

Greece's Snap Elections

By [Ciarán Morrissey](#), Comment Editor (2015/16)

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Image: [Mykl Roventine](#)

Following the failure of the Parliament of Greece to decide on who should be their next president, Prime Minister Antonis Samaras has announced that new elections are to occur, and may take place as early as January 25th.

The President of Greece, who holds a ceremonial role, more in line with Ireland and Israel than the USA or France, is elected by the 300-strong Greek Parliament, not directly by the electorate. In order for a President to be elected, s/he must receive at least 200 votes in the first two rounds or 180 in the third round of voting. Centre-right Stavros Dimas – this year's only candidate – received 168 votes, which has constitutionally triggered a new parliamentary election.

Greece's case is interesting primarily because of how next month's elections are likely to go. Unlike many countries in the EU, it is the far-left, not the far-right, that are gaining traction in Greece. While Golden Dawn made headlines across Europe and sparked fears of a swing to the far-right, this trend appears to be largely over. Golden Dawn still have MPs, and will likely retain at least some seats after the election, but barring an unprecedented swing towards the far-right, they will not be in government, coalition or otherwise.

The current Prime Minister, Samaras, is a member of the centre-right New Democracy Party and has been Prime Minister since 2012. However, the largest party in opposition is Syriza, a broad coalition of far-left factions. Syriza won 26.6% of the vote in this year's European Elections and is widely seen as an anti-establishment party, a position that has earned it a lot of support among the Greek electorate. It is therefore likely that Greece's snap election will see Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras sitting as the new Prime Minister, and it is unlikely that he will need to go into coalition.

Why this is significant is that Syriza advocate a hardline anti-austerity approach. Tsipras himself is certainly an anti-establishment figure. As a former communist with a child named after Che Guevara, it would be extremely disingenuous to count him as one of the many social democratic or moderate socialists in Europe. It is likely that, should he get into power, he will refuse to co-operate with the EU's demands for Greece to continue its program of austerity. Instead, it's likely he'll enact greater spending in order to try and combat declining employment rates and the poverty that is now widespread in Greece.

Rather, should Syriza gain power in Greece, the country will refuse to abide by the orders of a Commission it views as neoliberal and committed to globalisation. This is not the same socialism advocated by Francois Hollande in France, this is a much more radical socialism unwilling to compromise on its goals and principles.

Should Syriza take power next month, and should they successfully nominate a presidential candidate (failure to do this may leave the Greeks in a state of truly hopeless deadlock), then we're going to see a large swing to the left by a party completely unconcerned about co-operating with the European Union. Perhaps this will cause Greece to spiral into further decline, or perhaps Syriza will be able to put the country on the road to a stable recovery. Whatever the case, the result of Greece's snap election is sure to be an interesting moment for the European Left; it may be the first time a European country has pursued a radical socialist agenda since the formation of the modern EU, and the successes or failures of Syriza may well inform and shape European socialism of the 21st century.

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