

Freedom in the World 2022 - Greece

Free

87

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 37 / 40[Civil Liberties](#) 50 / 60

Last Year's Score & Status

87 / 100 Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

Overview

Greece's parliamentary democracy features vigorous competition between political parties and a strong if imperfect record of upholding civil liberties. Ongoing concerns include corruption, discrimination against immigrants and minority groups, and poor conditions for irregular migrants and asylum seekers.

Key Developments in 2021

- Christos Pappas, one of the main leaders of the far-right party Golden Dawn, was arrested in July after being on the run for nine months. Pappas and many other members of Golden Dawn, which failed to win representation in the 2019 elections, were convicted of running a criminal organization in October 2020.
- A law passed in February 2021 introduced police stations on university campuses, in what the government claimed was an effort to fight crime. However, students, faculty, and staff protested the law that month and prevented its enforcement for what they saw as a threat and violation of academic freedom and expression.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

The largely ceremonial president is elected by a parliamentary supermajority for a five-year term. The prime minister is chosen by the president and is usually the leader of the largest party in the parliament. Kyriakos Mitsotakis, head of the center-right party New Democracy (ND), took office as prime minister after the 2019 elections, replacing incumbent Alexis Tsipras of the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA). Katerina Sakellaropoulou, a longtime judicial official who had been nominated by ND but was also supported by SYRIZA and the center-left Movement for Change (KINAL), was elected president in January 2020.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

The 300 members of the unicameral Hellenic Parliament are elected to serve four-year terms through a mixture of 8 single-member constituencies, 48 multi-member constituencies, and a national constituency with 12 seats. Under the electoral law in effect for the 2019 elections, the party with the most votes received a 50-seat bonus, making it easier to form a governing majority.

In the 2019 elections, ND won a single-party majority of 158 seats. SYRIZA lost its leading position, falling to 86 seats, while KINAL won 22. Among smaller parties, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) took 15, the right-wing Greek Solution took 10, and the left-wing European Realistic Disobedience Front (MeRA25) secured 9. The far-right party Golden Dawn failed to win representation.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the 4 / relevant election management bodies? 4

The country generally has fair electoral laws, equal campaigning opportunities, and a weakly enforced system of compulsory voting. If passed with a two-thirds supermajority, changes to electoral law are implemented for the following elections. If passed with a simple majority, they go into effect in the following elections. An electoral law passed by the SYRIZA-led government with a simple majority in 2016 abolished the 50-seat bonus awarded to the winning party and was set to take effect during the elections after those in 2019. In January 2020, the ND government secured passage of legislation that would restore a bonus system, awarding between 20 and 50 bonus seats to the leading party depending on its share of the national vote. The new law also passed with a simple majority, meaning it would take effect only after the next elections.

In 2019, the ND government passed a law expanding the voting rights of diaspora and overseas Greek citizens. Citizens living abroad can participate in elections by proving residency in Greece for a two-year period within the last 35 years.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive 4 political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise / and fall of these competing parties or groupings? 4

The political system features vigorous competition among a variety of parties. Six parties were represented in Parliament as of 2021, and many others competed in the 2019 elections but did not pass the 3 percent threshold for representation.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power 4 / through elections? 4

Greece has established a strong pattern of democratic transfers of power between rival parties, with the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and ND alternating in government for most of the past four decades.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the 4 / political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 4

No group or institution from outside the political system exerts undue influence over the choices of voters and candidates.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, 3 / and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 4

Greece's largest recognized minority population, the Muslim community of Thrace, has full political rights, and three members of the community won seats in the 2019 parliamentary elections. The authorities have rejected some ethnic groups' attempts to secure official recognition or to register associations with names referring to their ethnic identity, affecting their ability to organize and advocate for their political interests, though such associations are generally able to operate without legal recognition. Since 2010, documented immigrants have been allowed to vote in municipal elections.

In August 2021, the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS) expressed concern over the appointment of Athanassios Plevris as minister of health. KIS claimed Plevris made antisemitic remarks as a lawyer in a 2009 court case against his father, Constantinos Plevris, who was charged with inciting racism and violence for a book he published called "Jews: The Whole Truth." Plevris apologized for his comments, stating that the objections to his court statements were "understandable" and that he disagrees with his father's views.

Though there are no significant legal or practical barriers to women's political participation, women only hold a little more than a fifth of the seats in Parliament and sexist and patriarchal attitudes dissuade their active participation. In January 2020, Katerina Sakellaropoulou became the first

woman to be elected as president of Greece.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 4 / 4

Greek elected officials generally set and implement government policies without undue interference, and the influence of international creditor institutions has receded over the past decade.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 3 / 4

Corruption remains a problem in Greece, and institutions tasked with combating it have inadequate resources. Tax officials in past years have been implicated in tax evasion schemes, which seriously complicate the government's fiscal reform efforts. A new criminal code and a new code of criminal procedure, adopted in 2019, allow prison time for the bribery of politicians and are more broadly aligned with relevant international conventions. However, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) expressed serious concerns that the main active bribery offense was converted from a felony to a misdemeanor.

In March 2021, a special committee was created to investigate accusations against former digital governance minister Nikos Pappas for receiving bribes and rigging television licensing competition. In July, Parliament voted in favor prosecuting Pappas through a special court in collaboration with the Judicial Council and the prosecutorial authority.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 3 / 4

Several laws and government programs are designed to ensure the transparency of official decisions and provide public access to information. Officials are required to make public declarations of their assets and income. The transparency of state procurement contracts remains a concern.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 3 / 4

The constitution includes provisions guaranteeing freedom of the press, and these are generally upheld in practice, though the law imposes some limits related to defamation, hate speech, and other such content. While citizens continue to enjoy access to a broad array of print, broadcast, and online news outlets, ownership concentration and editorial interference from owners remain concerns, and the government has been accused of directing public funds toward friendly private media.

Journalists have been subject to assaults or other mistreatment, particularly while attempting to cover protests or report on migration issues. Crime reporter and journalist Giorgos Karaivaz was fatally shot outside his home in Athens in April 2021. Also in April, police arrested three suspects who had allegedly plotted to kill journalist and newspaper owner Kostas Vaxevanis, after authorities learned that someone had sought to pay for his murder. Vaxevanis had been placed under increased police protection, but no charges had officially been made against the suspects at year's end.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 3 / 4

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and this is generally respected in practice. However, the Orthodox Church of Greece—which has a special constitutional status as the “prevailing religion” of the country—receives government subsidies, and its clergy's salaries and pensions are paid for by the state. The constitution prohibits proselytizing, but this restriction is rarely enforced. Members of some minority religions face discrimination and legal barriers, such as permit requirements to open houses of worship.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 4 / 4

There are no significant constraints on academic freedom in Greece, and the educational system is free of political indoctrination. A law passed in February 2021 introduced police stations on university campuses, in what the government claimed was an effort to fight crime. However, students, faculty, and staff protested the law that month and prevented its enforcement for what they saw as a threat and violation of academic freedom and expression.

D4 0-4 pts**Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 4 / 4**

The government does not engage in improper monitoring of personal expression. Individuals are generally free to discuss their views in practice.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts**Is there freedom of assembly? 3 / 4**

Freedom of assembly is guaranteed by the constitution, and the government generally protects this right. However, some protests have become violent, and police at times have used excessive force to disperse demonstrators. In March 2021, police violently dispersed protestors demonstrating in solidarity with Dimitris Koufontinas, a member of the November 17 terrorist organization who is serving multiple life sentences and went on a hunger strike after being denied a prison transfer. Protests broke out in October in Athens, Corinth, and Patra after a Romany man was killed by police while surrendering to them. Groups of Roma protesters blocked highways and clashed with riot police.

E2 0-4 pts**Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 4 / 4**

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) generally operate without interference from the authorities. However, during 2020 the government made a series of changes to the registration requirements for organizations working on asylum and migration issues, generally increasing the regulatory burden on NGOs. In October 2021, 19 testimonies from a hearing of human rights defenders exposed a concerted effort by Greek authorities to undermine civil society groups that work on migration issues, including through the initiation of criminal investigations to harass groups investigating abuses of migrants.

E3 0-4 pts**Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 4 / 4**

Most workers have the right to form and join unions, bargain collectively, and strike. The law provides protections against discrimination toward union members, and the government generally upholds union rights.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts**Is there an independent judiciary? 3 / 4**

The judiciary is largely independent, though its autonomy is undermined somewhat by corruption. Judges are appointed by the president on the advice of the Supreme Judicial Council, which is mostly composed of other judges. They serve until retirement age and cannot be removed arbitrarily.

F2 0-4 pts**Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 3 / 4**

The law provides safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention, ensures access to defense counsel, and provides for fair trial conditions. Persistent problems include court backlogs that lead to prolonged pretrial detention as well as improper detention of asylum seekers.

F3 0-4 pts**Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 3 / 4**

While overall rates of violent crime are low, there are occasional acts of politically motivated violence and vandalism by left- or right-wing extremist groups. In March 2021, police in Nea Smyrni Square in Athens violently attacked a citizen while enforcing COVID-19-related restrictions. A police officer was suspended following the incident.

Some prisons and detention centers suffer from substandard conditions, and law enforcement personnel have been accused of physical abuse, particularly against vulnerable groups such as migrants and asylum seekers.

F4 0-4 pts**Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 2 / 4**

Women generally enjoy equality before the law, though they continue to face workplace discrimination in practice. In January 2021, Greek Olympic gold medalist Sofia Bekatorou publicly discussed her experience being sexually assaulted by a former coach. Bekatorou's revelations paved the way for a nascent #MeToo movement in Greece, in which women more actively and publicly discuss instances of sexual harassment and assault they have experienced. The government responded by proposing legislation in February that facilitate people's ability to report these incidents and establish harsher punishments for perpetrators.

Violence targeting immigrants, refugees, and LGBT+ people remains a problem. Roma are also subject to discrimination and excessive policing despite legal protections. In October 2021, a young Romany man was killed by police after being caught driving a stolen vehicle. Testimony from a Romany youth in the car revealed that they had surrendered immediately with their hands over their heads after being stopped, but the police still shot at them with about 30 rounds of ammunition.

Christos Pappas, one of the main leaders of the far-right party Golden Dawn, was arrested in July 2021 after being on the run for nine months. Pappas and many other members of Golden Dawn, which failed to win representation in the 2019 elections, were convicted of running a criminal organization in October 2020.

Over 4,300 migrants and refugees entered Greece by sea and more than 4,800 entered by land during 2021, as reported by the Office of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the lowest numbers since the refugee crisis began several years ago. Many refugees are housed in Reception and Identification Centers on the Aegean islands or in camps on the mainland. Within those centers' inhumane living conditions, problems range from at times fatal violence, harassment of women, and endangerment of children. NGOs successfully pressured authorities to attempt to close the worst facilities by the end of 2021 and increase the use of urban accommodation on the mainland. Many relocation attempts are protested by Greek communities.

Greek authorities have been accused of forcibly returning migrants and asylum seekers who attempt to enter irregularly from Turkey by land and sea, and multiple cases of such pushbacks were documented in 2021. The government has denied these allegations, though the UNHCR and other organizations called for independent border monitoring in September 2021. In October, Afghani women and children refugees on the island of Lesbos had their documents and belongings confiscated and were returned to sea, later to be discovered by the Turkish Coast guard. Greek authorities claimed they were enforcing European Union (EU) immigration rules while complying with international law.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 4 / 4

Freedom of movement is generally unrestricted for most residents. The government imposed periodic public health restrictions in 2021, including a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for healthcare workers. Many healthcare workers criticized the mandate, protesting the decision in Athens in August.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 3 / 4

The government and legal framework are generally supportive of property rights and entrepreneurship, but bureaucratic obstacles can inhibit business activity. Those who have political connections or are willing to pay bribes can sometimes expedite official procedures. To pressure tax-evading property owners who misrepresent the value of their assets, the Independent Authority for Public Revenue announced significant fines for this offense in 2019.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 4 / 4

There are no major constraints on personal social freedoms, though domestic violence remains a problem. In May 2021, a controversial new law granted joint custody of children to divorced parents. Human rights groups warned that the law does not protect children from abusive parents.

In 2021, 17 women were murdered by current or former partners who are men. Rights groups have criticized a culture of impunity for gender-based violence and the fact that femicide is not a separate offence in the penal code. Despite pressure placed on the government to codify punishments for

femicide, the issue was resolved unresolved at year's end. In December, President Sakellariopoulou inaugurated the Centre for the Fight against Gender-Based Violence in Athens to provide a safe place for victims and promote legal services.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 3 / 4

Most residents enjoy legal protections against exploitative working conditions, but labor laws are not always adequately enforced. Migrants and asylum seekers are especially vulnerable to trafficking for forced labor or sexual exploitation, and government efforts to combat the problem, while increasing, remain insufficient, according to the US State Department.

ecoi.net summary:

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