its record while New Democracy could run on hope

Syriza disappointed many voters in some of its governance decisions, including in its [failed negotiations](#) with the country's creditors, the signing and ratification of [the third bailout plan](#), and its odd government coalition with a small far-right-wing party. Syriza could, and did, redistribute some of the primary surplus it had achieved by taxing more than it was spending. But given the compromises of governing, it could no longer chant "[hope is on its way](#)," as it did during its 2015 campaign. Syriza instead spoke of a return to "normalcy" while reminding citizens that New Democracy had been in power immediately before the onset of the recent economic crisis and the advent of austerity policies.

New Democracy, by contrast, had a [newly elected leader](#) who was perceived as a liberal reformer, who also partially reformed the party. New Democracy's victory has been attributed to Mitsotakis's astuteness. For example, he managed to keep his party from splitting over Greece's deal with its northern neighbor about its name — the final agreement settled on the "[Republic of North Macedonia](#)" — which has been a vexing issue for Greek nationalists. New Democracy made an optimistic case that it could deliver "strong economic growth," while criticizing the former government on law and order, the deal with North Macedonia and administrative failures in dealing with deadly wildfires in eastern Attica. New Democracy managed to appeal to audiences to both its left and right.

How did the other parties do?

KINAL (Movement for Change), a reformed version of the once-dominant PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement), also did better than it had during the E.U. parliament elections. That's true despite party leader Fofi Gennimata's last-minute decision to oust former party leader and prominent PASOK Minister Evangelos Venizelos. KINAL came third, pushing aside the xenophobic and nationalistic Golden Dawn, which failed to get the necessary 3 percent of the vote to be represented in parliament. The Communist Party of Greece came in fourth, keeping a stable share of just over 5 percent of the vote.

Two new parties entered parliament. One is a far-right nationalist party, Greek Solution, which proposes introducing the death

penalty for certain crimes; it garnered 3.7 percent of the vote. The other party, MeRA25, is a left-leaning party led by Yanis Varoufakis, a notorious former finance minister who splintered from Syriza, and it brought in 3.44 percent of the vote.

Four other parties that emerged during the crisis were electorally defeated or absorbed into other parties. Neither the Independent Greeks, Syriza's minor coalition partner, nor the River, ran in this election. The Union of Centrists received a mere 1.24 percent of the vote share. Finally, Democratic Left rejoined Syriza nine years after it left.

Taken together, all this suggests a return to political normalcy. Campaigning was relatively non-polarized, with the two main contenders holding small rallies, often addressing specialized audiences, rather than having mass political rallies in the center of Athens. Parliament now includes only six parties instead of eight, bringing closer to its precrisis character. The extremist Golden Dawn has fallen away.

Who's in the new government?

Mitsotakis's new government is reflecting both internal party power relations and his own preferences. The cabinet includes several technocrats who are not members of the parliament, either with a business background or with experience in international organizations. He has appointed very few women as ministers, but many point out that this is not a new pattern. Several cabinet members come from New Democracy's former archrival party, PASOK. For example, Michalis Chrisochoidis, who had served in several PASOK governments, is now minister of citizen protection. Similarly, Kyriakos Pierrakakis, a think tank research director who held posts in PASOK's governments, is the minister of digital governance. Lina Mendoni, who served as secretary general to the ministry of culture for PASOK governments, is minister of culture.

What's ahead?

The government faces some serious challenges. It remains to be

seen whether its proposed policy mix — low taxation, fewer bureaucratic obstacles and foreign investment — will bring the promised strong economic growth. To begin with, it has to persuade the E.U. and, in particular, the Eurogroup, composed of the finance ministers of the euro-zone countries, to cut Greece some slack on fiscal targets — i.e., whether the Greek government should continue taxing more than it is spending. Much will depend on global economic conditions.

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