

**Greece**

## Greece calls parliamentary elections for May 21

Support for ruling centre-right party has fallen amid criticism of the government's handling of a deadly train crash



Kyriakos Mitsotakis leads a cabinet meeting in Athens. Mitsotakis's party has an opinion poll lead of about three points over Syriza © Reuters

**Eleni Varvitsioti** 4 HOURS AGO

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Greek prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has called a general election for May 21 under a proportional representation system that will make it difficult for a single party to form a government.

Support for Mitsotakis's ruling centre-right party, New Democracy, has fallen amid criticism of the government's handling of a train crash in February, which claimed the lives of 57 people — the worst rail accident in the country's history.

But it still has an opinion poll lead of about three points over Syriza, the leftwing party of the previous government, which under then prime minister Alexis Tsipras changed the electoral law to introduce full proportional representation.

If parties fail to agree on a coalition, a second ballot under a semi-proportional system is expected to be held a few weeks later, by the beginning of July at the latest.

During a televised cabinet meeting on Tuesday, Mitsotakis said voters would be able to choose “whether the country will continue to claim and win the bet of modernisation”.

He called on Greeks to compare his administration with the previous Syriza government in terms of its handling of the economy, defence and foreign policy and how Greece was viewed from abroad.

Even before February’s train crash, the prime minister’s standing with centrist voters had been undermined by a political scandal in which [opposition politicians were wiretapped](#) by the secret service, and international criticism over his government’s handling of irregular migrants crossing from Turkey. Centrist support is seen as crucial for Mitsotakis’s re-election.

But criticism of Mitsotakis has not boosted Syriza’s poll numbers. As people took to the streets in protest over the rail crash, their anger was directed not just at the current ruling party but at those who had been in power in the years leading up to tragedy.

Marginal parties are the ones who have gained popular momentum while the pool of undecided voters is increasing.

After the election was announced on Tuesday, Tsipras said the government was out of touch economically and claimed the majority of Greeks could not afford to pay their bills. “On May 21, citizens will return the bill they can no longer pay to the ballot box,” the opposition leader said.

Syriza lost almost half its seats in 2019 after Tsipras imposed new austerity measures despite promises not to, a move that hit the Greek middle class hard.

George Pagoulatos, director-general of the Athens-based think-tank Eliamep, said as the elections draw nearer, the focus of voters would turn from the aftermath of the train crash “and increasingly be on governance”.

Mitsotakis is expected to use his electoral campaign to stress the achievements of his tenure. During Tuesday’s cabinet meeting, he said in 2019 Greece was “the last” in terms of eurozone growth. “Today,” he said, “our economy is increasing at almost double the eurozone average”.

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