



Freedom in the World 2020

Greece

88
/100

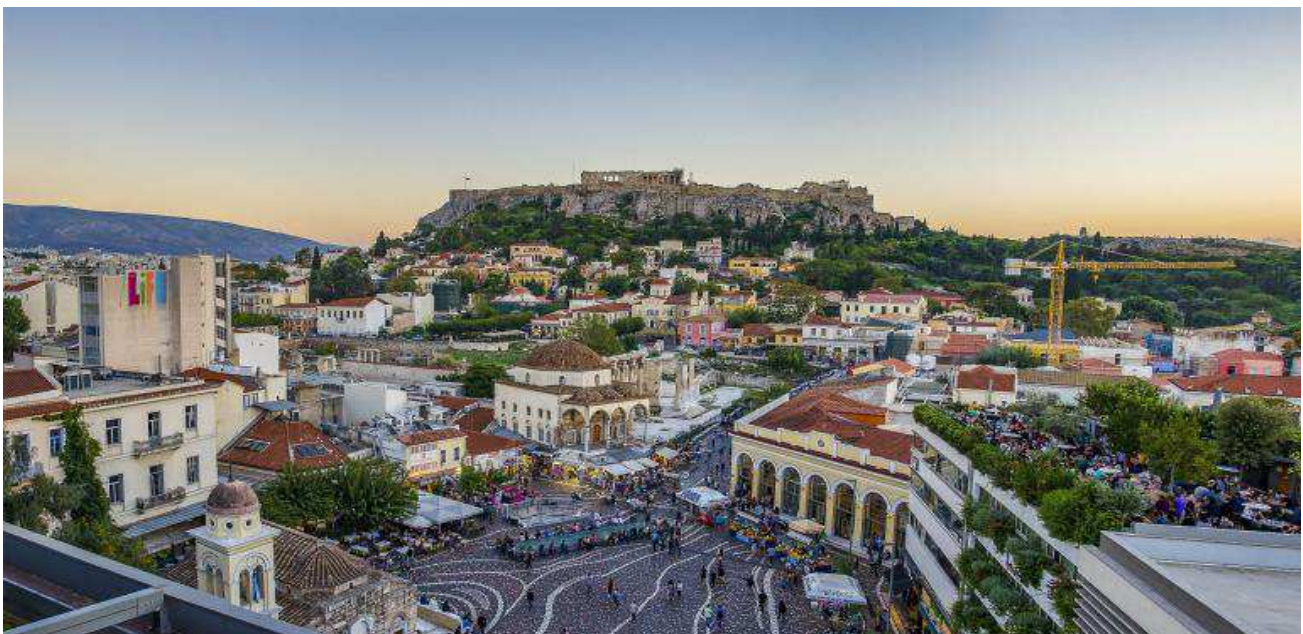
FREE

<u>Political Rights</u>	37 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	51 /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 minorities, and poor conditions for undocumented migrants and refugees.

Key Developments in 2019

- In 2019, the Greek Ministry of Education decided that school records and diplomas will no longer include the religious affiliation or citizenship status of students.
- The government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis government passed legislation scrapping academic sanctuary, which protected academic freedom of ideas for faculty and students, but which the new government argues is primarily used as a cover for lawlessness. The main opposition party, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), accused the government of attacking democracy itself with this law.
- Following more riots in overcrowded refugee camps, the new prime minister vowed to expedite the asylum process and send back to Turkey those who do not qualify for asylum on the basis of the 2016 agreement designed to curb the westward flow of migrants and refugees.

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. Current president Prokopis Pavlopoulos, a conservative former cabinet minister, was elected in February 2015. Prime Minister Mitsotakis, head of the center-right party New Democracy (ND), took office after the July 2019 elections, defeating incumbent Alexis Tsipras of SYRIZA.

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 multimember constituencies, and a national constituency with 12 seats. Under current electoral law, the party with the most votes receives a 50-seat bonus, make it easier to form a governing majority.

In the July 2019 elections, ND won 158 seats and became the majority party, the first time that a single party won a parliamentary majority since the financial crisis began in 2010. The left-wing SYRIZA lost its ruling majority, winning 86 seats; the center-left Movement for Change (KINAL) won 22; the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), 15; the Greek Solution, 10; and, finally, the European Realistic Disobedience Front (MeRA25), 9. The right-wing nationalist party Golden Dawn was left out of parliament.

A3 0-4 pts

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

4/4

The country has generally fair electoral laws, equal campaigning opportunities, and a weakly enforced system of compulsory voting. If passed with a two-thirds supermajority, changes to the electoral laws are implemented for the next elections. If passed with a simple majority, they go into effect in the following elections. A new electoral law passed by the SYRIZA-ANEL government with a simple majority in 2016, abolishing the 50-seat bonus awarded to the winning party, will go into effect in the next elections, unless the ND government manages to garner a two-thirds supermajority to change it. The voting age was also lowered from 18 to 17, implemented for the first time in the 2019 elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

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

4/4

The political system features vigorous competition among a variety of parties. Six parties are represented in the parliament as of 2019. Many other parties participated in the last elections but did not reach the 3 percent vote threshold to secure representation.

B2 0-4 pts

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

4/4

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. SYRIZA entered government for the first time in 2015, and ND transitioned into power after the 2019 elections.

B3 0-4 pts

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

4/4

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

B4 0-4 pts

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

3/4

Greece's largest recognized minority population, the Muslim community of Thrace, has full political rights, and four members of the community won seats in the last 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.

There are no significant legal or practical barriers to women's political participation. While the number of women in parliament increased from 18 percent to 20 percent in the last elections, the representation of women in the ministerial cabinet decreased, from four to two ministers. Sexism and patriarchal attitudes discourage women from playing a more active role in politics.

In December 2019, a bill passed detailing how members of the Greek diaspora can exercise their voting rights from their place of residence. Introduced in Article 51 of the Greek constitution 44 years ago, parliament was incapable of implementing the law until now. An overwhelming majority voted in favor of this legislation (288 out of the 296 ministers present). The only party that opposed the law, in principle, was the MeRA25. This bill has been severely criticized by many diaspora Greeks, however, for the arduous and exclusionary requirements to join the electoral register.

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. However, their fiscal policy choices in particular had been limited in recent years by the main creditor institutions that guided the country through its public debt crisis—the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB), the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In August 2018, Greece exited its third and final bailout program, which began in 2015, and has since regained much of its financial sovereignty.

Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because elected officials freely set and implement government policies, and the influence of creditor institutions has receded.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?	3/4
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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 complicates the government’s fiscal reform efforts. A new criminal code and a new code of criminal procedure that passed in early July 2019 include reforms in relation crimes committed against the interests of the Greek state. In particular, it allows prison time for bribery of politicians and it aligns the Greek code to relevant international conventions. However, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Working Group on Bribery expressed serious concerns because the main active bribery offense was converted from a felony to a misdemeanor. This change could lead to “the closure of ongoing corruption-related investigations and prosecutions,” and possibly hinder “international cooperation in future cases.”

Nevertheless, there has been gradual improvement in enforcement of anticorruption laws. In early 2019, the Novartis probe—an investigation of the Novartis pharmaceutical company—found no initial evidence of any bribery of Greek officials, though the government’s investigation is still ongoing. In October, the parliament approved the creation of a committee to probe former alternate minister of justice Dimitris Papangelopoulos, who may have attempted to incriminate political rivals.

C3 0-4 pts**Does the government operate with openness and transparency?****3/4**

A number of laws and government programs are designed to ensure the transparency of official decisions and provide public access to information. In practice, officials do not operate with openness and transparency.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts**Are there free and independent media?****3/4**

The constitution includes provisions for freedoms of speech and the press, and these rights are generally protected. Citizens enjoy access to a broad array of privately-owned print, broadcast, and online news outlets. There are some limits on hate speech and related content.

In April 2019, the anarchist group Rouvikonas attacked and destroyed furniture and equipment in the offices of the *Athens Voice* newspaper, protesting a comment in their online publication about the death of an Armenian woman who fatally injured herself while attempting to evade a possible inspection of her residence and work permit.

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. Opposition to the construction of an official mosque in Athens for its 200,000 Muslim inhabitants remains substantial. The project proceeded in 2019 and the mosque opened its doors in July, though formal prayer services have yet to begin.

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. The Mitsotakis government passed legislation in 2019 scrapping academic sanctuary, a law which protected academic freedom for faculty and students, but which the new government sees as a cover for lawlessness. The main opposition party, SYRIZA, accused the government for attacking democracy itself with this law.

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?	4/4
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Freedom of assembly is guaranteed by the constitution, and the government generally protects this right. Austerity-related protests over the past decade have sometimes grown violent, and extremist groups like Golden Dawn have attempted to attack and intimidate assemblies in support of causes they oppose. However, such instances have become less frequent since a crackdown on Golden Dawn's leadership began in 2013, and police have improved their handling of security surrounding demonstrations.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?	4/4
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Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) generally operate without interference from the authorities.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?	4/4
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Most workers have the right to form and join unions, bargain collectively, and strike. The law provides protections against discrimination towards union-members, and the government generally upholds union rights. In 2019 the Mitsotakis government planned labor law changes which would impact the ability to strike, collective labor agreements as well as the framework within which labor unions function. The Greek Civil Servants Confederation (ADEDY), which represents workers in the public sector, protested the proposed changes as favoring employers and diminishing workers' rights.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

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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. For example, in recent years Rouvikonas has damaged the property or ransacked the premises of NGOs, corporations, universities, churches, government buildings, embassies, and consulates, among others. Two men were jailed after being charged with membership in the Revolutionary Self Defense, a terrorist organization that claimed responsibility for targeting the Embassies of Mexico and France, among other attacks.

Some prisons and detention centers suffer from substandard conditions and law enforcement personnel have at times been accused of physical abuse, particularly against vulnerable groups such as migrants and asylum seekers. Several incidents of police violence and excessive use of force against civilians were reported in 2019. Amnesty International, Greek activists, and government opposition parties

have protested what they see as an “extremely worrying” situation. In response to these claims Mitsotakis’s government set up an independent commission headed by law professor, Nikos Alivizatos.

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 2019, the Ministry of Education decided that school records and diplomas will no longer include the religious affiliation or citizenship status of students. Greece’s data protection authority (HDPa) declared that records of the religious faith of students violates the Greek constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights.

Violence targeting immigrants, refugees, and LGBT+ people remains a problem. The Romany minority is also subject to discrimination despite legal protections. According to the Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN) incidents of racist violence have become more frequent in recent years despite a law enforcement crackdown on Golden Dawn. A trial against dozens of the group’s members and leaders was ongoing during 2019 and has yet to conclude. The new penal code introduced in July lengthens sentences for racist crimes and allows for harsher punishment for rape. Moreover, those indicted for running a criminal organization can now receive up to 15 years in prison. This change is relevant for Golden Dawn members, who have been charged with running a criminal organization.

Since 2016, when the EU reached an agreement with Turkey to curb the westward flow of migrants and refugees, the number entering Greece has been significantly reduced. However, more than 74,000 new refugees arrived in the country during 2019, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Many of these refugees are in Reception and Identification Centers on the Aegean islands or in camps on the mainland. Some of these sites feature harsh living conditions, violence, the harassment of women, and endangerment of children. Under pressure from NGOs, officials have attempted to close the worst

facilities and increase the use of urban accommodation. After a deadly fire and riots at Moria refugee camp in September 2019 in Lesbos, the government intensified its efforts to move refugees to the mainland, while promising to expedite asylum cases and send back to Turkey those who do not qualify. Observers have questioned whether individuals who are formally deported to Turkey under the EU agreement are being returned to a safe third country.

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.

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. In an effort to put pressure on tax-evading property owners who misrepresent the size of their assets, in October 2019 the Independent Authority for Public Revenue announced significant fines for this offense. This form of tax evasion when the tax authorities' interconnect their databases interconnected to the national land registry.

G3 0-4 pts

4/4

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?	
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There are no major constraints on personal social freedoms, though domestic violence remains a problem.

In January 2018, the parliament adopted legislation that curbed the jurisdiction of muftis applying Sharia (Islamic law) to family law disputes among Muslims in Thrace, replacing a system the European Court of Human Rights had labeled discriminatory. Official recognition of the Sharia system stemmed from treaties that followed World War I. The new law stipulated that civil courts have priority, and that Sharia courts could only adjudicate cases in which all parties agree to the arrangement.

A 2017 law allowed unmarried transgender people over age 15 to change their legal gender on identity documents without undergoing gender reassignment surgery or other such procedures, subject to validation by a judge. In 2018, parliament approved legislation that permitted same-sex couples to serve as foster parents.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?	3/4
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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. The Greek cabinet approved an increase in the minimum wage to 650 euros in January, up by 11 percent.



On Greece

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

88/100 **Free**

Other Years

2019

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