

Who wanted what? An aftermath of the Public debate on Greek Elections

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The debate on the Greek elections organized by the Hellenic Observatory on 4th February, offered some interesting food for thought. What struck us was a casual comment by Dionyssi Dimitrakopoulos at the beginning of the talk, namely that SYRIZA had scored well amongst most social groups but rather less well amongst pensioners. After all, these people had suffered pretty draconian cuts, with the 2010 Memorandum and its successors reducing pensioners' incomes – in some cases by up to 40%– and making benefits harder to claim. Later Daphne Halikiopoulou presented results from exit polls showing support for the parties by different categories of the population. But whilst she talked about public sector workers, private sector workers and unemployed people, she showed no results for pensioners. We decided to look at the data in more detail. We used data from Kapa Research[1] and performed our own analysis. The voting behaviour depicted by these data could offer useful insights into who voted which way and to suggest why and what this could mean.

We started by dividing the parties according to whether they were Pro-Memorandum (Pro-M) or Anti-Memorandum (Anti-M).[2]

Pensioners went strongly for New Democracy (ND), the major party of the former Pro-Memorandum coalition government – 34% of them voted for it, rather more than did for SYRIZA (32%). When we calculate the votes attributed by Pensioners to Pro-M and Anti-M parties, the picture is the same – the Pro-Ms lead the Anti-Ms by two percentage points.

This outcome might well indicate that Pensioners felt they might actually lose out by Grexit. But it might also reflect their sentimental attachment to the health care system and their fears – generated by pre-election rumours that an extremist – left wing government could damage the system. And there might also be a “PASOK effect”. Some eight per cent of pensioners voted for the latter party – the highest share it got from any social group. Maybe an age factor was also at play. Older people might have a favourable attitude towards the party that ruled the country for almost 20 years since the start of the 1980s.

Another group that proved worth looking at was Businesspeople/Entrepreneurs. ND was their preferred party – it took 38% of their votes compared to SYRIZA, which got 31%. Equally, Pro-M parties received eight percentage points more of this group's vote than Anti-M parties. If we include in the Anti-M block the ‘Other Parties’, the difference Pro-Anti drops to a three percentage points, but it still remains. Another intriguing point is that the far-right party (GD), which takes an anti-memorandum stance, gathered around nine percent of Businesspeople/Entrepreneurs' votes. Thus, although the Pro-M block lead, there is an alarming rise of the extremist far-right amongst Businesspeople/Entrepreneurs – something that calls for further interpretation.

That 52 percent of Businesspeople/Entrepreneurs sympathised with Pro-M parties is not surprising. They might have had reason to fear Grexit. And, through the reforms undertaken by the governments that had signed the MoUs, they had achieved substantial labour market deregulation. However, nearly one in ten of them voted for GD. Some earlier Kapa Research (September 2014) might help explain this. It showed that people who had large loans from the banking sector indicated a propensity to vote for extremist parties.[3] If Businessmen/Entrepreneurs fit into this category, the rather high GD vote fits in. Moreover, we should not underestimate the impact of falls in consumption that is likely to have had a negative impact on many SMEs and might have led their owners to vote the Anti-M block.

It is also worth looking at the voting behaviour of Public and the Private Sector Employees. Both groups might be

expected to be Anti-M – and, indeed, this block took 14 percentage points more votes from each than the Pro-Ms. However, rather more Private Sector Employees voted GD – two percentage point more. This might be perceived as an expression of social discontent by Private Sector Employees, who had been less well represented in the political arena for a long period of time, living in the shadow of the Public Sector. Moreover, Public Sector Employees were more likely to support SYRIZA. After all, it promised to restore some of the privileges that they had enjoyed before the austerity programme started.

Lastly, we should point to the high proportion of Unemployed People that gave votes to extremist parties. Of course, these people were the group that had been the greatest losers of the crisis. Nearly three quarters of them voted for Anti-M parties, and six out of ten for parties that could be classified as ‘extremist’.

[1] ‘To Vima’ published on the 1st of February 2015

[2] In the former group we put ND, PASOK, Potami and KINIMA, in the latter, SYRIZA, GD, KKE and ANEL.

[3] SYRIZA, GD, and KKE

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