

The 2023 Greek elections were an exercise in disillusionment

*The legislative election held in Greece on 25 June produced a victory for New Democracy, led by incumbent Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. Yet as **Athanasia Chalari** explains, the real story may have been the large numbers of citizens who abstained from voting.*

There are different ways to read the results of elections, but one of the least favoured is to focus on those who *didn't* vote. This approach, however, tells us something important about politics in Greece following the country's [latest legislative election on 25 June](#).

Greek elections have long been characterised by low turnout rates. At the latest election, the percentage of Greeks who abstained was around 47% – up from 42% at the 2019 legislative election. The result is that just over half of the eligible voting population (around 53%) have elected the parties that will form the new Greek parliament.

Of those who did vote, the 40.55% who backed New Democracy, led by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, were enough to determine the nature of the next government. This is one of the paradoxes of democracy: voting is (in most countries) not compulsory and even relatively small proportions of the electorate can select a government to lead the country on behalf of everyone.

Why have so many Greeks abstained from voting? The obvious explanation is that they simply don't care about the outcome of elections. Yet this apparent lack of interest in the political process should not be conflated with apathy.

Indeed, all evidence suggests that Greek citizens are fully aware of the consequences of political developments for society. They choose to abstain from voting not because they are apathetic, but because they are convinced there is no longer any point in doing so.

Over the last decade, I have interviewed hundreds of Greek people of all ages and backgrounds for research projects exploring the ways they have experienced the turbulent periods of [the Greek debt crisis](#) (2008-18), the subsequent [Greek brain drain](#) and [the Covid-19 pandemic](#). In all this time, I have never found Greek respondents

‘uninterested’ about the impact of such huge social changes on their lives.

In one project studying [the effect of the Greek debt crisis on youth identity formation](#), I found respondents clearly displayed a collective degree of inactivity in relation to social and political developments but without being apathetic. Participants (particularly young participants) commonly expressed their disappointment and lack of trust towards the state and any form of authority, including [scientific authorities associated with the Covid-19 pandemic](#).

The overwhelming feeling among these respondents is that there is no longer any reliable and accountable form of support or protection within Greek society. They feel powerless and therefore consider it pointless to attempt to produce any form of political reaction. They are *consciously inactive* because they have endured a lifetime of harmful experiences arising from the norms, powers and qualities that govern Greek social and political life. People no longer vote because they can no longer be convinced by the promises of political parties.

This conscious inactivity may not be the most effective way of expressing disapproval at the way democracy functions in Greece. But it could be the most *honest* way of withholding support from a system that no longer protects its citizens – and from parties who appear to have few alternatives to offer to the status quo.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics. Featured image credit: [European Union](#)
