

Bigger Page, Fewer Votes: SYRIZA, New Democracy and Facebook in Greece, 2015 to 2020

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Abstract

In July 2019 New Democracy won a parliamentary majority in Greece with 40% of the vote, ending four and a half years of SYRIZA government. I use 31,532 posts from the Facebook pages of five Greek parties and four of their leaders, from January 2015 to September 2020, collected through CrowdTangle, to compare engagement with the vote and to follow the two main leaders' pages through the change of government. In the month before the 2019 European and national elections, the pages of SYRIZA and Alexis Tsipras drew 56% and 61% of the interactions on the five parties' party and leader pages, against 33% and 36% of the vote among the same parties. The pages of New Democracy and Kyriakos Mitsotakis drew 25% and 21%, against 46% of the vote. The gap is consistent with differences in audience size and posting volume rather than weaker posts: Tsipras's page had about three times as many likes as Mitsotakis's, the SYRIZA party page posted far more than New Democracy's, and Mitsotakis's posts drew more interactions per page like. Counting Tsipras's page, the SYRIZA side also drew about four-fifths of the two main parties' interactions before both 2015 elections. In both main parties the leader's page drew most of the engagement: between 74% and 90% of the SYRIZA pair each year and between 82% and 96% of the New Democracy pair once Mitsotakis led it. After Mitsotakis became prime minister, his share of the two leaders' interactions returned from 36% in the quarter before the election to between 51% and 64%, similar to his share in 2016. Angry reactions on Tsipras's page fell from 4.2% of reactions while he was prime minister to 1.0% in opposition, but much of the earlier anger came from a few episodes. On Facebook in 2019, the bigger page belonged to the party that lost.

1 Introduction

Greece's party system changed twice in five years. In January 2015 SYRIZA, a radical-left coalition turned party, won the election on an anti-austerity platform. After the July 2015 bailout referendum and a third bailout agreement, it won again in September 2015 ([Tsatsanis and Teperoglou 2016](#)). In July 2019 New Democracy, led since 2016 by Kyriakos Mitsotakis, won an outright majority with 39.9% of the vote against SYRIZA's 31.5%. PASOK, once a party of government, had become the core of a smaller alliance, the Movement for Change (KINAL), and two new parties entered parliament: Greek Solution on the nationalist right and MeRA25, founded by the former finance minister Yanis Varoufakis.

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Alexis Tsipras’s Facebook page was the largest Greek political page in the data throughout this period. That makes Greece a useful case for a simple question: did the party with the bigger Facebook presence win? It did in 2015 and did not in 2019. I ask three descriptive questions. How did each party’s share of engagement compare with its share of the vote at the two 2015 elections and the two 2019 elections? How much of each party’s engagement came through its leader’s page? And what happened on the two main leaders’ pages when government changed hands?

The paper is one of a series using the same CrowdTangle export, collected during my doctoral research (Hotham 2021). It complements a study of populist parties across Europe (Hotham 2026a), of the radical right in the Nordic countries (Hotham 2026b) and of leaders and party pages in Britain (Hotham 2026c).

2 Background

Parties now use Facebook continuously, not only at elections (Larsson 2016), and politicians use their own pages to reach audiences directly (Stier et al. 2018). Posts in a personal style draw more engagement than other posts (Metz et al. 2020; Bene et al. 2022), so leaders’ pages often carry much of a party’s online presence. In Britain I found that the leader’s share of a party’s engagement varied widely, from about three-quarters for some leaders to a quarter or less for others (Hotham 2026c). Greece, where the two main parties have long been led by a small number of political families, is a case where that share might be expected to be high.

3 Data and methods

3.1 Pages and posts

The data are all posts from a CrowdTangle list of Greek political pages, exported on 28 October 2020 (CrowdTangle Team 2020). The list has eleven pages. I use the official pages of five parties (SYRIZA, New Democracy, KINAL, MeRA25 and Greek Solution) and of four leaders (Tsipras, Mitsotakis, Fofi Gennimata of PASOK and KINAL, and Varoufakis). I leave out a page of supporters of the Communist Party (KKE), which is not the party’s own page. I also leave out a page in Kyriakos Velopoulos’s name whose username identifies it as a page of his “friends”, because I cannot confirm that it is his official page; including it as Greek Solution’s leader page is a check reported below. The KKE, which won 5.3% in July 2019, therefore has no page in the sample, and nor does Golden Dawn, whose pages Facebook had removed. Greek Solution has a party page but no leader page.

I keep posts from 1 January 2015 to 30 September 2020. After removing 20 duplicate posts (same page, time and text) from the full export, the sample is 31,532 posts with 23.6 million interactions (Table 1). Interactions are the sum of reactions, comments and shares. The “From” dates are the first posts in the sample period, not the dates the pages were created. Timestamps are in UK time, two hours behind Athens, which moves the window edges slightly.

3.2 Elections

I compare each party’s share of interactions in the 30 days before an election with its share of the vote among the parties compared (Ministry of Interior, Hellenic Republic nd). The elections are the parliamentary elections of 25 January 2015, 20 September 2015 and 7 July 2019, and the European

Table 1. Pages in the sample, January 2015 to September 2020.

Page	From	Posts	Interactions (m)	Median per post
SYRIZA (party)	Jan 2015	7,934	2.40	97
Alexis Tsipras (SYRIZA leader)	Jan 2015	1,997	8.28	2,518
New Democracy (party)	Jan 2015	1,926	1.29	395
Kyriakos Mitsotakis (ND leader from 2016)	Jan 2015	2,206	7.99	2,250
Movement for Change, KINAL (party)	Feb 2018	2,958	0.59	154
Fofi Gennimata (PASOK/KINAL leader)	Jan 2015	3,122	1.34	288
MeRA25 (party)	Feb 2018	2,205	0.47	157
Yanis Varoufakis (MeRA25 leader)	May 2017	2,148	0.26	63
Greek Solution, EL (party)	May 2016	7,036	0.97	78
Total		31,532	23.6	

election of 26 May 2019. For 2019, I count each party's own page and its leader's page together. Varoufakis's page has no posts in June 2019, which covers almost the whole national campaign, probably a gap in CrowdTangle's coverage, so the MeRA25 figures for July 2019 rest mainly on the party page. For 2015, I compare only the SYRIZA and New Democracy party pages, because New Democracy's leaders at the time, Antonis Samaras in January and the interim leader Vangelis Meimarakis in September, have no pages in the data, and the other parties' pages do not yet exist. As a check, I add Tsipras's page to SYRIZA for 2015. As checks, I use windows of 14 and 60 days and, for 2019, party pages only. The 2019 European and national elections were six weeks apart, so their 60-day windows overlap. Vote shares are renormalised among the parties compared. I report both the ratio of Facebook share to vote share and the gap in percentage points.

3.3 Leaders and the change of government

For each party, I calculate the leader's share of the interactions on the leader's page and the party page together in each year from 2015 in which the person led the party. For Mitsotakis that is from 2016. For Gennimata and Varoufakis it is from 2018, when KINAL and MeRA25 launched their pages. To follow the change of government, I calculate Mitsotakis's share of the interactions on the two main leaders' pages by quarter from January 2016, when he became New Democracy's leader. I also compare the mix of reactions on each leader's page while Tsipras was prime minister (March 2016 to 7 July 2019, from when reactions are available) and while Mitsotakis was (8 July 2019 to September 2020).

4 Results

4.1 The bigger page lost in 2019

In January 2015 the SYRIZA party page drew 69% of the interactions on the two main party pages, against SYRIZA's 57% of the two parties' vote (Figure 1, Table 2). In September 2015 the two party pages split interactions close to the vote: 53% for SYRIZA against 56%. But that depends on leaving out Tsipras's page. With it, the SYRIZA side drew 81% of interactions in January 2015 and 79% in September, so SYRIZA dominated Facebook at both 2015 elections, which it won, as well as at both 2019 elections, which it lost.

In 2019 the gap was large and went the other way from the result. Before the European election, the SYRIZA and Tsipras pages drew 56% of interactions on the five parties' pages, against 33% of the vote among the same parties, while the New Democracy and Mitsotakis pages drew 25% against 46%. Before the national election in July, the SYRIZA side drew 61% against 36% and the New Democracy side 21% against 46%. New Democracy drew about half its vote share on Facebook (ratios of 0.53 and 0.46), and SYRIZA about 1.7 times its share. KINAL drew more than its vote share (1.22 and 1.44 times), MeRA25 about its share, and Greek Solution, with no leader page, about a quarter of its share. Counting the Velopoulos page as Greek Solution's leader page raises its ratio to about 0.6 and leaves the others almost unchanged (New Democracy 0.52 and 0.45). The New Democracy ratio stays between 0.42 and 0.56 with windows of 14 and 60 days, and falls to between 0.24 and 0.29 with party pages only (Table 3).

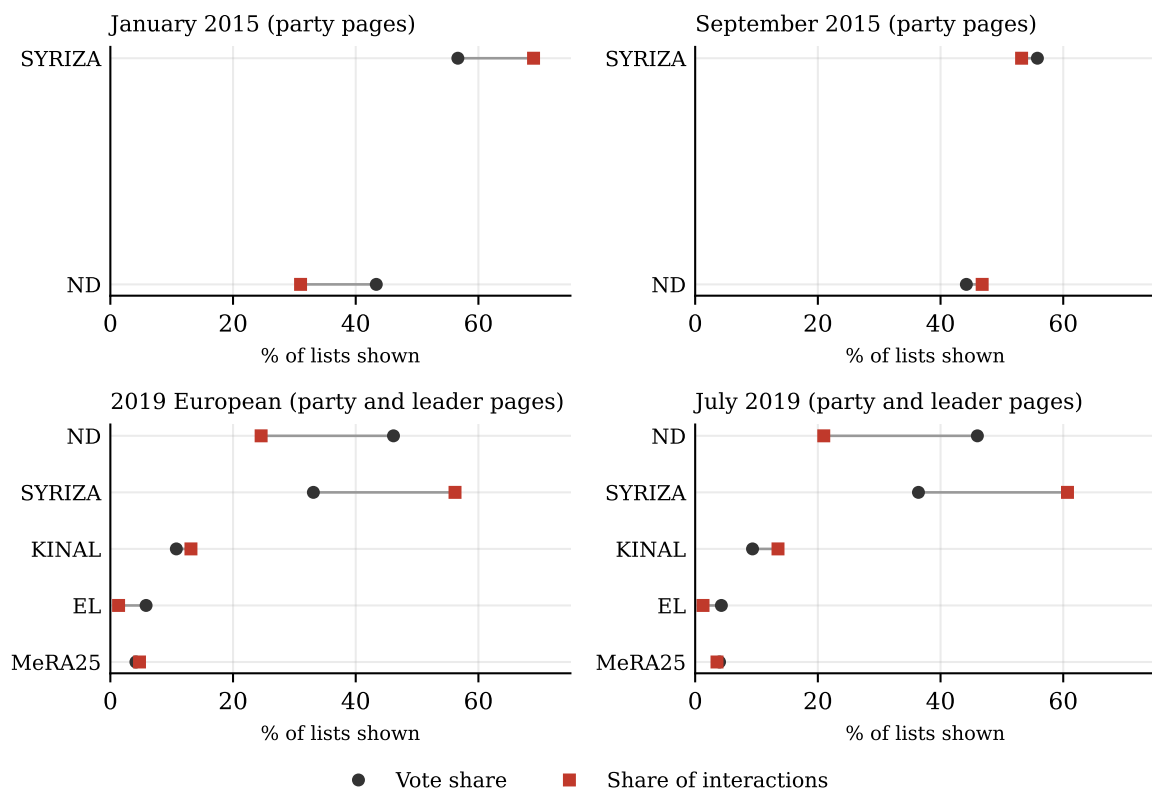


Figure 1. Share of interactions in the 30 days before each election and vote share, among the parties compared. 2015 compares the SYRIZA and New Democracy party pages only. 2019 counts each party's page and its leader's page together.

The gap does not appear to mean that New Democracy's posts were less engaging. Tsipras's page had about 442,000 to 450,000 likes in the two 2019 windows, three times Mitsotakis's 139,000 to 147,000. The SYRIZA side also posted far more: 370 and 310 posts in the two windows, against 90 and 75 for New Democracy and Mitsotakis. That difference came from the party pages: the SYRIZA page posted 325 and 238 times against New Democracy's 34 and 34, while Tsipras posted less than Mitsotakis before the European election (45 against 56 posts) and still drew 1.9 times his interactions. Per post, Mitsotakis's page drew a median of 2,700 interactions before the European election and 3,800 before the national election. Relative to page size, that is 19 and 26 interactions per 1,000 page likes, against 14 and 11 for Tsipras, and the ordering is the same using means. Because engagement per like usually falls as pages grow, a higher rate for the smaller page is partly expected. The results are consistent with New Democracy drawing less engagement because it had a smaller audience and its party page posted less,

Table 2. Facebook and vote shares in the 30 days before each election. Posts are those on the pages counted for each party in the window. Facebook % is the share of interactions among the parties compared, and Vote % the vote share renormalised among the same parties.

Election	List	Posts	Facebook %	Vote %	Gap (points)	Ratio
January 2015	SYRIZA	73	69.0	56.6	+12.3	1.22
	ND	52	31.0	43.4	-12.3	0.72
September 2015	SYRIZA	104	53.2	55.8	-2.6	0.95
	ND	138	46.8	44.2	+2.6	1.06
2019 European	ND	90	24.6	46.2	-21.6	0.53
	SYRIZA	370	56.2	33.1	+23.1	1.70
	KINAL	306	13.1	10.8	+2.4	1.22
	EL	92	1.3	5.8	-4.5	0.23
	MeRA25	282	4.8	4.2	+0.6	1.14
July 2019	ND	75	21.0	46.0	-25.0	0.46
	SYRIZA	310	60.7	36.4	+24.3	1.67
	KINAL	374	13.5	9.4	+4.2	1.44
	EL	72	1.3	4.3	-3.0	0.30
	MeRA25	83	3.6	4.0	-0.4	0.90

not because its leader's posts drew less from the audience he had, but they do not decompose the gap formally.

4.2 The leaders carried their parties

In both main parties the leader's page drew most of the engagement (Figure 2). Tsipras's page drew between 74% and 90% of the interactions on the two SYRIZA pages in every year from 2015 to 2020. Mitsotakis's page drew between 82% and 96% of the two New Democracy pages in every year from 2016, when he became leader. Gennimata's page drew 88% of the two KINAL pages in 2018 and about 55% in 2019 and 2020. MeRA25 was the exception: Varoufakis's page drew between 17% and 56%, and in 2019 and 2020 the party page drew more than he did, though his 2019 figure is affected by the gap in his page's coverage. These shares are at or above the top of the range I found for British leaders, where the highest were between 71% and 79% (Hotham 2026c).

4.3 What changed when government changed

Figure 3 shows Mitsotakis's share of the interactions on the two main leaders' pages. In 2016, his first year as leader, he drew more than Tsipras in every quarter (53% to 72%). From late 2017 to early 2019 the two were close (44% to 60%). In the second quarter of 2019, which included the European election and the start of the national campaign, Tsipras drew far more and Mitsotakis's share fell to 36%. After Mitsotakis became prime minister on 8 July 2019, his share was 60% in the third quarter of 2019 (which also includes the last week of the campaign), 51% in the fourth and between 57% and 64% in each quarter of 2020, when the pandemic raised engagement on both pages. This was partly a return to his earlier level: he averaged about 55% from 2016 to 2018, and the second quarter of 2019 was the exception. His page also grew from a median of about 117,000 likes in 2018 to 245,000 in 2020, while Tsipras's stayed near 450,000.

Table 3. Ratio of Facebook share to vote share under alternative windows and page sets. For 2015, the main specification already uses party pages only.

Election	List	30 days (main)	14 days	60 days	Party pages only
January 2015	SYRIZA	1.22	1.29	1.22	1.22
	ND	0.72	0.62	0.72	0.72
September 2015	SYRIZA	0.95	1.15	0.93	0.95
	ND	1.06	0.81	1.08	1.06
2019 European	SYRIZA	1.70	1.81	1.54	1.58
	ND	0.53	0.47	0.56	0.24
	KINAL	1.22	1.22	1.44	2.11
	EL	0.23	0.16	0.28	0.72
July 2019	MeRA25	1.14	1.03	1.42	2.30
	SYRIZA	1.67	1.76	1.60	1.61
	ND	0.46	0.42	0.47	0.29
	KINAL	1.44	1.31	1.49	1.68
	EL	0.30	0.25	0.31	0.77
	MeRA25	0.90	0.80	1.15	2.25

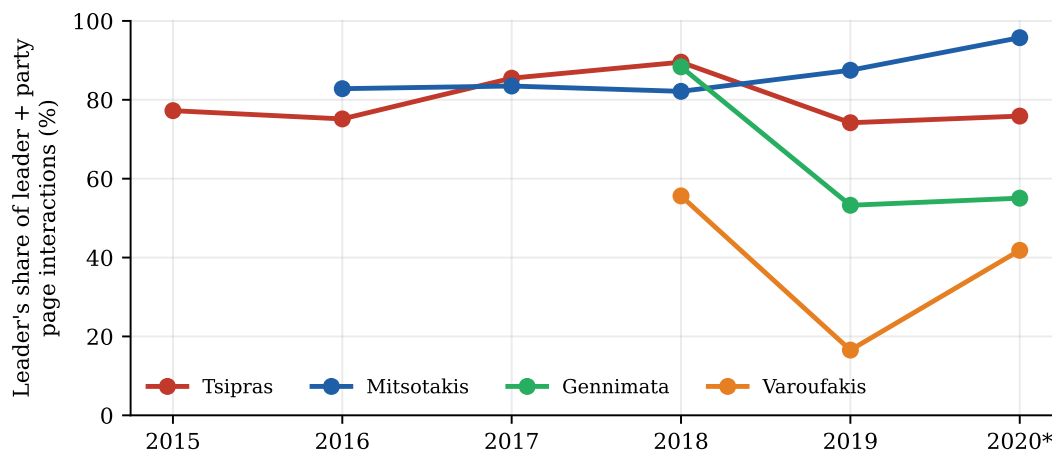


Figure 2. Leader's page as a share of the interactions on the leader's page and the party page together, by year, in years when the person led the party and both pages are in the data. *2020 runs to September.

The reactions on Tsipras's page changed when he left office (Table 4). While he was prime minister, 4.2% of reactions to his posts were "angry" and 22% of interactions were comments. In opposition, the angry share fell to 1.0% and comments to 14%. Much of the earlier anger, however, came from a few episodes. In most quarters while he was prime minister the angry share was between 1% and 5%, but it reached 17% in the second quarter of 2018, when the Prespa agreement with North Macedonia was signed, 8% in the third, which included the Mati wildfire, and 12% in the first quarter of 2019, when the agreement was ratified. Twenty posts account for 38% of all angry reactions on his page in that period, and in the second quarter of 2019, while he was still prime minister, the angry share was 1.9%. For the median post, the angry share fell from 1.5% to 0.6%. On Mitsotakis's page the overall angry share stayed at 1.1% after he took office, while the median post's rose from 0.3% to 0.6%, and "haha" reactions fell from 2.9% to 1.3%. "Love" reactions rose on both pages, which probably reflects how people's use of reactions changed over time.

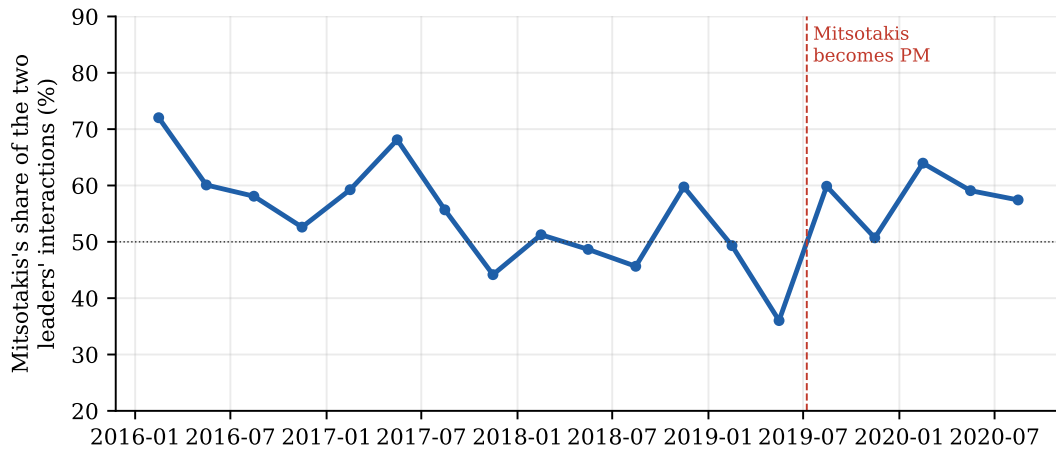


Figure 3. Mitsotakis’s share of the interactions on the Tsipras and Mitsotakis pages, by quarter, from his election as New Democracy leader in January 2016 to September 2020.

Table 4. Reactions as a percentage of all reactions including likes, and comments as a percentage of all interactions, on the two leaders’ pages while Tsipras was prime minister (March 2016 to 7 July 2019) and while Mitsotakis was (8 July 2019 to September 2020).

Page	Period	Angry	Haha	Love	Comments
Tsipras	Tsipras PM	4.2	2.6	16.9	22.4
Tsipras	Mitsotakis PM	1.0	1.9	19.3	13.6
Mitsotakis	Tsipras PM	1.1	2.9	9.3	9.8
Mitsotakis	Mitsotakis PM	1.1	1.3	17.0	10.0

5 Discussion

In 2019 the Greek party with the larger Facebook presence lost. SYRIZA and Tsipras drew more than half of the interactions on the main parties’ pages in the month before each 2019 election, and New Democracy won both elections by large margins. The reason was not that New Democracy’s posts failed to engage: Mitsotakis’s page drew more interactions per page like than Tsipras’s. It was that Tsipras’s page had been built up over years, much of it as prime minister, and that SYRIZA posted far more. Engagement shares on Facebook mostly measure the size and activity of a party’s existing audience, and in Greece in 2019 that audience was not a guide to the vote.

The leader share results put Greece at the personalised end of the range. In both main parties, the leader’s page drew most of the engagement in almost every year, and the party pages were secondary. The change of government gives only weak evidence about whether anger follows the office. Angry reactions on Tsipras’s page fell after he left government, but they had been concentrated in a few divisive episodes, above all the Prespa agreement, rather than spread across his time in office. They did not rise much on Mitsotakis’s page, but his first year in office was dominated by the pandemic, an unusual period for any government.

6 Limitations

The sample has no official pages for the KKE or Golden Dawn, and no leader page for Greek Solution, so the five-party comparison leaves out about 13% of the July 2019 vote and about 28% of the 2019 European vote, and understates Greek Solution's presence. Varoufakis's page has no posts in June 2019. The 2015 comparison covers only the two main party pages. CrowdTangle's historical coverage is not guaranteed to be complete, and I cannot check it against another source. Interactions are not support: they include engagement from opponents, from people outside Greece (Greeks abroad could not vote from abroad in these elections), and possibly from paid promotion. The reaction comparison spans a period in which the use of reactions changed and in which the pandemic began, so it cannot separate the effect of office from those trends. Four elections and one change of government are too few to generalise.

7 Conclusion

In Greece in 2019, the bigger Facebook page belonged to the party that lost. SYRIZA's and Tsipras's large and active audience gave them more than half of the engagement on the main parties' pages, while New Democracy, whose leader's posts drew more per page like, won both elections. Both parties ran their Facebook presence through their leaders. When government changed hands, the new prime minister drew more engagement than his rival, much as he had in his first years as leader, and the anger on the outgoing prime minister's page, which had come mostly from a few divisive episodes, fell away. For reading Facebook as a guide to elections, the Greek case is a reminder that engagement measures an audience built over years, not the electorate on the day.

Provenance and AI use

The data were exported from CrowdTangle in October 2020 for my doctoral research. This paper builds on my doctoral thesis ([Hotham 2021](#)). The analysis and writing were completed in 2026.

I wrote the text, with drafting and editing assistance from Claude (Anthropic), which also helped prepare the analysis code and review drafts. I checked the analysis and the text and take responsibility for both.

Ethics and data

The data are public posts by political parties and party leaders. In line with CrowdTangle's terms, I do not publish post-level data and I do not quote posts. Aggregated data are available from the author: interactions by page and quarter, the election comparisons, the leader shares and the reaction counts.

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