



Freedom in the World 2017 - Greece

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Freedom Status: Free

Aggregate Score: 84 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 2.0 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 2 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 2 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 10,800,000

Capital: Athens

GDP/capita: \$18,002

Press Freedom Status: Partly Free

OVERVIEW

Greece's parliamentary democracy features vigorous competition between political parties and a strong if imperfect record of upholding civil liberties. Entrenched corruption has undermined the economy and state finances, and since the sovereign debt crisis of 2010, Greece's international creditors have imposed tight constraints on its fiscal policies. Other concerns include discrimination against immigrants and minorities as well as poor conditions for an influx of refugees and migrants in recent years.

Key Developments in 2016:

- Although the flow of migrants and refugees eased during the year, more than 60,000 remained stranded in Greece at year's end, often living in squalid or dangerous conditions.
- In August, the parliament adopted measures that enabled the introduction of schooling for young migrants and refugees in the fall and the construction of a mosque in Athens to help serve the needs of Muslim residents, including refugees.
- In September, the government held an auction for television broadcast permits in an attempt to reorganize and regulate the sector, but the Council of State ruled the process unconstitutional in October.

Executive Summary:

The economic impact of Greece's 2015 agreement with its international creditors was not as extreme as many feared, and the economy was expected to return to annual growth in 2017. The budget outlook also appeared more positive in 2016, with the year's primary surplus set to increase in 2017. Nonetheless, the economy remained fragile, and the government's ability to implement additional unpopular austerity measures was uncertain.

A March 2016 agreement between the European Union (EU) and Turkey limited the number of new refugees and migrants entering the country during the year, but Macedonia's decision the same month to close its southern border left a substantial number stranded in Greece. Irregular migration picked up again in the aftermath of the attempted coup in Turkey in July, and Greek officials, citing safety concerns, were reluctant to return the newly arrived refugees. By year's end, over 60,000 migrants and refugees were stranded in Greece as officials struggled to process asylum claims in a timely manner. Many camps and facilities suffered from squalid and dangerous living conditions, violence, harassment of women, and endangerment of children. EU emergency funds appeared insufficient, and Greek authorities had difficulty putting the money into action, though some funds were also channeled directly to nongovernmental organizations. On the positive side, the Greek government began incorporating refugee children into the school system in the fall, and the parliament voted in August to begin construction of an official mosque to serve Muslim residents of Athens, including many refugees. Muslims were previously forced to worship in improvised mosques and other informal gathering places.

Though acts of racist violence are an ongoing problem, the threat appears to have diminished somewhat since law enforcement agencies began investigating and prosecuting the illegal activities of the far-right Golden Dawn party. Dozens of party members and leaders remained on trial during 2016 in a case that got under way the previous year, with prosecutors arguing that Golden Dawn operated as a criminal enterprise. Separately, the parliament continued its efforts to hold members accountable for their actions, for example by voting in June to lift immunity for three lawmakers accused of various offenses: Pavlos Polakis and Christos Byialas of the ruling left-wing SYRIZA party and Nikos Mihos of Golden Dawn.

In late August and early September, the government attempted to reorganize the private television sector by holding an auction for broadcast permits under a law passed in 2015. Supplementary legislation adopted in February had authorized the government to administer the auction directly rather than through the National Council for Radio and Television, as the parliament had failed to reach agreement on the council's membership, leaving it unable to function. The new law also allowed the government to reduce the number of private nationwide broadcasters to four, from the current seven, leading critics to accuse SYRIZA of altering the media landscape in its favor. Station owners challenged the auction's legality, and the Council of State ruled in October that it was unconstitutional. A new auction was expected to be conducted by the media council in 2017.

Explanatory Note:

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Greece, see [Freedom in the World 2016](#).

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