

Freedom in the World 2016 - Greece

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Freedom Status: Free
Aggregate Score: 83
Freedom Rating: 2.0
Political Rights: 2
Civil Liberties: 2

Quick Facts

Population: 11,520,785
Capital: Athens
GDP/Capita: \$21,682.60
Press Freedom Status: Partly Free
Net Freedom Status: N/A

OVERVIEW

With Greek voters exhausted by austerity measures required by international in exchange for debt relief, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) won snap elections held in January 2015, ousting the previous governing coalition of the center-right New Democracy (ND) and the center-left Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). With support from its smaller coalition partner, the right-wing populist Independent Greeks (ANEL), SYRIZA then sought to renegotiate the onerous terms of bailout loans the country had agreed to in 2010 and 2012, but faced resistance. In June 2015, hoping to use public opposition as a bargaining chip in the negotiations, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras called for a referendum on the most recent proposal Greece had received from its lenders.

Over 61 percent of voters rejected the deal in the plebiscite held in July, but Greece's creditors still refused to make major concessions. With the country on the brink of financial collapse, the Tsipras government accepted creditors' tough terms for a \$96 billion debt relief package in August, rather than risk being forced out of the eurozone. Some 40 hardline anti-austerity politicians from

SYRIZA rejected the deal or abstained from voting on the decision, though support from other parties assured its approval.

Facing a split within SYRIZA, Tsipras called snap elections, which took place in September. SYRIZA once again won the vote and formed a coalition with ANEL, and Tsipras returned as prime minister. By year's end, a measure of stability has returned to Greece. However, the government still faced the challenges of meeting the bailout deal's difficult conditions and engaging in further negotiations with creditors.

Separately, the arrival of hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees fleeing war and political instability in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere strained the Greek state's ability to accommodate such a large population, leading to a human rights crisis. Since the construction of a fence along a key section of the Evros River, Greece's natural border with Turkey, in 2012, most refugees have entered Greece by boat from Turkey to nearby Greek islands: Lesbos, Chios, Kos, and Samos. In 2015 alone, more than 850,000 migrants made the perilous crossing to Greece, most of them attempting to make their way to other EU countries.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Political Rights: 35 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The 300 members of Greece's legislature, the unicameral Hellenic Parliament, serve four-year terms. Of them, 288 are elected by proportional representation, and 12 are elected from national party lists. 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. Recent elections in Greece were regarded as free and fair.

By creating an impasse in December 2014 over the election of a successor to retiring president Karolos Papoulias, SYRIZA effectively forced the governing coalition, led by the center-right ND, to call snap parliamentary elections, which were set for January 2015. Campaigning on promises to ease austerity measures and to renegotiate agreements with Greece's troika of creditors – the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – SYRIZA scored a resounding victory, winning 149 seats compared to ND's 76. The right-wing extremist party Golden Dawn and the new center-left To Potami (the River) party each won 17 seats. The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) took 15 seats and the right-wing populist Independent Greeks (ANEL) took 13, as did PASOK. Turnout was about 64 percent. Lacking an outright majority, SYRIZA formed a coalition government with ANEL, which had also run on an anti-austerity platform, and Tsipras became prime minister.

Amid difficult negotiations with international creditors, in June 2015 Tsipras called a referendum on the latest debt deal that creditors had extended. Over 61 percent of voters rejected the deal's terms in a July plebiscite that saw roughly 63 percent turnout. Tsipras accepted the deal despite the result, seeking to prevent Greece's exit from the eurozone, and called early elections after a splinter faction of SYRIZA defected over the move.

SYRIZA won reelection in a snap vote in September, taking 145 seats in the parliament, and once again formed a coalition with ANEL, which won 10; Tsipras stayed on as prime minister. ND took 75 seats; Golden Dawn won 18; the Democratic Coalition, composed of PASOK and the center-left party Democratic Left (DIMAR), took 17; KKE, 15; To Potami, 11; and the Union of Centrists (EK), 9. The splinter faction that left SYRIZA over the debt deal, Popular Unity, failed to win enough support to qualify for parliamentary seats. Voter turnout stood at 57 percent, lower than in previous elections.

The country has generally fair electoral laws, equal campaigning opportunities, and a system of compulsory voting that is weakly enforced. Since 2010, documented immigrants are allowed to vote in municipal elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Greece's multiparty system features vigorous competition between rival parties. Until recently, the post-1980 political landscape had been dominated by PASOK and ND. PASOK has rapidly lost ground in elections since the sovereign debt crisis emerged in late 2009. It finished last among the parties that received representation in the January 2015 elections, but later joined DIMAR in a coalition that placed fourth in the September elections. SYRIZA remained popular in 2015 despite economic turmoil, and was the leading party in both of the year's elections. SYRIZA's coalition partner, ANEL, was founded in 2012 by disillusioned members of ND. The party has vehemently opposed austerity programs linked to the bailout deals, characterizing them in its founding document as "national humiliation and violent economic attack."

Golden Dawn is Greece's third-largest party, and has retained support despite a government crackdown that began after a party supporter murdered antifascist rap artist Pavlos Fyssas in 2013. Golden Dawn president Nikolaos Michaloliakos and 68 other party members face charges of belonging to or founding a criminal organization; their trial began in April 2015 but has been characterized by bureaucratic delays, and remained open at the year's end. Mihaloliakos and another senior party member were released from pretrial detention in March 2015 after serving 18 months, the maximum time authorities may detain someone ahead of their trial.

Greece's largest minority population, the Muslim community in the province of Thrace, is allowed full political rights and has four representatives in parliament after the latest election.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

Corruption remains a problem in Greece, with tax evasion representing a serious challenge for the government. While tax enforcement efforts have become more robust in recent years, authorities have largely failed to prosecute tax evasion by economic elites. It is estimated that Greece's undeclared economic activity is 6 percent higher than the European average; tax evasion is enabled in part by a high rate of self-employed workers who encounter little oversight. Separately, in an encouraging sign, the parliament voted in August 2015 to lift immunity for ND deputy Vasilis Giogiakas so that he may face charges stemming from past actions taken as the governor of the Thesprotia region.

Greece was ranked 58 out of 168 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Civil Liberties: 48 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

The constitution includes provisions for freedoms of speech and the press, and these freedoms are generally protected. The public broadcaster, Hellenic Radio Television (ERT), closed in 2013, diminishing the diversity of opinions in the mass media. In 2014, the smaller New Hellenic Radio, Internet, and Television (NERIT) succeeded ERT as the nation's public broadcaster. ERT returned to the air in June 2015, and its operations were merged with NERIT's. More than 2,600 former ERT employees received reemployment offers at the broadcaster.

Citizens generally enjoy access to a broad array of privately owned print and broadcast outlets, and internet access is unrestricted. There are some limits on speech that incites fear, violence, and public disharmony, as well as on publications that offend religious beliefs, are obscene, or advocate the violent overthrow of the political system. Antidiscrimination legislation passed in 2014 criminalized denial of the Holocaust and other genocides, including the World War I-era mass killing of Armenians in Turkey. Some journalists have been physically assaulted by police while covering anti-austerity protests over the past three years.

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, though the Greek Orthodox Church receives government subsidies and is considered the "prevailing" faith of the country. Members of some minority religions face discrimination and legal barriers, such as permit requirements to open houses of worship and restrictions on inheriting property. The constitution prohibits proselytizing, but this restriction is rarely enforced. Opposition to the construction of an official mosque in Athens remains substantial; Muslim inhabitants are forced to worship in improvised mosques.

Academic freedom is respected in Greece, and the educational system is free of political indoctrination. Private discussion is open and free.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are guaranteed by the constitution and the government generally protects these rights in practice, though there are some limits on groups representing ethnic minorities. Golden Dawn has attempted to intimidate assemblies of immigrants and immigrant advocacy groups. However, such instances have become somewhat less frequent since the crackdown on Golden Dawn's leadership. In some cases, police have not adequately defended the rights of immigrants to assemble.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) generally operate without interference from the authorities, and workers have the right to form and join unions. Major anti-austerity protests and strikes have occurred frequently in recent years. The vast majority of participants have been peaceful, but several protests have turned violent due to confrontations between anarchist elements and the police.

F. Rule of Law: 10 / 16

The judiciary is independent, and the constitution provides for public trials. Prisons suffer from overcrowding, as do immigrant detention centers, particularly those on the Greek islands dealing

with the recent surge of migrants and refugees. Immigrants are disproportionately affected by institutional problems in the judicial system.

Acts of racist violence are an ongoing problem, though observers have noted a slight decline since the crackdown on Golden Dawn. In a May 2015 report, the Racist Violence Recording Network stated that 81 acts of racially motivated violence had taken place in Greece in 2014, affecting at least 100 victims. Anti-Semitic attitudes are widespread. A 2013-14 survey by the U.S.-based Anti-Defamation League found that 69 percent of respondents from Greece held anti-Semitic views. While such attitudes do not often translate into violence against people, the Racist Violence Recording Network has reported desecrations of Jewish buildings and monuments. In 2014, the government approved legislation that increased penalties for attacks motivated by ethnicity or sexual orientation, but the law has been criticized for failing to protect victims of hate crimes from deportation proceedings.

An influx of refugees and migrants into Greece created a human rights crisis in 2015, and the resources of the Greek state remain insufficient for accommodating such a large population. Authorities have been unable to implement an adequate system for processing asylum applications. Many refugees are housed in overcrowded, poorly equipped, and unsanitary welcome centers, or have resorted to sleeping in public parks and squares. Authorities have forcibly moved migrants and refugees living in outdoor encampments to separate sites. In December, more than 1,000 people camped in the village of Idomeni, on the border with Macedonia, were relocated to an overcrowded stadium outside Athens after Macedonia increased border controls, granting entry only to refugees with proof of origin from Iraq, Syria, or Afghanistan. In September, the European Union (EU) agreed to relocate 160,000 refugees from Greece and Italy, which had also seen a surge in migration, to other countries in the bloc. By mid-November, only 1,418 spots had been made available, and just 147 relocations had occurred. In December, the EC pledged €80 million (\$87 million) to help Greece with temporary housing for asylum-seekers.

The country's Romany community continues to face considerable governmental and societal discrimination. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals encounter some discrimination and occasional violent attacks.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

Freedom of movement is generally unrestricted. Government bureaucracy exerts influence over the ability to start and operate businesses, and political parties have been involved in smoothing the process for their supporters. As a result, the field for business activity is not level for all participants.

Women continue to face discrimination in the workplace and held only 20 percent of the seats in parliament at the end of 2015, a decline of 3 percent from the representation gained in the January elections. Zoe Konstantopoulou of SYRIZA was elected parliamentary speaker following the January elections, but was replaced by a man after the September polls. Domestic violence remains a problem.

Greece serves as a transit and destination country for the trafficking of men, women, and children for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. The U.S. State Department's 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report* noted a decline in the enforcement of Greek antitrafficking laws.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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