

Polarization in Greek Politics: PASOK's First Four Years, 1981-1985

by STATHIS N. KALYVAS

The victory of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) in 1981 was a crucial test for the young Greek democracy for at least two reasons. First, this new party, founded only seven years earlier in 1974, was up to 1977, a "semi-loyal" party (Diamandouros 1991) critical of the country's new institutions and of its general orientation. Even after 1977, and up to 1981, the party remained at best ambivalent about its fundamental foreign policy intentions. In the context of the Cold War, driving Greece out of NATO, as the party claimed it would do, was a prospect fraught with grave dangers for the country's regime. Second, this was the first instance of democratic alternation of power. After seven years in power, New Democracy (ND), the center-right party founded by Constantine Karamanlis, was soundly defeated. The importance of this can hardly be underestimated, since the legacy of the Civil War still loomed large, and previous attempts of alternation in the mid-sixties had been blocked (including by the 1967 military coup). Indeed, PASOK claimed to represent precisely the political and social groups whose legitimate representation had been thwarted in the past. In short, 1981 was clearly going to test the degree to which the Greek democratic regime was really consolidated.

The 1981 elections took place amid a highly polarized

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climate (Mavrogordatos 1983b). Still, many observers expected that, once the elections were over, the new government would follow a moderate political strategy (Tsebelis 1984). This proved a correct assessment as far as *policy* was concerned: political rhetoric notwithstanding, Greece remained in the EEC and NATO and renewed its defense agreement with the United States, allowing the American military continued operation in the country. In the economic and social realm, the new government followed a mildly redistributive policy, but refrained from implementing any radical measures.

In terms of political strategy, PASOK opted for polarization rather than moderation. Indeed, the new government adopted an openly and consistently confrontational political strategy. This move appears paradoxical in light of the moderate policies implemented by the same government. Was polarization just a matter of inflamed rhetoric dismissable as a mere instance of the idiosyncratic character of Greek politics and the country's political culture? Or, did it represent a distinct type of strategy with important political implications? In this paper, I argue the latter. I show that what Greece experienced during the first half of the 1980s was not mere polarizing rhetoric but an instance of polarized politics, what Perez-Diaz (1993:6) has described as "the kind of intense and divisive politics one may refer to by the name of *absolute politics*." Then, I address the paradox of polarization in the absence of policy differentiation. Demonstrating that Greek politics were truly polarized during this period and disaggregating the politics of polarization into its component parts is both a matter of accurate understanding of a recent and important period of Greek politics, and an issue with far-reaching theoretical implications: the Greek case suggests that our understanding of polarization is inadequate and requires further elaboration.

Polarization in the Greek Context

Our understanding of polarization stems from Giovanni Sartori's (1976) theory of polarized pluralism: the presence of anti-system parties at the opposite ends of the political spectrum and

the effects of proportional representation produce centrifugal competition threatening the stability of the regime. This is a type of party system with features such as ideological extremism, lack of compromise, and "politics of outbidding" where parties "overpromise" in order to bid support away from each other. While polarized pluralism results from the interaction of polarization and fragmentation, it is polarization (operationalized as the ideological distance between parties) which best predicts the instability of a democratic regime. As (Giacomo) Sani and Sartori (1983:337) have shown, it is "the best single explanatory variable for stable versus unstable, functioning versus non-functioning, successful versus immobile, and easy versus difficult democracy."

While polarization can be operationalized simply as the ideological distance between parties, it is a multifaceted phenomenon. This is why I proceed by checking one by one Sartori's (1976:131-145) list of the features of polarized pluralism against the Greek case (in the 1981-85 period). This list includes the following elements: (1) the presence of antisystem parties (which undermine the legitimacy of the regime); (2) bilateral oppositions (oppositions that are, in constructive terms, incompatible); (3) the central placement of one party or of a group of parties; (4) polarization, or the positioning of the lateral poles literally two poles apart, due to ideological distance; (5) the prevalence of centrifugal rather than centripetal drives in the electorate; (6) ideological patterning as a *forma mentis* rather than a pragmatic mentality differentiating parties; (7) the presence of irresponsible oppositions; and (8) the politics of outbidding.

(1) The presence of antisystem parties

Only one relevant Greek party can be classified as anti-system, in the sense of being explicitly opposed to the institutional set-up of the country: the Communist Party (KKE), a party closely attached to the Soviet Union (Mavrogordatos 1983b). An antisystem party of the far right, the National Front, won 6.8 percent of the votes in 1977, but disappeared

before the 1981 elections, and its electorate was absorbed by ND. None of the two main parties (PASOK and ND) can be classified as antisystem: they both explicitly adhered to the democratic rules of the game. While PASOK remained, throughout the 1980s, a charismatic-led populist movement closest to Latin American than to European social democratic parties (Papadopoulos 1989:67), its government record after 1981 was far from radical.

(2) *Bilateral oppositions*

According to Sartori, in a polarized party system oppositions are mutually exclusive, i.e. they cannot join forces. While Sartori had in mind multiparty systems where parties of the extreme left and the extreme right squeeze the center, his argument is based on the mutual exclusivity of the parties, which is to say the denial of the legitimacy of the adversary. This is particularly dangerous—not least because it allows for the ideological definition of the criteria discriminating members from non-members of the polity, a process that facilitates democratic breakdown (Ermakoff 1995:11).

Both PASOK and ND used a "discourse which presented the social and political space as divided into two opposed fields" (Lyrintzis 1987:671). They claimed to represent incompatible political "camps" and made conscious and unrelenting efforts to undermine the legitimacy of each other. PASOK claimed that ND stood for authoritarianism, the oligarchy, and foreign interests which had to be destroyed by the "democratic forces" represented by PASOK; it frequently accused unnamed ND politicians of committing economic sabotage against the country; and made continuous references to the "dustbin of history," where the right had supposedly been relegated—the implication being that it could never return to power by legal means. Andreas Papandreou, the charismatic PASOK leader, described the European elections of 1984 as "the final confrontation" in which the Greek people would be called on to choose between "the past and the future, between progress and regression, between dependence and national independence, between the

Middle Ages of the Right and the regeneration of the Left," while PASOK's electoral strategy during the 1985 campaign was designed around the same theme: elections were not about mere policy issues, "oranges and tomatoes," as the leading PASOK strategist put it, but a confrontation between two worlds (Clogg 1987:108). As an author puts it, for PASOK "the single enemy was well defined: in the social realm it was the privileged or 'the Establishment'; in politics it was the right . . . ; internationally the US, the CIA, NATO, and, at one time, the EC played this role. In fact the leader's pet project, whenever he found himself in serious trouble, was that this should not but be the result of an "international plot" undertaken by "foreigners" in collaboration with their domestic "servants" or "apostates" (Pematoglou 1993:109). Such positions fit with Juan Linz's observation (1978:31) about disloyal oppositions (but applied here to a party in government): they "picture their opponents collectively as instruments of outside secret and conspirational groups." In fact, accusations of treason regularly flew from both sides. It is important to emphasize that these accusations went beyond inflamed rhetoric and constituted a full-fledged electoral strategy. According to Pridham and Verney (1991:46):

PASOK's highly successful electoral strategy was based on the promotion of a new dividing line allegedly separating the Right from the so-called "democratic forces." Despite PASOK's "Socialist" title, its self-presentation was essentially as a populist force which was "non-Right and anti-Right." The Right was depicted as one and indivisible from the collaborationist Security Battalions of the Second World War through the Civil War, the subsequent repressive parliamentary regime and then the military dictatorship, up to its most recent reincarnation as New Democracy.

PASOK's polarizing discourse was closely matched by ND, giving rise to party system polarization. The new party leadership under Evangelos Averoff used a discourse directed to "those party regulars and supporters who remain[ed] viscerally

attached to the legacy of the Civil War," suggesting that the party was "retrogressing" (Mavrogordatos 1984:159). Furthermore, ND argued that the ultimate objective of PASOK was to subvert the democratic regime, while the government was often referred to as the "junta of PASOK." Indeed, Averoff claimed that the 1984 elections were "not a conflict between two parties but between two ways of life" (quoted in Pridham and Verney 1991:48).

Such statements were reproduced and amplified on a daily basis by the government-controlled electronic media as well as the press, which was partisan in its entirety. They dominated the political debate on both the elite and mass level. Far from being extremist assertions uttered by marginal politicians, they reflected the essence of the strategy adopted by both parties, a strategy clearly intended to divide and deepen existing divisions.

(3) The central placement of one party or a group of parties

This feature complements the presence of bilateral oppositions. Evidence can be ambivalent here. On the one hand, the traditional centrist party (EDIK) was eliminated in the 1981 elections. On the other hand, public opinion data of party placement indicate that PASOK was perceived by the electorate as a left to center party, with KKE and ND placed laterally, at the two extremes (Mavrogordatos 1984). This point is further developed below.

(4) Polarization, or the positioning of the lateral poles literally two poles apart, due to ideological distance

Students of Greek politics agree that the party system was extremely polarized during the first half of the 1980s: they have classified the Greek party system as a type of limited but polarized pluralism (Mavrogordatos 1984), a type of polarized pluralism (Seferiades 1986), or simply a case of polarized bipartism (Papadopoulos 1989). Overall, there is general consensus about the extremely high level of political polarization in Greece

during the period (Sotiropoulos 1995; Pridham and Verney 1991:45; Featherstone 1990:102; Papadopoulos 1989:61).

Party system polarization is inextricably linked to the rise of PASOK. The 1981 elections were fought in a climate of great polarization, reflected in the collapse of the traditional centrist parties: the combined electoral score of the EDIK, KODISO, and the Liberal Party reached just 1.5 percent—compared to 12 percent for EDIK in 1977 and 20.6 percent for EK-ND in 1974. Far from subsiding, polarization increased after PASOK's victory. Indeed, the 1984 elections for the European parliament "took place in a climate of unprecedented fanaticism and polarization" (Katsoudas 1987:100). As Richard Clogg (1987:95) points out, "nowhere within the EC was the European election of June 1984 contested with greater vigour and certainly nowhere with greater bitterness than in Greece." Likewise, the 1985 elections surpassed in intensity and polarization all post-1974 elections (Seferiades 1986:88; Mavrogordatos et al. 1988:14).

Polarization pervaded both the elite and the mass level. At the elite level, it was reflected in a "weak consensus" (Pridham and Verney 1991:48), among what Sani and Sartori (1983:336) call "conflict-seeking and intrinsically hostile political elites." The distance between the perceived mean position of PASOK and ND on the left-right scale was bigger than the distance between PASOK and the Communist Party (Seferiades 1986:83). In 1985, Greeks were 30 percent more likely than Italians, Spaniards, and Portuguese to totally reject the statement "all parties are the same" (Kafetzis 1988:61). The electorate was equally "bitterly divided" (Pappas 1995:319). The standard measure of mass polarization, self-location on a ten point left-right scale, shows a distance between the mean self-placement of KKE and ND supporters that exceeded six points (6.57), while the equivalent distance between ND and PASOK supporters was also high (3.8). These were the highest values among the 12 EC countries, and the length of the overall ideological axis was also the highest (Papadopoulos 1989; Mavrogordatos 1984).

Another indicator of mass polarization is mass mobilization: it reached extremely high levels, as shown among others, by the level of partisanship among the public and the level of political

participation and interest in politics, which were the highest in Southern Europe. For example, Greeks were 14 percent more likely than Italians, 20 percent more likely than Spaniards, and 30 percent more likely than the Portuguese, to read newspapers on an every day basis (Kafetzis 1988:28). To this one must add that the level of partisanship in the press was higher in the Greek case. High levels of political mobilization are also indicated by the membership growth of the two main parties—especially the transformation of ND into a mass party *after* 1981, including the tremendous growth and “radicalization of the youth and student organizations of parties that the mature party cannot disown without losing some of its most enthusiastic and active followers” (Linz 1978:33).¹

Mass polarization and mobilization had explicit physical manifestations, reflecting the fact that individual party identification became highly public and visible: the creation and wide expansion of separate partisan “green” and “blue” coffee shops (the main socialization space in the countryside), the widespread use of party flags in visible places such as cars and apartment balconies, and the organization of giant rallies, “probably the largest of their kind in Europe” (Featherstone 1990:110), during the electoral campaigns and even in between. Besides direct means of mobilization, parties literally colonized civil society by assuming the control of professional, local, cultural, and even high schools students’ associations. Board elections in these associations were transformed into party contests, closely monitored by the press. For example, the yearly university and high school student elections became major political events. This “partyness of society” led to a “suffocation of social life,” reducing it to an “arena for party competition” (Papadopoulos 1989:66). By introducing an institutional framework that made party intervention in civil society easier, PASOK took the lead in this pervasive politicization of the public space (Mavrogordatos 1993). Polarization was reflected in the state’s control and partisan use of the electronic media. The traditional control of the electronic media by the party in government was enhanced and refined during these years, Stephanos Pesmatzoglou (1993: 97) underlines the “censorship, distortion, concealment of opposition party statements, and carefully-planned blackouts, among

other practices [on TV]," and points out that "anyone switching on TV would have thought throughout that there was but one 'Movement' and but one 'Leader.'" Finally, the press engaged in an increasingly intense partisanship, acting as the parties' mouthpieces.

(5) *The prevalence of centrifugal rather than centripetal drives in the electorate*

High levels of polarization are associated with centrifugal rather than centripetal drives in the party system, leading to the enfeeblement of the center. The collapse of the center parties after 1977 was clearly a symptom of these centrifugal trends. However, available survey data appear to be at odds with the phenomenon of mass polarization described above.

First, public opinion surveys indicate that PASOK was perceived by many as a party located close to the center. ND was placed clearly on the right of the ten-point left-right scale (in 1985, 37.8 percent of the respondents placed ND in the most extreme position of the right, perceiving it as the most right-wing among conservative parties in Europe, including the Italian neo-fascist MSI). PASOK, on the other hand, was perceived as a center-left party with 27.7 percent of the respondents placing it squarely in the central position.² While the distance between the two parties is substantial, the gap between PASOK's polarizing strategy on the one hand and its perceived centrist location on the other hand is puzzling.

Second, centrifugal drives in the party system are usually reflected in a bimodal distribution of the electorate, characterized by asymmetry and non-normal, non-U-shaped curves (Sani and Sartori 1983:329). However, 1981 Eurobarometer self-placement survey data show a quasi-normal distribution of the electorate on the ten-point left-right scale, peaking at the center with a smaller peak close to the extreme right. Likewise, the 1985 comparative Southern European survey shows a similar distribution, stronger on the left than the right, but with a strong concentration in the center: 23.7 percent of the respondents placed themselves in the central position, while 48.4 percent were concen-

trated in the center and its adjacent positions (positions 4-6) (Mavrogordatos et al. 1988). How is this distribution compatible with mass polarization and centrifugal drives?

This apparent divergence between mass polarization and public opinion data finds its explanation in the semantic ambiguity of the term "center" in Greek politics. Rather than just referring to a spatial and ideological *location* at the center of the political spectrum, the term "center" designates a *party legacy*, that of the pre-1967 Center Union Party, and a *collective identity* associated with it.

The Center Union, a party of the center-left, evolved into the main opposition party in the beginning of the 1960s. It forged a collective identity based to a great extent on the republic vs. monarchy cleavage, the traditional cleavage of Greek politics which goes back to the 1915 "national schism." This cleavage was reactivated in a vehement way during (and after) the 1965 political crisis, which began as a clash between the king and the leader of the Center Union, George Papandreou. The electorate of the Center Union developed even stronger hostile feelings against the right and the monarchy, which were seen as blocking the center's legitimate claims to power. Indeed, after his resignation as prime minister in 1965, George Papandreou outbid his leftist opponents in castigating the right (Seferiades 1986:79). This hostility was further reinforced after the April 1967 coup, which prevented the widely expected victory of the Center Union in the planned May 1967 elections.

PASOK, assisted by the fact that its leader was George Papandreou's son, managed to project itself after 1977 as the heir to the legacy of the Center Union. It succeeded to revive, appropriate, and mold anew the collective identity associated with the Center Union by incessantly attacking the right for its past deeds, real or imaginary, and constantly referring to the 1965 crisis. Thus, PASOK won over the Center Union identifiers by appealing to their traditional anti-rightism. In fact, studies of electoral behavior have highlighted the high degree of overlap between voting support for PASOK and the pre-1967 Center Union (Featherstone and Katsoudas 1985:30). It is in that sense that PASOK's polarizing anti-right strategy could be understood by the electorate to be "centrist," and that PASOK could

be perceived to be a "centrist" party.³ In short, the public perception of PASOK as a centrist party did not necessarily signify the political moderation traditionally associated with the term center, but a polarizing (because strongly anti-rightist) political legacy and collective identity.

For the same reason, self-placement data can be in the Greek context a flawed indicator of individual location on the left-right cleavage. The congestion of respondents at the center is an artifact of the ambiguous meaning of the "center." Respondents who identify with the legacy of the old Center Union party are usually known as centrists (*kentróoi*). This identification, however, does not carry the meaning usually associated with the term, that is of a floating electorate equally willing to move in the direction of both parties. This point is supported by the findings of a study that ingeniously classified voters into seven distinct groups from left to right based on an index measuring the respondents' feelings about ten prominent political figures (Bechrakis and Nikolakopoulos 1988). Because it does away with apolitical terminology that carries an ambiguous meaning, this index is a valid indicator of both the position of respondents on the left-right *cleavage* and their voting intentions. As a result, this index supplies a very different picture of the distribution of the electorate from the self-placement data, a picture that is consistent with the polarization of the electorate. The distribution of respondents based on this index displays a concentration on the left side of the spectrum (46.1 percent of the sample); a weaker but still substantial center (35.3 percent of the sample); and an even weaker right (just 18.6 percent of the sample). PASOK clearly dominates the left in terms of the respondents' partisan preferences, while the space of the center has been "purged" of PASOK-oriented Center Union identifiers and is occupied by moderate voters overwhelmingly supporting ND—in a ratio of four to one. It is clear that the electorate of PASOK was not made of moderate voters willing to switch sides between both parties. On the other hand, this analysis shows that the bulk of PASOK identifiers, a substantial and compact group strongly attached to their party, were clearly located on the left and remained isolated from the center and the right.

A final related point: Bipartisan party systems are generally

structurally moderate because both parties have an incentive to converge toward the median voter. How was, then, the Greek party system's essentially bipolar nature compatible with its centrifugal drive? An answer is that the Greek party system was, in fact, "a typical case of extreme and polarized pluralism" (Seferiades 1986:87). The logic is this: in addition to the third relevant party (KKE), two additional parties at both extremes, the Communist Party of the Interior (KKE es.) and the extreme right National Front (EP, then EPEN), can be counted as relevant parties because of their "intimidation" potential. This is to say, they exercised a "centrifugal pull" on the two parties. However, such an answer is not entirely satisfactory: it tries hard to fit the Greek case into the mold of the theory of polarized pluralism. A more satisfactory answer is that by occupying a large ideological space of competition, the two main parties (and their electorate) included substantial radical segments which exerted considerable centrifugal pressures (Pappas 1995:267-272).⁴ Available survey data point to the strength among the electorate of important off-center groups (Mavrogordatos 1984: 162-4; Bechrakis and Nikolakopoulos 1988:114-5). For instance, half of PASOK's core group of supporters (18 percent of the total sample) was leaning toward the two communist parties: In fact, the single strongest group of the six distinct groups of voters supporting PASOK was the most leftist one (Bechrakis and Nikolakopoulos 1988:114-5). Hence, it made sense for PASOK to try to outbid the Communists with a polarizing anti-right discourse—which had the tangible advantage of also satisfying the (also anti-right) Center Union identifiers and, thus, attracting votes from both its left and right.

Over all, the presence of centrifugal drives during the period under study receives robust empirical support. Interestingly, the polarizing and centrifugal dynamics of the Greek party system were potentially more dangerous than those of a typical multi-party system, because polarization was not mitigated by the presence of a large moderate center party but led to frontal confrontation between the two parties.

(6) *Ideological patterning as a forma mentis rather than a pragmatic mentality differentiating parties*

The prevalence of ideology in Greek politics during the period under study has been underlined by many observers. For instance, Takis Spyros Pappas (1995:326; 360) remarks that the "overriding theme of modern Greek politics," was "ideological polarization between the Right and the Left" and the non-comitant "ferocity of the ideological struggle between political parties." Likewise, Clogg (1987:158) points out that "one of the salient features of the political scene since the *metapolitefsi* of 1974 has been the way ideology has become paramount to a degree unprecedented in Greek politics." This produced what Sartori (1991:439-440) has dubbed "epithet-thinking": "ideological warfare," with "the enemy assaulted with swear-words and smear labels." This point is further developed below.

(7) *The presence of irresponsible oppositions and*
(8) *the politics of outbidding*

These features include "unfair competition" and "escalation" with competitors striving to bid support away from each other by stronger appeals and promises (Sartori 1976:140). Greek politics, during the period under study, were dominated by what Linz (1978:42) has dubbed "ressentiment politics against persons and institutions identified with the previous order." There was a pronounced "tendency to blame the accumulation of problems on neglect by a previous regime rather than on the intractability of social reality" (Linz 1978:41). The term "revanchism" became a staple of the political discourse, reflecting a very credible threat felt by large segments of the population who had benefited from the distribution of spoils, since "embittered losers fear the winners' arrogance" (Papadopoulos 1989:61). Pridham and Verney (1991:47) provide a concise description of irresponsible opposition and the politics of outbidding in Greece:

Over all, in this "winner-takes-all" system, the essentially bipolar nature of political competition has resulted in a pronounced confrontational style of politics. The basic aim of the opposition has been not so much to influence government policy in a particular direction, but rather to discredit the governing party and drive it from power. In consequence, oppositional tactics have been based on a concept of "structural opposition" involving a direct challenge to the government on all issues, even when this entails the adoption of a stance incompatible with party policy. Rational debate around policy difference has thus been the exception. The preferred mode of political discussion has been rhetorically emotive and ideologically heavy, allowing ample reference to the historical sins of the opposing camp and frequently conducted on a personalistic basis.

The democratic regime was never openly questioned by the two main parties, and enjoyed widespread support from the population at large.⁵ However the practice of the two parties, especially with regards to spoils and favoritism in the enormous public sector, almost coterminous of the entire economy, undermined the stability of the democratic regime. Furthermore, PASOK's populist bent led it in many instances to disregard the integrity of institutions. As Papandreou once put it (quoted in Pematoglou 1993:107), "there are no institutions, there is only the people." The newspaper *Avriani*, one of PASOK's main pillars, displayed a particularly acute antidemocratic bias. This was not expressed in a direct and outright rejection of democratic institutions, but rather in the promotion of the populist view that the ultimate judge is the people, whose will is expressed, according to the newspaper, by PASOK and its leader. According to Pematoglou (1993:107), "if there is one historical analogy with a daily paper, it will surely have to be with the organ of the National-Socialist Party, *Volkische Beobachter*, which was incessantly scandal-mongering against the 'rotten' bourgeois class and the Weimar Republic, on the very eve of the latter's dissolution in 1933."

In fact, both parties did not hesitate to tamper with the

rules of the game in order to win, thus undermining the legitimacy of the regime in a practical, if indirect, way. Observers have underlined the fact that the 1975 constitution was not the result of agreement and compromise and have stressed the propensity of governing parties in Greece to amend or bend the rules of the game, their continuing ambivalence toward constitutional rules, and the presence of a certain lack of the basic agreement necessary for the functioning of democratic institutions (Pridham and Verney 1991:48). An example of such practices was provided by the 1985 elections which were fought, to a large extent, around issues of constitutional legality. Just before the elections, PASOK decided to support for the post of the presidency a highly symbolic candidate, Christos Sartzetakis, a personality associated with resistance both against the authoritarianism of the pre-1967 right and the dictatorship itself.⁶ To obtain the necessary parliamentary majority PASOK had recourse to means of dubious legality, such as the use of highly visible colored ballots to spot potential defectors. The parliamentary vote took place in a highly charged atmosphere exacerbated by the press, which was treating potential defectors, and by crowds of PASOK supporters demonstrating on a daily basis outside the parliament. Just after Sartzetakis was elected, ND refused to recognize the election as valid, a position which raised the specter of a major constitutional crisis in the case of a ND victory. While all these actions did not question the democratic regime in a direct way, they clearly undermined its long-term legitimacy. As Papadopoulos (1989:64) points out, "such disputes suggest that there is no consensus among the two major parties over the constitutional issue. . . . Institutional instability thus becomes an integral part of party competition. Rotation of power in Greek politics is far removed from democratic standards elsewhere. Divisive issues on a fundamental level represent a substantial threat to the legitimation of the political system."

Polarization in the Absence of Policy Differentiation

Having shown that the Greek party system was polarized during the first half of the 1980s and having described in de-

tail the features of this polarization, it is possible to return to the initial question: how could polarization possibly emerge and persist in the absence of substantial policy differentiation between PASOK and ND?

To begin with, it is important to point out that the term *policy* usually refers to the economic and social realm. Such policy is necessarily geared toward the class cleavage: measures such as nationalization or income redistribution are intended to satisfy different class constituencies. However, the main cleavage of Greek politics is not along class lines. Greece is a society with a small industrial base and a respectively small industrial working class. Employees of the public sector and a mass of self-employed (largely in agriculture) closely linked to the state make up a social majority (Tsoucalas 1987). According to a recent electoral study (Gunther and Montero, cited in Pappas 1995), class is not a predictor of voting behavior in Greece. In fact, Greece ranked last on the structural determination of the vote in a sixteen-country study (Ersson, Janda, and Lane 1985). In addition, electoral data (Mavrogordatos 1983b) suggest that support for PASOK in 1981 was equally distributed across all social strata.

Hence, the absence of substantial policy differentiation is not surprising in light of the absence of a class cleavage.⁷ Is that equivalent of asserting that polarization was a superficial phenomenon, a matter of inflamed rhetoric? The answer is no—unless we wrongly assume that polarization can only express a class cleavage. If polarization is a reflection of another dimension rather than class, we need to identify the relevant dimension. The Greek party system during the 1980s was built around a left-right cleavage anchored (a) in historically constructed political identities, and (b) in the individual welfare consequences of a giant spoils system. Hence, the symbolic and material anchors of polarization should be sought in the manipulation of historical memories and collective identities on the one hand, and the distribution of spoils on the other hand.

The left-right cleavage in Greece is, first, a reflection of conflicting collective identities, deeply anchored in past conflicts. A memory of violence and civil wars, both older and more recent (the "national schism" of 1915 and the Civil War of

1944-1949), military coups and dictatorships (the Metaxas dictatorship, 1936-1940 and the Colonels' one, 1967-1974), repression, and division over fundamental issues such as the institutional form of the regime (republic versus monarchy), have shaped extremely strong collective political identities. These memories were alive during the 1980s, particularly in rural areas (Aschenbrenner 1987). On the other hand, the right governed the country during the 1950s and the 1960s by denying the Greekness of "large number of Greeks . . . because of center-left and left persuasions and actual or alleged involvement with the vanquished side of the Civil War" (Diamandouros 1991:22).⁸ On the other hand, PASOK denied the legitimacy of the right during the 1980s by consistently accusing it of standing in for foreign interest and reincarnating the repressive governments of the 1950s and 1960s.

These historically constructed collective identities acquired a material basis through clientelistic practices. Political affiliation, "belonging" to a political camp as the Greek expression goes, had explicit and unambiguous individual welfare consequences, affecting large segments of the Greek population. This was the case because of the hegemonic position of parties in Greek society (Pridham and Verney 1991:45), the control exercised by the governing party over the state—turning it into a partisan state or even a "party-state" (Sotiropoulos 1993; Featherstone 1990), and the large number of positional goods (such as government jobs or contracts) whose presence generally increases the level of conflict (Hardin 1994:57). While clientelism was a well-entrenched practice in Greek politics, the advent of PASOK into power introduced a major quantitative and qualitative change. State activities greatly expanded during the 1980s because of the influx of EEC subsidies that followed Greece's adhesion: public expenditure increased during the 1982-1988 period of 40 percent (compared to 28 percent during 1975-1981), while public debt rose by 433 percent (compared to 106 percent during the 1975-1981) (Lyrintzis 1993:27). These changes did not reflect any economic or social reforms but a general rise in consumption: indeed, PASOK continued, developed, formalized, systematized, and rationalized existing clientelistic practices under a system of "bureaucratic clientelism," "achiev[ing] an unprece-

dent degree of control over the state bureaucracy" (Papadopoulos 1989:65). In such a context, party identification acquired extraordinary material consequences. The payroll of the wider public sector grew to include more than 900,000 employees in 1989 (up from 500,000 in 1980)—about half the total number of wage earners.⁹ The new appointments were in their vast majority PASOK supporters: a 1986 study (cited by Pridham and Verney 1991:49) found that among PASOK members who had joined the party since 1981, 89 percent were employed in the state sector (a figure that is even more impressive given that in 1986, 70 percent of PASOK members had joined the party after 1981). In the absence of a system of party compromise over the distribution of spoils (*proporz*), partisan control of the state by parties was bound to both reflect and amplify mass polarization. Hence, while PASOK's economic policy did not diverge widely from that of past ND governments, its strategy along the dimensions of collective identity and its individual material payoffs was deepening existing cleavages.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the first half of the 1980s was a period of sharp polarization in Greek politics. This polarization did not reflect a class cleavage, but mirrored instead and shaped historically constructed partisan identities based on the memories of past conflicts and grounded in a giant partisan spoils system. The evidence presented in this paper matches Sartori's features of polarized pluralism—with two notable exceptions: first, the fragmentation ("pluralism") of the party system—with the concomitant presence of anti-system parties at the extremes of the political spectrum and the central placement of a party or a group of parties; and, second, the open questioning of the democratic institutions by the relevant political actors.

Both exceptions hold important implications for our understanding of polarization. First, polarized pluralism can be reconceptualized as a category of polarization. In turn, polarization should be studied as a general phenomenon which can arise in the absence of party fragmentation. For instance, the Greek

case can be classified as a type of "limited but polarized pluralism," "an 'alternative possibility' recognized but not elaborated by Sartori" (Mavrogordatos 1984). The implications of this reconceptualization need to be explicitly addressed and fully explored. Second, the explicit acceptance by the relevant actors of a country's democratic institutions does not constitute a necessary condition for a democratic regime's solidity and safety, i.e. its consolidation. As Sartori recently pointed out (1991:437), the fact "that there is no current alternative to democracy as a principle of legitimacy does not imply that democracy becomes unassailable. . . . Democracy may stand unchallenged in principle, and yet in practice be formidably challenged in its performance." As the Greek case indicates, parties that accept the rules of the game can very well adopt a polarizing strategy. It follows that polarized politics do not originate exclusively from anti-system or semi-loyal parties, as Linz and students of democratic consolidation have assumed. The fact that the Greek democratic system survived unharmed a period of high conflict does in no way imply that polarized politics never posed a threat to the regime's stability. As I pointed out, the polarized politics of the 1980s were particularly pernicious because they undermined the long-term legitimacy of institutions, reactivated in a divisive way collective memories of civil conflict, shaped and mobilized conflictual identities, and led to the frontal confrontation of two parties both within political institutions and the society at large. The fact that this conflict did not ultimately harm the Greek democratic regime underlines the necessity for the theoretical specification of the conditions under which polarized politics may lead (or not) to democratic breakdown.

NOTES

¹PASOK's membership stood at 260,000 in 1986 (Papadopoulos 1989:5). On the other hand, the speed with which ND transformed itself into a mass party after 1981 is remarkable: local committees were multiplied from 380 in 1979 to 2,000 in 1983, and by 1983 membership exceeded the 200,000 mark (Pappas 1995:311; Kalyvas 1996).

²Data from the 1981 Eurobarometer and the 1985 Southern European surveys.

³As Lyrintzis (1991:37) points out: "It may be true that PASOK is perceived by the electorate as a new center in politics. The point is, however, that the terms of party competition have significantly changed and that the meaning of old labels has also changed."

⁴Confirming, this trend is the result of the 1981 elections for the European parliament, which took place simultaneously with the national elections. PASOK's "European" score was eight percent lower from its national score (40.12 percent as opposed to 48.16 percent), with the difference going mostly to the parties on its left.

⁵In 1985, 35.4 percent of Greek respondents thought that "the democratic regime was working well" versus 8.5 percent in Spain, 4.4 percent in Portugal, and 4.9 percent in Italy (Kafetzis 1988:57).

⁶Sartzetakis led, as an attorney, the official investigation of the 1962 assassination by extreme rightists of the deputy of the left Grigoris Lambrakis. The candidature of Sartzetakis came as a surprise, because of the widespread assumption that PASOK would support the outgoing president, Constantine Karamanlis, widely perceived as a figure guaranteeing the stability of the regime.

⁷While PASOK implemented some redistributive measures during its first years in power, raising minimum salaries and pensions among others, it shunned radical structural reforms in the crucial sectors of economic and foreign policy.

⁸After 1974, the right abandoned this discourse. Still, ND consistently depicted PASOK as an authoritarian quasi-Marxist party closer to Third World than European politics.

⁹For the 1980 estimation see Tsoukalas 1987:83; for the 1989 estimation see *Oikonomikos Tachydromos* 1925, March 21, 1991: p. 20. The exact number of employees employed directly or indirectly by the state remains unknown.

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