

Remnants of Civil War: immediate and long-run effects of electoral oppression in cold war Greece

During the Cold War, a global battle of ideologies ensued between Western countries, primarily the U.S., and communist Russia. This ideological conflict was also mirrored in Greece, manifesting as a political competition between the right-wing government, which was supported by the U.S., and the United Democratic Left, backed by the (then) illegal Communist Party. This backdrop set the stage for the elections of the 1950s and 1960s in Greece, characterized by widespread state-led voter suppression tactics including violence, intimidation, and fraud.

This blog summarises our research that aims to quantify the intensity of the political clashes during this period and assesses their immediate and long-term political effects. Specifically, we explore how KKE propaganda from radio broadcasts influenced the rise of the United Left party in the 1958 elections and whether areas with higher support for the Left experienced disproportionate electoral violence and intimidation during the 1961 elections.

To provide guidance to its members and supporters despite communication challenges within Greece, the Communist Party established a radio broadcasting service during the civil war, which continued to operate even after the conflict. This service initially broadcast from Belgrade, disseminating party propaganda and updates on the war situation. Post-war, following the Tito-Stalin split, the service moved its operations to Bucharest and continued until April 1956, halting due to internal conflicts within the Communist Party of Greece triggered by the de-Stalinization process initiated at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Union's Communist Party. Broadcasts resumed in March 1958 from Leipzig, East Germany, with the editorial board based in Bucharest.

In the 1958 elections, less than ten years after the civil war, the party of United Democratic Left emerged as the major opposition force. This success alarmed the conservative establishment and paved the way for extensive electoral suppression tactics before the 1961 elections, targeting both the major opposition and the Centrist

Union. The 1961 elections were marred by widespread voter suppression, violence, and voting fraud, affecting supporters of both the leftist and centrist parties.

Against this backdrop, our study leverages archival sources (published in the aftermath of the election) to meticulously quantify these events by collecting, geocoding, and classifying violence incidents to analyze the geographical spread and intensity of electoral oppression across Greece. This detailed dataset includes incidents of arrests, physical violence, obstruction of voting processes, and intimidation, all aimed at suppressing the electoral influence of left-wing parties. The following maps documents the distribution of signal strength and events across Greece.



Figure 1 Predicted signal loss at village/city level. Darker colors represent higher signal loss.



Figure 2 Distribution of Oppression Events (at least one). Source: EDA's Black Bible, authors calculations

We leverage historical information on the Communist illegal radio station to measure the relative exposure to its signal strength across municipalities in Greece. We then exploit this information in a novel IV estimation that instruments the result of the 1958 elections with exogenous variation to the Communist party's broadcasts. Our analysis reveals a stark pattern: municipalities that were exposed to stronger radio signals—and hence had greater exposure to communist propaganda—experienced higher voting share of the left in 1958 and subsequently significantly higher incidents of electoral violence in 1961. Our results suggest that 1 st. dev increase of EDA share in 1958 increases the probability of having an event in this municipality by 12%.

Additionally, using contemporary data from the European Quality of Government Index surveys (2010-2015) we provide suggestive evidence that individuals currently residing in municipalities that experienced violence have significantly lower levels of trust in the national government, the police and local authorities. These insights are crucial, as they highlight the long-term consequences of electoral violence—issues that remain relevant in many democratic societies. Recognizing the impacts of Cold War-era electoral oppression in Greece helps us understand the challenges facing modern democracies. It prompts us to consider how historical awareness can inform current policies and

democratic practices, ensuring a more just and stable political environment. Our ongoing research will expand on these findings by examining other dimensions of public life affected by past political violence, including economic activity and public goods provision. By understanding these long-term effects, we seek to offer a more nuanced view of how historical events shape contemporary political and social realities.

The Hellenic Observatory hosted a **research seminar on the topic on 19 March 2024. For more information please visit the [event page](#).*

Note: *This article gives the views of the author, not the position of [Greece@LSE](#), the [Hellenic Observatory](#) or the [London School of Economics](#).*