



UNEQUAL DEMOCRACIES

GREECE: WHO DOES (NOT) HAVE A SEAT IN PARLIAMENT?

Jenny Mavropoulou
February 2025



This study examines the social composition of the 2023 Hellenic parliament in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, education level and socio-economic status.



Women, younger people and lower-grade social classes are clearly underrepresented in the 2023 Hellenic parliament. In general, the current parliamentary composition is strongly skewed towards men, older MPs and consists of socioeconomically high-level individuals.



A series of measures on three different levels (e.g., policy-making process, political parties and political campaign) should be adopted to bridge the representation gap and achieve the so-called descriptive representation of the Greek electorate.



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INTRODUCTION

According to the fundamental principles of representative democracy, representative institutions, such as parliaments, are supposed to represent the various interests of the community and respond to the preferences and needs of the different societal groups. An ideal parliament would consist of representatives that reflect their society's diversity in terms of their different socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, education level, socio-economic status and other factors. It is well established that citizens tend to identify with representatives who share a common socio-demographic background and act in pursuit of their interests and demands (Campbell and Cowley 2014). A properly functioning representative democracy thus mobilises citizens to communicate their demands and influence the policymaking process. If this proves successful, it is likely to enhance popular trust in parliament and the political system in general.

In general terms, parliamentary representation has become a critical issue in modern democracies, as success in striking a balance between continuity and change has been considered an indicator of the quality of a democracy. More specifically, although higher levels of parliamentary turnover may lead to greater responsiveness to citizens' demands and concerns, constant renewal of the political elite is likely to disrupt political continuity and therefore undermine the achievement of long-term policy goals (McCubbins and Cox 2001). On the other hand, while parliamentary continuity may contribute to the efficiency of legislative and executive operations, it could also pose a threat to democracy because of the erosion of MPs' legitimacy and the diminishing effectiveness of public policymaking (Matland and Studlar 2004).

Over recent decades, the scholarly and public debate has focused on analysing the specific characteristics that make up the political and socio-demographic identity of parliamentary representatives (Norris 1997). As is well known, no parliament could be characterised as a mirror of a society's actual composition; parliamentary representatives tend to be male, middle-aged and well educated and to belong to the dominant socio-economic groups. Therefore, the following analysis aims to examine the composition of the Hellenic parliament in terms of socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education level and socio-economic status, in order to identify whether there are societal groupings that are overrepresented, underrepresented, or even not represented at all.

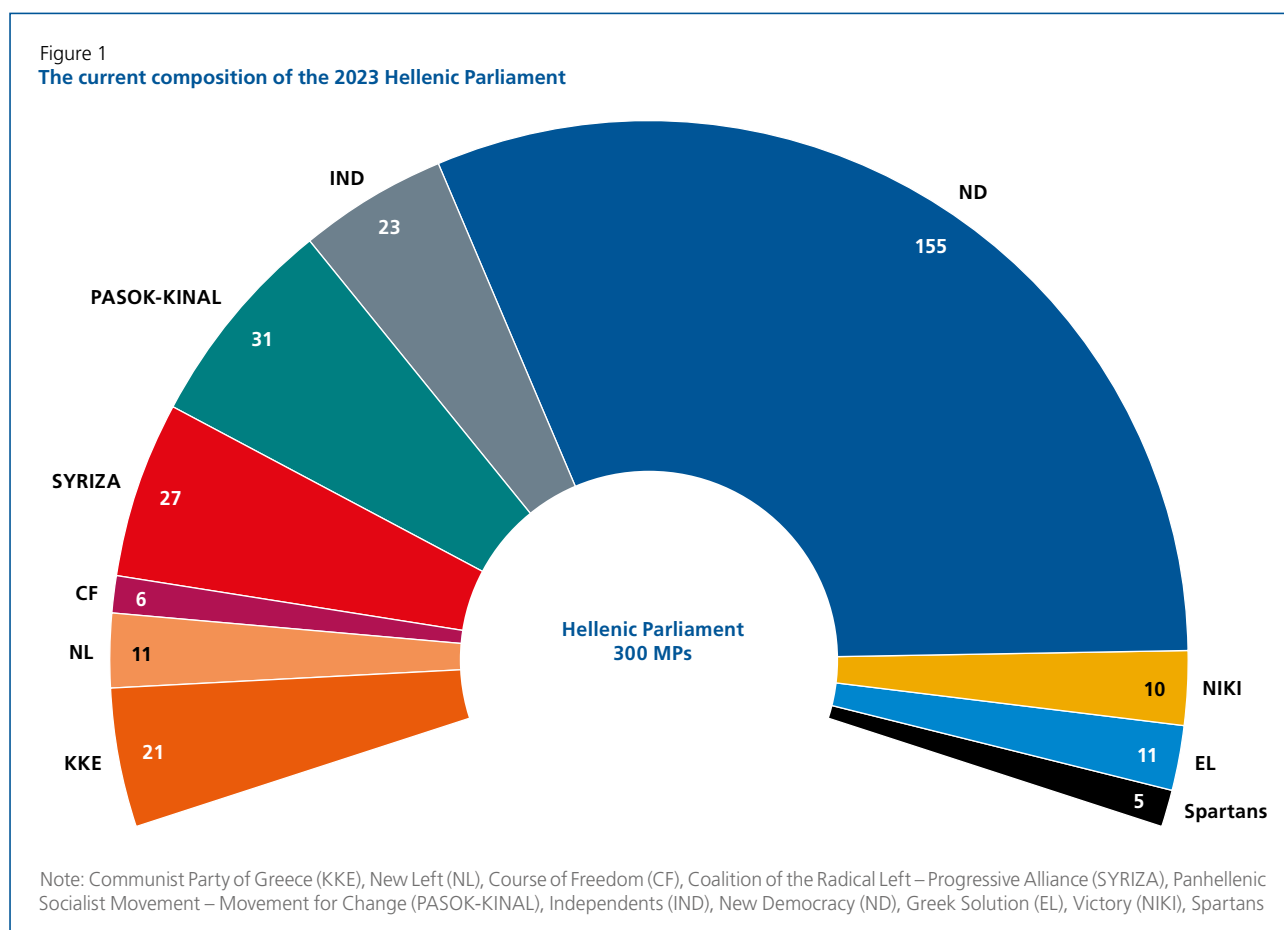
THE PARTY COMPOSITION OF THE HELLENIC PARLIAMENT

Starting with some basic remarks that illuminate the structure of the Hellenic parliament, we observe that it consists of 300 Members of Parliament (MPs) elected in general elections, normally for a four-year term. According to the principles of the current electoral system, known as “reinforced proportionality”, a form of semi-proportional representation that combines aspects of proportional representation and the majoritarian system, 250 seats are allocated proportionally, while a staggered 50-seat bonus is awarded to parties that exceed the 25% threshold. Figure 1 shows the distribution of seats¹ among political parties that crossed the 3%

threshold and entered Parliament in the legislative elections in June 2023. The conservative New Democracy (ND) won the elections, securing 155 seats,² whereas SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance), a party on the radical left-wing spectrum, lost half of its parliamentary seats compared with the 2019 Parliamentary elections. More specifically, in November 2024, SYRIZA lost its status as the main opposition group in parliament. SYRIZA has been undergoing a significant internal crisis since its electoral collapse in the 2023 elections, which was initially accompanied by the departure of eleven MPs and the formation of a new par-

1 Figure 1 depicts the party composition of the Hellenic Parliament until November 2024.

2 New Democracy won the 2023 parliamentary elections securing 158 seats, but three MPs have been removed from ND’s parliamentary group by November 2024 and sit as independent MPs.



liamentary group, called the New Left, in December 2023. SYRIZA's dissolution crisis peaked after the removal of its leader, Stefanos Kasselakis. His decision to start a new political movement initiated a new domino-effect of departures, as eight MPs quit the party, reducing SYRIZA's parliamentary representation to 27 MPs, as result of which it lost the role of main opposition group in parliament. The social democratic PASOK-KINAL (Panhellenic Socialist Movement-Movement for Change), having strengthened its parliamentary representation in the 2023 elections, became the leading opposition group with 31 MPs, for the first time in 15 years. Moreover, the Communist Party (KKE), as well as Greek Solution (EL), a party of the populist radical right, increased their parliamentary representation compared with previous elections. The recent elections also saw the parliamentary entry of three new parties with left-wing (Course of Freedom) and right-wing (Victory – NIKI, and Spartans) ideological profiles. Finally, it is worth noting that since the 2023 elections, 23 MPs have been sitting as independents, having left or been removed from the parties they were elected with. The majority of independent MPs were elected with SYRIZA (9 MPs), followed by the Spartans (7 MPs), New Democracy (3 MPs), the Course of Freedom (2 MPs), Greek Solution (1 MP) and PASOK-KINAL (1 MP).

The analysis that follows draws on data that illustrate the socio-demographic composition of the current parliament elected in June 2023. The analysis will be enriched by its comparative dimension, processing the database "Members of the Hellenic Parliament (1989–2019)", which provides information on their socio-demographic characteristics³ for the period 1989–2019. The analysis' comparative perspective will illustrate whether the parliamentary representatives' profiles have changed over time and whether there are particular patterns that facilitate the entry into parliament of social groupings with specific socio-demographic characteristics.

³ More information available at: <https://socoscope.gr/dataset/deputies>.

THE HELLENIC PARLIAMENT OVERREPRESENTS OLDER AT THE EXPENSE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Figure 2 depicts the current age composition of the Hellenic parliament. In general terms, we observe the absence of elected members under the age of 30 in the recent Parliamentary elections. The database “Members of the Hellenic Parliament (1989–2019)” reveals that this pattern appears to have been consistent since 1989, as parliamentary representation of the under-30 age group ranged from absent to negligible. Moreover, our findings confirm that underrepresentation also affects the age group between 30 and 39 years, as it constitutes the minority of the 2023 Hellenic parliament, with only 25 representatives. It is also worth mentioning that the representation of the 30–39 age group remained at low levels from the second half of the 1990s until the 2009 pre-crisis elections; the 30–39 age group showed slightly higher levels of representation since the May/June 2012 double “earthquake” Parliamentary elections (Voulgaris and Nikolakopoulos 2014), which were accompa-

nied by a restructuring of the party system. Regarding the 40–49 age group, we see that it consists of 81 MPs (28.8%), reversing the downward trend that characterised this age group from the 2004 to 2019 Parliamentary elections. Finally, it is evident that MPs aged over 60 comprise the majority of the Hellenic parliament, superseding the dominance of the 50–59 age group since the 2000 legislative elections. The overrepresentation of MPs over 60 years of age, combined with the inadequate or even insignificant representation of younger age groups demonstrates that the Hellenic parliament has been experiencing a long-standing skewedness of representation regarding age.

Looking at the share of MPs by age and political parties (Figure 3), we observe that the parliamentary group of the *New Left* and *PASOK-KINAL* have the highest shares of younger MPs (age group 30–39), at 18.2% and 14.3% respectively,

Figure 2
The age composition of the 2023 Hellenic Parliament

Age groups	Number of seats	Share of seats (%)	Male MPs		Female MPs	
			Number	Share (%)	Number	Share (%)
Under 30	0	0	0	0	0	0
30–39	25	8.9	17	68	8	32
40–49	81	28.8	59	72.8	22	27.2
50–59	85	30.2	72	84.7	13	15.3
Over 60	90	32	73	81.1	17	18.9

Figure 3
Share of MPs by age groups and political parties

Political parties	Number of seats	Share of MPs (%)				
		under 30	30–39	40–49	50–59	over 60
Communist Party of Greece (KKE)	21	0	10.5	10.5	21.1	57.9
New Left (NL)	11	0	18.2	27.3	9	45.5
Course of Freedom (CF)	6	0	0	40	40	20
Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance (SYRIZA)	27	0	7.5	44.4	25.9	22.2
Panhellenic Socialist Movement – Movement for Change (PASOK-KINAL)	31	0	14.3	35.7	25	25
New Democracy (ND)	155	0	7.6	26.2	33.8	32.4
Victory (NIKI)	10	0	0	30	50	20
Greek Solution (EL)	11	0	9.1	36.3	27.3	27.3
Spartans	5	0	20	60	20	0
Independents (IND)	23	0	9.5	19	28.6	42.9
Total MPs	300	0	8.9	28.8	30.2	32

compared with the other parliamentary groups.⁴ Moreover, it is worth noting that our findings indicate the absence of MPs aged 30–39 from the parliamentary groups of *Course of Freedom* and *Victory* parties. More than a third of the parliamentary composition of *PASOK* and *SYRIZA* falls into the 40–49 age group, while 34% of *ND*'s MPs belong to the 50–59 age group. Finally, it is important to mention that a significant number of left-wing oriented MPs (MPs of the Communist Party and New Left) come from the over-60 age group.

⁴ The share of Spartan MPs aged 30–39 is not very informative due to the very small size of their parliamentary group (5 MPs in total).

WOMEN: STILL UNDERREPRESENTED, BUT WELL EDUCATED

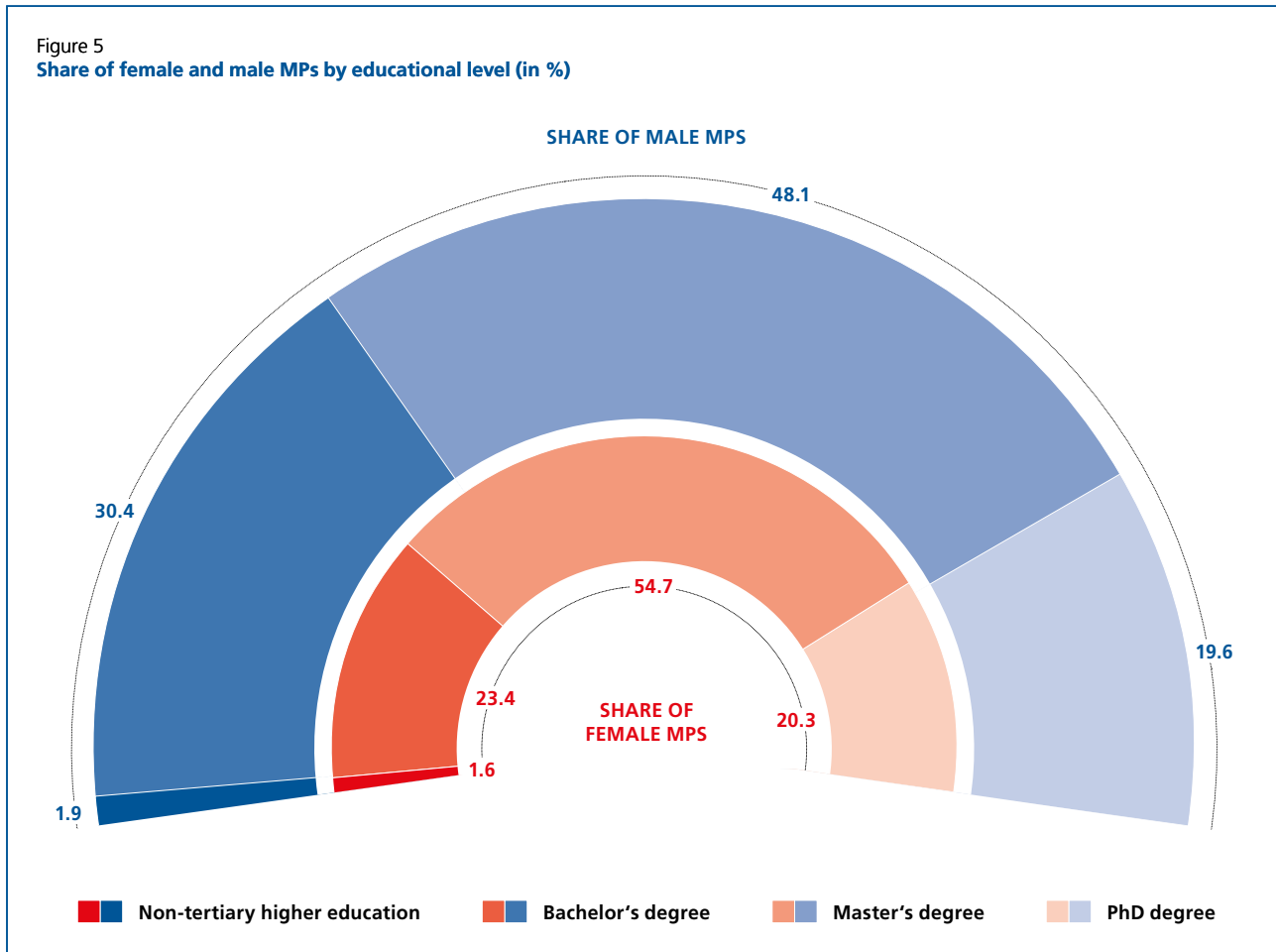
In the next step of our analysis, we take a look at the gender composition of the Hellenic parliament. According to the results of the 2023 legislative elections, only 69 of the elected MPs were female (23%). This appears to contravene Greek electoral law because the introduction of quotas obliges political parties to include at least 40% women in their electoral lists. In general, it is worth noting that until the 1996 Parliamentary elections, the representation of women MPs was around 6% or even lower. Since the 2000 elections, however, there has been a gradual increase in the number of female representatives, which is also reflected in the recent legislative elections. The database “Members of the Hellenic

Parliament (1989–2019)” demonstrates that even though there has been a gradual improvement in the representation of women throughout the period, they remain drastically underrepresented. Figure 4 illustrates that the parliamentary groups of political parties with either a left-wing or a centre-left orientation are characterised by higher levels of gender balance. More specifically, the Course of Freedom has 50% female MPs, followed by New Left with 45.5%, SYRIZA with 29.6%, the Communist Party with 28.6% and PASOK-KINAL with 25.8% female MPs. The governing party ND’s parliamentary group includes only 30 female MPs (19.3%), a share that is far from the declared goal of gender balance.

Figure 4
Share of MPs by gender, age and political party

Political parties	Number of female MPs	Share of female MPs (%)	Share of female MPs (%)				
			under 30	30–39	40–49	50–59	over 60
Communist Party of Greece (KKE)	6	28.6	0	20	0	20	60
New Left (NL)	5	45.5	0	20	0	0	80
Course of Freedom (CF)	3	50	0	0	33.3	67.3	0
Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance (SYRIZA)	8	29.6	0	12.5	50	12.5	25
Panhellenic Socialist Movement – Movement for Change (PASOK-KINAL)	8	25.8	0	33.3	33.3	33.3	0
New Democracy (ND)	30	19.3	0	11.5	50	23.1	15.4
Victory (NIKI)	1	10	0	0	100	0	0
Greek Solution (EL)	2	18.2	0	0	0	0	100
Spartans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Independents (IND)	6	26.1	0	0	16.7	16.7	66.6
Total female MPs	69	23	0	13.1	36.1	21.3	29.5

Figure 5
Share of female and male MPs by educational level (in %)



In line with other countries in Europe, the representation of women in the parliamentary groups of far-right parties, such as Greek Solution, Victory and Spartans, is very low or in certain cases even absent. Further analysis of the age of female representatives shows that the parliamentary groups of PASOK-KINAL, SYRIZA and New Democracy include more younger female MPs (aged 30–39 and 40–49) than those of the left-wing parties (Figure 4). To illustrate this further, half of New Democracy's female MPs come from the 40–49 age-group, while 60% and 80% of the female MPs belonging to the parliamentary groups of the Communist Party and New Left, respectively, fall into the over-60 age group.

Focusing on education level, we observe that the vast majority of parliamentary representatives have higher academic qualifications, a phenomenon referred to as “diploma democracy” (Bovens and Wille 2017) – MPs with a university degree are increasingly prevalent. In general, only five MPs (1.8%) have completed a post-secondary non-tertiary education cycle (ISCED 5), compared with 98.2% who have completed higher academic education (ISCED 6-7-8). More specifically, 80 MPs (28.8%) have a bachelor's degree (ISCED 6), 138 MPs (49.6%) have a master's degree (ISCED 7), and 55 MPs (19.8%) have a PhD (ISCED 8). If, more specifically, we analyse education levels by gender (Figure 5), we notice that the percentages of male and female MPs do not differ significantly. With regard to tertiary education, 23.4% of women MPs have a bachelor's degree compared with 30.4%

of men MPs. In addition, 54.7% of women MPs have a master's degree, whereas 48.1% of men MPs have an equivalent degree. Finally, 20.3% of female and 19.6% of male parliamentary representatives have obtained a doctorate. In sum, our findings confirm “diploma democracy” in the Hellenic parliament.

THE HIGHER ONE'S SOCIAL CLASS, THE BETTER CHANCE ONE HAS OF BEING ELECTED

Regarding the social composition of the Hellenic parliament, we may observe that the vast majority of Greek representatives belongs to the upper service class. We classified the indicated occupational backgrounds in accordance with the Oesch (2006) class scheme (Figure 6). In general terms, our findings demonstrate the overrepresentation of the upper service class, as well as the underrepresentation of the lower-grade service class and the working class. More specifically, 255 MPs (87%) belong to the upper service class, while only 20 MPs (6.9%) come from the lower service class and another 18 MPs (6.1%) can be considered to be part of the working class (Figure 7). Looking at the social composition of the Hellenic parliament by party affiliation, we can see that working-class MPs are not equally distributed across

political parties (Figure 8). The majority of working-class MPs belong to political parties situated either on the radical-left (Communist Party) or on the radical-right wing side (Greek Solution) of the political spectrum. Moreover, the majority of representatives belonging to the lower-grade service class are members of the parliamentary groups of left-wing (SYRIZA and Course of Freedom) and right-wing parties (Victory and Spartans). Given, as already mentioned, that 255 out of 300 MPs (87%) are part of the upper service class, they cannot be considered to constitute exclusively a pool of centre-right and centre-left parties, such as ND and PASOK-KINAL. All political parties, regardless of ideological orientation, seem to undergo a process of "similarisation" (Ilonszki 2007) because of their penetration of previously

Figure 6
The Oesch Social Class Classification scheme

	EMPLOYEES			SELF-EMPLOYED	
	Administrative work logic	Interpersonal work logic	Technical work logic	Independent work logic	
Upper service class	Higher-grade managers accountants, senior ministry officials, advertising professionals	Sociocultural experts secondary school teachers, physicians, university teachers	Technical experts engineers, IT experts	Independent professions lawyers, practicing physicians, independent consultants	Large employers managers, business owners, farmers
Lower-grade service class	Lower-grade managers skilled administrative staff, skilled commercial professions	Sociocultural professions social workers, elementary school teachers	Technical semi-professions skilled workers in engineering professions, medical technicians	Small business owners with employees	
Working class	Skilled clerks skilled secretaries, warehouse clerks	Skilled service providers salespersons, preschool teachers, practical nurses	Skilled crafts workers electricians, building electricians	Small business owners without employees	
	Routine office clerks call-centre agents	Routine service providers bartenders, cleaning professions, security professions	Routine skilled workers machinery operators, freight professions		

Figure 7
The composition of the Hellenic Parliament according to social classes

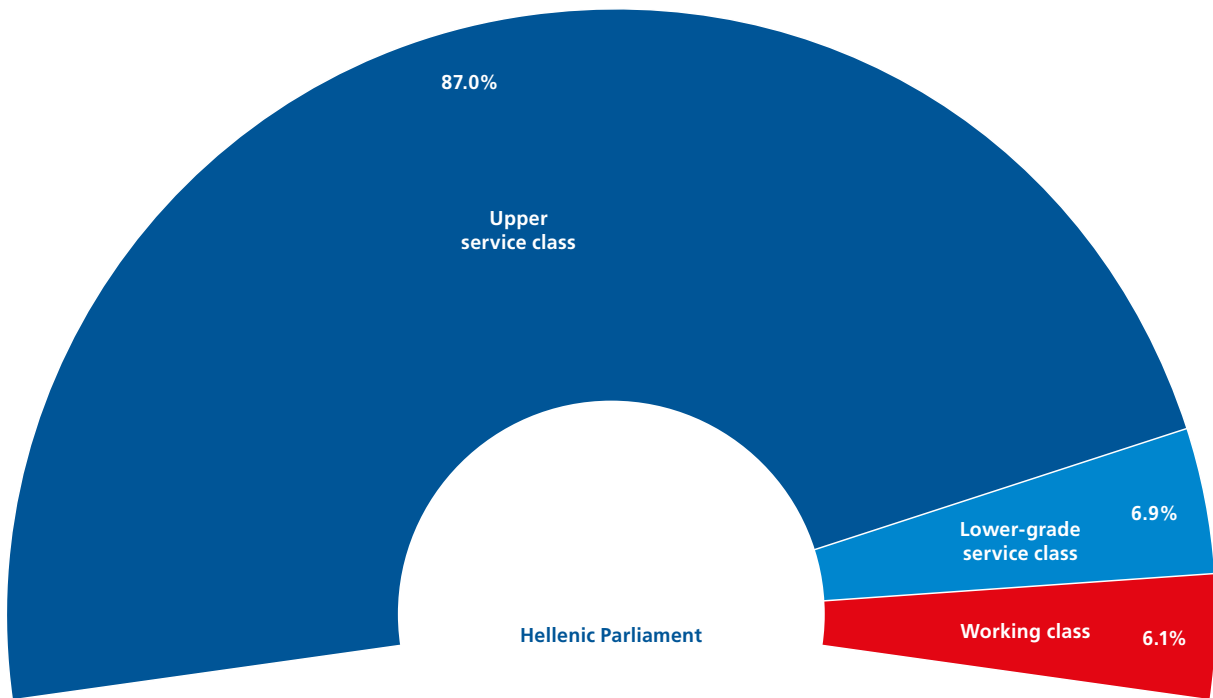
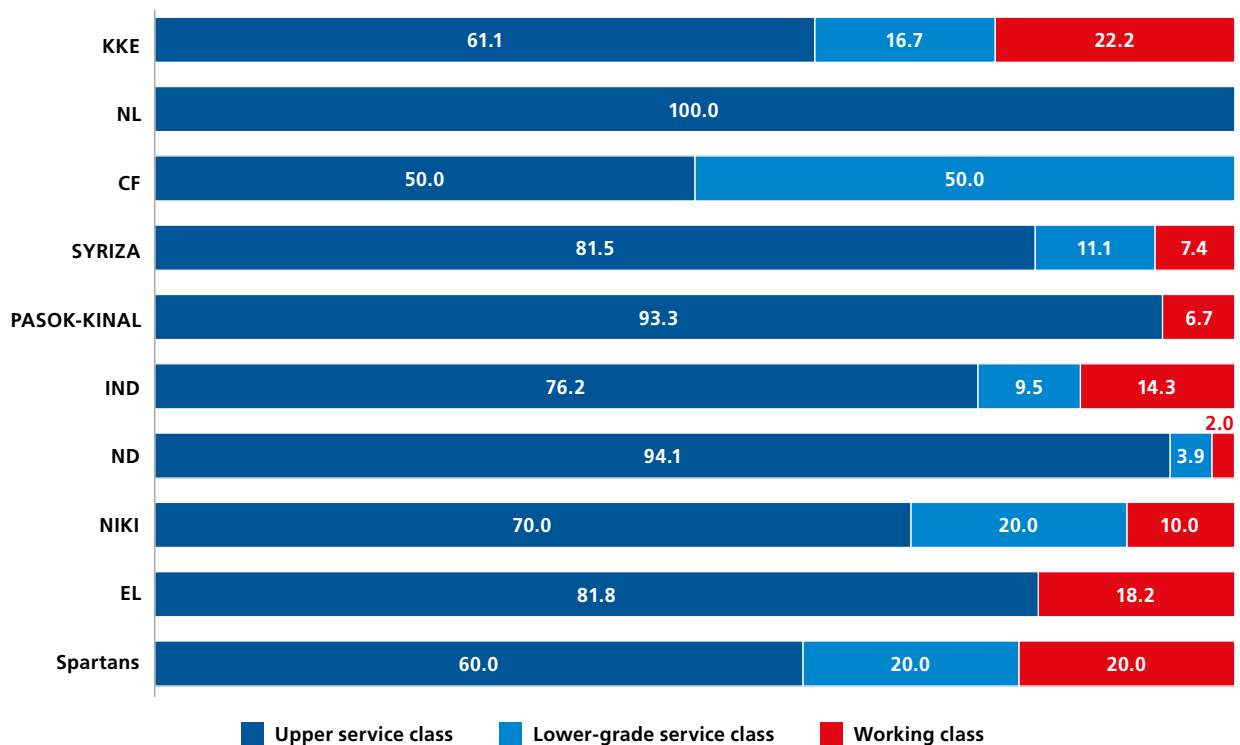
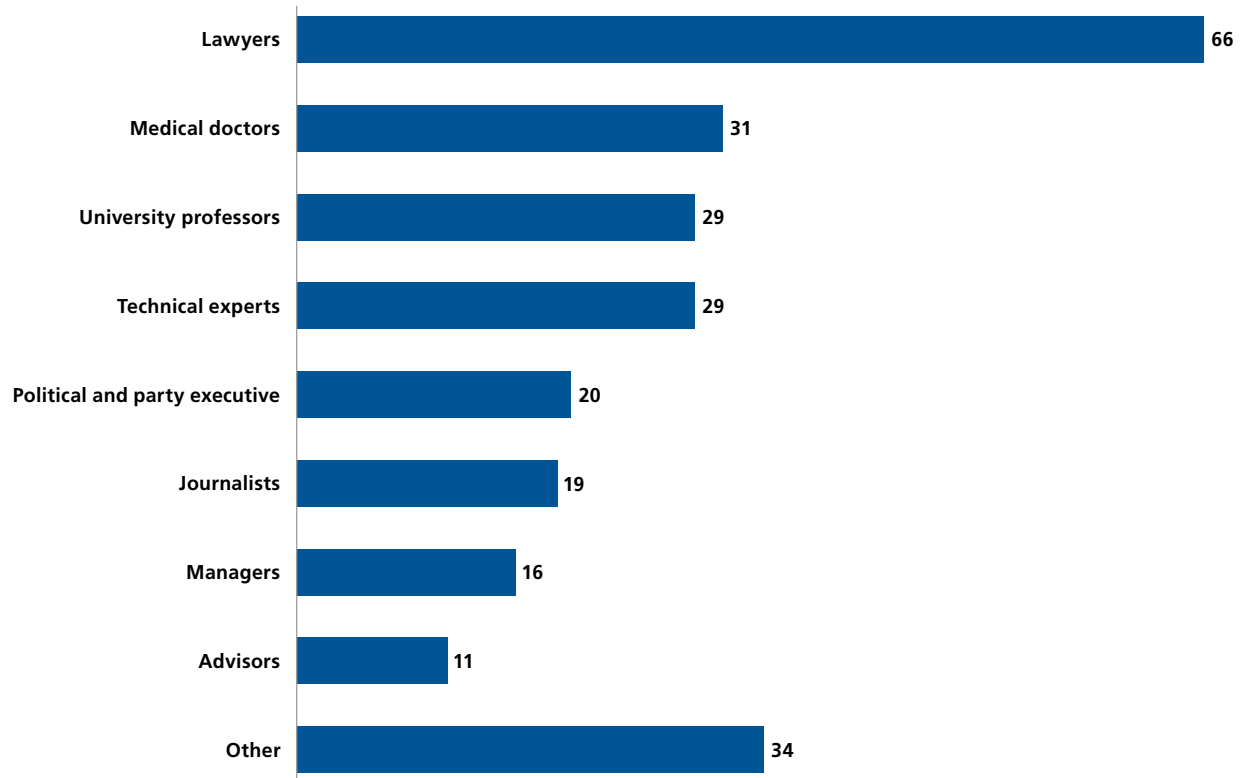


Figure 8
The composition of the Hellenic Parliament by social classes and political parties (in %)



Note: Communist Party of Greece (KKE), New Left (NL), Course of Freedom (CF), Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance (SYRIZA), Panhellenic Socialist Movement – Movement for Change (PASOK-KINAL), Independents (IND), New Democracy (ND), Greek Solution (EL), Victory (NIKI), Spartans

Figure 9

The top types of professions of upper class MPs

inaccessible occupational groupings. In other words, the parliamentary groups of left-wing and right-wing parties do not diverge from those of mainstream parties in terms of social composition, as they are also composed of MPs belonging to higher occupational groupings. Looking at the occupational composition of the upper service class (Figure 9), we see that the Top 6 professions in parliament are lawyers (66), followed by medical doctors (31), university professors and technical experts (each 29), political executives (20) and journalists (19).

THE IMPORTANCE OF HOLDING LOCAL OR REGIONAL GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR ENTERING PARLIAMENT

MPs' background in terms of previously held political office was also surveyed. Figure 10 indicates that 105 (35%) out of 300 MPs held local or regional government offices before entering parliament. In other words, more than a third of MPs had local or regional experience, namely as mayors or heads of regional government or members of municipal or regional councils. This indicates that prior local or regional government office facilitates entry to the parliamentary arena.

One of the main reasons for abandoning the local and regional scene in favour of the parliamentary arena is political visibility. Political parties tend to include local government officials on their parliamentary ballot papers, as their ties to

the local or regional community⁵ may broaden the pool of voters, enhancing political parties' electoral chances. More specifically, our findings demonstrate that 48.2% of SYRIZA MPs had political experience in local or regional government before entering parliament, followed by PASOK-KINAL on 41.9% and New Democracy on 40%. Finally, it is evident that New Democracy and PASOK-KINAL have had links with local or regional government officials since the 1989 elections.

⁵ The fact that local government officials tend to create tight bonds with their local/regional community may indicate that a less partisan electorate could vote for them in national elections regardless of the party's ideological identity.

Figure 10

Share of MPs who held local or regional government office before entering parliament and a career as politicians

Political parties	Number of seats	MPs with political office before entering parliament		MPs who are career politicians	
		Number	Share (%)	Number	Share (%)
Communist Party of Greece (KKE)	21	4	19	11	52
New Left (NL)	11	4	36	5	45
Course of Freedom (CF)	6	0	0	0	0
Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance (SYRIZA)	27	13	48	13	48
Panhellenic Socialist Movement – Movement for Change (PASOK-KINAL)	31	13	42	10	32
New Democracy (ND)	155	62	40	79	51
Victory (NIKI)	10	2	20	0	0
Greek Solution (EL)	11	0	0	1	9
Spartans	5	0	0	0	0
Independents (IND)	23	7	30	5	22
Total MPs	300	105	35	124	41

After the double parliamentary elections of 2012, however, SYRIZA seems to have cultivated strong ties with local and regional government officials, which could be attributed mainly to the losses that PASOK experienced in local and regional government.

In addition, the Hellenic Parliament of 2023 consists of 124 MPs (41.3%) who could be classified as career politicians based on the fact that they have served at least two parliamentary terms. Career politicians depend on building a successful political career as they have no other professional life and income sources apart from their involvement in politics (O'Grady 2019). Figure 10 shows that 52.4% of Communist MPs could be considered career politicians, followed by 51% of New Democracy MPs, with SYRIZA on 48.2%, New Left on 45.4% and PASOK-KINAL on 32.3%. The newly emerging parliamentary groups on the left (*Course of Freedom*) and on the right (Victory and Spartans), however, are not, as expected, composed of career politicians. Roughly speaking, the typical career politician of the 2023 Hellenic Parliament may be characterised as a man 60 years of age or above, with a higher education, from the upper service class, and previously holding local or regional government office.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Summarising the patterns of unequal representation that emerged from our data analysis, we find that younger people (aged 30–39) are clearly underrepresented in, or entirely even absent from the parliament, as in the case of people younger than 30, while middle-aged (50–59) as well as older (over 60) citizens are overrepresented. Moreover, women are still underrepresented despite their relatively high educational level and the adoption of quotas on ballot papers to eliminate gender-based discrimination. Finally, people without academic qualifications are underrepresented. The socio-economic composition of the 2023 Hellenic Parliament does not reflect the occupational structure of Greek society because of the overrepresentation of the upper service class and the underrepresentation of the lower-grade service class, as well as the working class. In summary, the Hellenic Parliament is strongly skewed towards men and older MPs, and consists of socioeconomically high-level individuals. This is in contrast to other Western European parliaments where the overrepresentation is much smaller (Elsässer & Schäfer 2022). It is thus far away from representing the Greek electorate.

In theory, an ideal national parliament should at least partly mirror a country's population. However, as is widely known, no such ideal parliament has ever existed in terms of socio-demographic composition. The Hellenic Parliament could not be considered an exception to the rule. The representation gap tends to create fertile ground for the emergence of further forms of discrimination/exclusion and mistrust towards the parliamentary institution, leading to further alienation of citizens from politics. Therefore, a series of measures should be adopted towards the achievement of so-called "descriptive representation".

Policy measures to this end could include the introduction of a youth quota in electoral law in an attempt to ensure that citizens in younger age groups are adequately represented. Training in gender mainstreaming for the members of political parties, combined with the implementation of policies to eliminate any form of gender-based discrimination/exclusion – that is, unequal labour market participation, earnings gap, gender-based violence – would contribute to the achievement of equal gender representation. Similarly, political parties should organise training programmes for future women politicians and promote women to positions of power and decision-making to ensure an equal gender balance. Moreover, political parties should introduce and

foreground the debate on descriptive representation within their networks (NGOs, trade unions, think tanks) and electoral constituencies. In addition, political parties should invest in young people by organising seminars to train their future political staff. Finally, political parties should promote socially underrepresented groups to the forefront of their campaigns and include more women and younger party officials on media panels.

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