



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 50,949

Area (sq. km.): 131,957

Greece is about the same size as Nicaragua, or just smaller than the U.S. state of Alabama. Although it lies farther east than most of Western Europe, Greece is generally considered part of the West because of its heritage and its membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). It is situated south of Albania, Bulgaria, and Macedonia. The latter became an independent nation in 1991, but its name has been an issue of contention because Greece's northern province is also called Macedonia and Greece feared territorial disputes.

Sparsely populated mountain areas cover much of Greece. The Pindos Mountains run from north to south through the mainland. Mount Olympus is the highest point in the country, at an elevation of 9,570 feet (2,917 meters). The fertile valleys, plains, and coastal areas are densely populated. About 20 percent of Greece is arable. Earthquakes are common and sometimes severe. The country includes an archipelago of about thousand islands, the largest of which is Crete. These islands give Greece the twelfth longest coastline in the world and comprise about one-fifth of the country's total land area, though only a tenth of the islands are suitable for habitation. A warm, temperate Mediterranean climate prevails in southern Greece, while the north is wet and cool. In general, winters are mild but wet; summers are hot and dry.

History

Ancient Greece

Although the history of ancient Greece stretches back to 3000 BC, Athens had its beginnings in 1300 BC, and city-states began forming around 1000 BC. From this point, Greek culture began to thrive; literature, philosophy, and art began to flourish. The first Olympics were held in 776 BC. Ancient Greek civilization reached its peak by 400 BC. During that period, Athens was the center of a vast overseas empire. The country's rich heritage of government, art, science, and drama played an important role in the establishment of Western civilization.

Philip of Macedonia conquered Greece in 338 BC and was assassinated just two years later. His son, Alexander the Great, led the Greeks to conquer an empire that covered much of what is now the Middle East. After Alexander's death in 323 BC, the empire declined, and by 146 BC it had become part of the Roman Empire. In AD 330, the Roman emperor Constantine moved the capital of the empire to the Greek city of Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey).

Turkish Rule and the War of Independence

In AD 395, the Roman Empire divided into an eastern (later called Byzantium) empire and a western empire, with Greece at the center of the Byzantium Empire. The eastern empire fell in 1453, and in 1460, most of Greece became a Turkish province. After four centuries of Turkish rule (the Ottoman Empire), the Greeks began a war of independence in 1821, supported by Britain, France, and Russia. In 1832, Prince Otto of Bavaria became the king of the newly independent state of Greece.

Wars and Political Struggle

Greece adopted a parliamentary system in 1875. As a result of World War I and the Balkan wars, the Greek territory doubled. In World War II, Greece was occupied by German and Italian forces and lost one-eighth of its population to fighting and starvation. After liberation in 1944, a civil war between the government and communist guerrillas cost another 120,000 lives. The government, with aid from the United States, was victorious in 1949.

In 1965, a political crisis developed between Prime Minister George Papandreou and King Constantine II, which resulted in Papandreou's dismissal. The royal family fled Greece in 1967 when a group of army colonels staged a coup. From 1967 to 1974, the colonels ruled as a repressive dictatorship. Their fall in 1974 allowed for general elections, through which voters rejected a return to monarchy and established a republic.

Republic of Greece and Privatization Efforts

In 1981, Greece joined the European Community, which later evolved into the European Union (EU). The Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK)—led by Andreas Papandreou, the son of a former prime minister—won a majority in Parliament. Papandreou led the country as prime minister until 1989. In 1990, the New Democracy Party (ND) gained power in the government and worked to privatize state enterprises, cut government spending, and prepare Greece for greater economic integration within the EU.

The austerity measures used to accomplish these goals led to voter discontent; PASOK regained parliamentary majority in 1993 elections through 2007 and vowed to reverse privatization efforts, among other economic policies. PASOK pursued policies to reduce inflation and unemployment, promote private sector investment, curb government spending, and improve Greece's infrastructure. Over the past two decades, public sector employees—including teachers—have repeatedly gone on strike to protest the government's privatization strategies.

International Relations and Economic Turmoil

Today, Greece seeks to develop closer ties with its Balkan neighbors, including its traditional foe, Turkey. Signaling a thaw in relations, Greece announced its support of Turkey's application for EU membership in December 1999. Despite a recent series of negotiations aimed at resolving the problem, disputes over control of the island of Cyprus continue to strain relations with Turkey.

Severe financial trouble in 2009 and 2010 pushed Greece to impose strict spending cuts and to increase taxes, both of which led to widespread protests and strikes. In October 2011, eurozone leaders approved a bailout package for Greece that was conditional upon further economic austerity measures; the ensuing political turmoil forced the prime minister to resign in November 2011. Two general elections in May and June 2012 did not result in a solid parliamentary majority for any single party; the pro-bailout conservative and socialist parties formed a temporary coalition government with a small party from the left to keep Greece in the eurozone. Protests continue against austerity measures.

Recent Events and Trends

- **Budget cuts:** As part of the recent efforts to improve

Greece's economy, including a series of spending cuts and tax rises, the government shut down radio and television services from the state broadcaster ERT in June 2013. Around 2,500 employees were suspended. Mass protests in reaction to the closure led to a court ruling that the broadcaster can resume transmissions by the end of June, though with a smaller team. Greece's bailout terms include a large number of austerity measures, including cutting 15,000 state employees by the end of 2014.

- **Right-wing politics:** Recently, a far-right extremist political party, Golden Dawn, has risen in popularity and gained seats in Parliament. The party has been accused of violence against political opponents, immigrants, and homosexuals. In September 2013, a Greek anti-fascist rapper was murdered, prompting major public backlash against Golden Dawn and a government investigation of the party and the police force for connections to the violence. Several senior police officials with links to Golden Dawn were replaced, and many leaders of the party, including members of Parliament, were arrested.

- **Occupied broadcast building raided:** In June 2013, the government closed the former state broadcasting station ERT due to budget concerns. Several former employees protested by occupying the building and broadcasting online. In November 2013, Greek police forced the protestors to leave, prompting criticism from the political left and protests outside the building.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Population: 10,775,557

Population Growth Rate: 0.01%

Urban Population: 62%

Greece does not collect data on ethnicity in its census reports. Only about 90 percent of the population (around 9.9 million people) has Greek citizenship; the rest are immigrants. Large numbers of Albanians and Turks now live in Greece, though their numbers have not been officially counted. The government does not officially recognize the 180,000 to 350,000 Roma (or Gypsies) who also live in the country. Athens, the capital and the largest city and industrial center, has a population of more than three million.

After the financial crisis of 2008, the number of immigrants to Greece slightly decreased, while the number of Greeks leaving the country increased. However, large numbers of immigrants seeking employment and opportunities continue to flow into Greece from neighboring countries. Illegal immigrants come to Greece in order to move to other countries in Europe, but due to European laws and flawed Greek immigration policy, many get stuck in the country. Illegal immigrants face harsh conditions in detainment camps and may be held without being told why or for how long.

Language

Greek is the official language. The first surviving fragments

of written Greek date back to 1450 BC, and the language has maintained significant continuity since the days of Homer (ninth to eighth century BC). With its long scholarly tradition, Greek has lent terms to the world's modern languages, especially in disciplines such as medicine, physics, philosophy, and theology. It has also borrowed numerous terms from Italian, Turkish, and French, as well as technical terms more recently from English.

Many of Greece's ethnic minorities speak Turkish and Albanian. English and French are widely understood, and English is a mandatory subject in schools.

Religion

There are no official statistics on religion in Greece. As the official state religion, the Greek Orthodox Church (a branch of the Eastern Orthodox Church) claims about 98 percent of the Greek people. However, polls suggest that between 20 and 25 percent of the population is non-religious or agnostic in practice. The Eastern Orthodox Church has been independent of the Roman Catholic Church since the Great Schism in 1054. It is directed by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (in Istanbul, Turkey); the Greek Orthodox Church also follows a religious council called the Holy Synod that is headed by the archbishop of Greece.

Although freedom of religion is guaranteed in Greece, the state supports the Eastern Orthodox Church through taxes, and other religions are not allowed to proselytize. Eastern Orthodox principles are taught in the schools. Religion is an inseparable part of the Greek way of life; however, most people do not attend church regularly, except on holidays or other special occasions. Older people tend to go to church more frequently than young people, and women tend to go more than men.

Just over 1 percent of the people (mostly those of Turkish origin) are Muslim; there are also small groups of other Christians and Jews. Jewish communities are located in Thessaloniki and Athens. Most of Greece's immigrant population is either Muslim or Roman Catholic.

General Attitudes

Greeks see themselves as individualistic, brave, and hardworking. While Greece's older generations value family, religion, tradition, and education, the younger generation tends to view status and friends as also very important. Greeks are very proud of their cultural heritage, which they view as being central to Western civilization. They are eager to import trends and technology but may also be wary of outside powers such as the EU or powerful foreign countries.

Greek society traditionally has been dominated by males. Men consider it a matter of personal honor to fulfill obligations to their families and others. A man may praise the food served in his home as especially good or he may be the hero of his own tales. However, in recent generations, women (especially in urban areas) have gained greater prominence and rights. They have leadership roles in business, civil service, and other professions.

Personal Appearance

Greeks generally wear clothing influenced by Western

European fashions. Fashionable clothing is popular among the younger generation and has become essential for working professionals. Rural and older people generally prefer to dress more conservatively. Greek women wear dresses more often than do U.S. American women. Traditional costumes are worn at folk festivals and on special occasions. Older women in rural areas often wrap scarves around their heads.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Greeks are often physically expressive in their greetings. Friends and relatives hug and kiss upon meeting, while others shake hands. Men often slap each other's back or arm at shoulder level instead of shaking hands. Kissing a woman's hand is considered old-fashioned and may be interpreted ironically.

People use a variety of verbal greetings; the situation dictates the greeting they choose. One term meaning "Good morning" is *Kaliméra*. "Good evening" is *Kalispéra*. Close friends and family members call each other by first name, but acquaintances and strangers are generally addressed by their title ("Doctor," "Professor," "Mrs.," etc.) followed by the surname. In urban areas, people do not greet strangers they pass on the street. Villagers briefly greet passing strangers in rural areas. When getting on an elevator, one usually nods at the others present and might give a short, general greeting.

Gestures

Gestures frequently are used among Greeks of a similar social status; using some gestures with superiors or elders may be improper. To indicate "no," one tilts the head backward; nodding the head slightly forward means "yes." Pointing a finger at someone is impolite; it often indicates a threat or contempt. Directing an open palm with the fingers spread at another person is called *moúta* and is severely insulting.

A Greek may smile not only when happy but also sometimes when he or she is angry or upset. People use their hands a great deal in conversation, both to accompany and to replace verbal expressions. A person may release a puff of breath through pursed lips to ward off the jealousy of the "evil eye" after he or she has given or received a compliment. Some Greeks, especially those who live in rural areas, may also try to ward off the evil eye by repeating a short saying or performing a small ritual and prayer at home.

Visiting

Ancient Greeks believed a stranger might be a god in disguise and were therefore kind to all strangers. This tradition of hospitality continues today. In small towns, friends and relatives commonly drop by unannounced. However, in urban areas it is polite to inform friends and family before visiting them. Greeks enjoy inviting friends to their homes for dinner or for special occasions—such as New Year's Day. Christmas and Easter present opportunities for family gatherings. Home visits are most popular during the holiday season, though they have become more popular throughout the year since the financial crisis began. Traditionally, on other nights, it was

more common for friends to meet at local taverns.

Invited guests usually bring a gift to the hosts, such as flowers, a bottle of wine, or pastries. All guests, invited or unannounced, are offered refreshments. A cup of coffee is most common, but other drinks, a homemade fruit preserve, or pastries are also popular. If Greek hosts insist several times about anything (that a guest stay longer or eat more, for example), they usually are sincere, and guests try to accommodate them so as not to hurt their feelings.

Eating

Traditionally, lunch was the main meal of the day and was served in the early afternoon (between noon and 2 p.m.). However, because of changing work schedules, gathering for a meal at midday is no longer possible for many families. Dinner is frequently the main meal and is often eaten as late as 8 or 9 p.m. Leaving the table before everyone has finished eating is considered impolite. Greeks are careful to finish all the food on the plate so as not to insult the cook. Taking second helpings is the best way to show appreciation for the meal and to compliment the hostess.

At restaurants, a group will often order many different dishes to share. It is not unusual for guests to enter a tavern's kitchen and choose their dinner by looking into various pots of food; however, this is not acceptable at nicer restaurants. Service is often included in the bill, so tipping is not standard in most restaurants. People may round up the price of the meal and leave the change as a tip, or they may leave a more substantial tip in a formal restaurant.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

Greece's birthrate was comparatively high a few generations ago; however, as its citizens have become wealthier, its birthrate has dropped to one of the lowest in Europe. Both urban and rural families tend to have one or two children. The family unit is a high priority in Greece; it is vital that no member bring shame or dishonor to the family. Extended families live close together in rural areas, but this is less often the case in urban areas.

Parents and Children

In rural areas and among lower-class families, children are expected to work in the fields or in the family business. Adults traditionally disciplined their children firmly, often using corporal punishment, but the practice is changing. Parents usually spend a large portion of their income on clothing, feeding, and educating their children. Greek parents believe it is their duty to provide for a good education, and they will always help their children if they can. They support their children financially after they've become adults. Parents, in turn, expect to be supported by their children later in life. If parents die, the oldest child usually helps younger siblings finish their education and get out on their own.

Children may live with their parents well into their 30s or until they marry. Some newlywed couples live with their parents or in-laws until they can afford a home of their own.

Young couples in urban areas often try to live close to their parents; they frequently turn to their parents for babysitting, especially because of a shortage of daycare centers.

Grandparents have an active role in raising children. The elderly are respected; they are traditionally addressed by courteous titles and served first at meals. Greeks care for their elderly parents at home when possible. If the parents must live in a home for the elderly, their children take care of all arrangements and make frequent visits.

Gender Roles

Traditional gender roles are still observed, though younger fathers in urban areas are more likely to participate in household chores and in raising the children; fathers in rural areas rarely help with these tasks. Both men and women traditionally do farm work.

While the effects of the eurozone financial crisis may be straining social cohesion in general, it has resulted in closer relationships within families. Stay-at-home fathers have become more common due to unemployment. Because their wages are typically lower than men's, many women have been able to remain employed.

An increasing number of women are pursuing careers outside the home. Though women do not yet receive pay equal to men's, they have participated in business since the beginning of the 20th century. They have increasingly worked in business leadership positions since the 1970s, when the first woman became the head of a large company. A large number of women work for the public sector. In the 1990s, most Greek political parties imposed quotas for the minimum number of women on each ballot. Women have also served as members of the Academy of Athens, speaker of Parliament, and chair of the Supreme Court.

Housing

Urban

Most urban residents live in multi-storey concrete apartment buildings with balconies on every floor and flat roofs. Most of these buildings were built in the 1960s and 1970s after owners of single-family homes sold them to developers. Urban dwellers commonly own small plots of land and homes in their native villages as well.

Rural

The majority of people in rural areas live in one- or two-storey houses; these houses are sometimes shared between two families. In such cases, the two living areas are often connected by a staircase, either on the inside or outside of the house. In rural mountain areas in northern Greece, there are many modest stone houses that resemble housing in Balkan areas. In central Greece, the small towns and larger villages feature *polykatoikies*, which are two- or three-storey apartment buildings made of reinforced concrete.

Exteriors

Traditional styles vary extensively, from stone houses with enclosed balconies in mountain areas, to white-washed island houses with domes and terraces. On the Cycladic islands, for example, arched-roof houses are often built into steep slopes.

While urban apartment buildings, suburban houses, semi-urban dwellings, and modern summerhouses are usually reinforced concrete structures, rural dwellings may also be

made from brick, plain concrete, or (rarely) cement blocks. Most houses in central Greece use red tiles for the roof.

Interiors

A typical apartment has a living room, a kitchen, a bathroom, and one or two bedrooms. Some apartments also have separate sitting and dining rooms and a room separate from the bathroom for the toilet. Modern apartments and lofts often include larger living rooms and open-plan kitchens.

In many Greek homes, the dining room is highly decorated, and oriental rugs are laid over marble, terrazzo, or ceramic-tile floors. It is common for observant Orthodox Greeks to display collections of icons in the corner of a room. Modern homes are typically furnished with a refrigerator, washing machine, kitchen appliances, dishwasher, and a couple of TV sets. Rural homes may lack a few of these appliances, but most basic conveniences are present.

Ownership

Greece's economic expansion prior to 2008 was based to a large extent on real estate and construction. In 2006, at the peak of this economic trend, over 80 percent of Greece's population were homeowners. Since the economic downturn, that percentage has decreased and is expected to continue decreasing as people move back in with their families and young Greeks move abroad for employment.

Some Greeks also own a second home, usually either a village home or a summerhouse. Sometimes, rural homes are owned by multiple people, who have inherited the house from parents or relatives. Families often use these houses as vacation homes and rotate use with the other owners.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

Greeks often begin dating during middle school in urban areas and high school in rural areas. As in most of Europe, Greek youth socialize together freely, often in groups and couples. On Sunday afternoons in rural areas, groups often gather in the village square to socialize. It is common for a couple to live together before or instead of marrying. The majority of Greeks still expect to marry, but a growing number of people prefer to remain single or cohabitate with their partner.

Engagement and Marriage

Traditionally, the man asked the woman's parents for permission to marry her. If the parents approved, the two would date and become better acquainted during a formal engagement. Such formalities are now quite rare, although more traditional families still commonly follow this practice.

The average age for women to marry is 29; men usually marry around age 30. Weddings have become an increasingly important social event, especially for recently wealthy urban Greeks. Such weddings include large receptions at special estates in the suburbs. In the current economic decline, receptions are still popular, though people spend less on them.

Civil marriage, conducted in a town hall, was introduced in 1982. About half of all marriages today are civil. A couple may choose between a civil or a religious ceremony, or both. Many couples choose a religious wedding because their parents prefer a traditional church wedding. The total number of marriages has declined in recent decades.

Alternatives to Marriage and Divorce

Common-law marriages are not part of the Greek legal system. Civil partnership ceremonies conducted in registry offices were introduced in 2009. Civil partners do not have the right to guardianship of their partner's children from previous relationships or each other's social security (which includes health care and pensions), but they do have some rights of inheritance. There is no provision for same-sex civil partnership, though some political parties have declared support for it.

No-fault divorce and divorce by mutual consent were legalized in 1983. The Greek Orthodox Church allows only three divorces to those who have had religious weddings; there is no divorce limit for civil weddings. Divorce rates have risen in recent years. The majority of divorces are consensus divorces. Some in rural areas look down on divorced women.

Life Cycle

Birth

All employed women are allowed by law a paid maternity leave of no less than 17 weeks, 8 of which must be granted before childbirth. When they return from maternity leave, women are entitled to the same or an equivalent position to the one they had before childbirth, as well as improvements to working conditions they would have been entitled to during their absence. Both parents are entitled to unpaid parental leave of three months each, which must be taken before the child's 30th month. Fathers often take this as their paternity leave but traditionally use it as vacation rather than to relieve the mother from her household and child-raising chores.

Traditionally, women and newborn babies stayed in their homes for 40 days, at which point the baby was blessed in church. Today, few mothers observe the 40-day confinement, but most still bring the babies to church 40 days after the birth. A baby is normally christened, or baptized, between three months and a year old. Civil name-giving was introduced in 1976 as an alternative to religious christening. There is no ceremony that accompanies a civil name-giving, though some families hold a party for friends and family.

Milestones

A person becomes a legal adult at the age of 18. At this age, a person may vote and get a driver's license and is considered legally and financially responsible. Military service is compulsory for males starting at age 18.

Prior to the 2008 global financial crisis, Greek workers retired around age 65 or after 35 years of work, though those in certain careers retired sooner. Those who reached the age of 65 and did not qualify for a pension had the option to pay money to make up for the missing years of employment. However, since the financial crisis, the retirement age has risen to 67, with limitations on buying into pension plans.

Death

When a person dies, burial, usually accompanied by a church service, tends to happen promptly. In some regions, women sing special funeral songs and conduct ritualized displays of mourning. Throughout most of the country, women wear black clothes and men wear black armbands and ties for several weeks or months after the death. Older widows may

wear black for the rest of their lives. Families in mourning sometimes cover the mirrors throughout their homes and attend memorial services three months, six months, and a year after a loved one dies.

Until 2006, cremation was not an option (due to religious objections from the Greek Orthodox Church). No crematories have been built in Greece yet, though there are plans underway to build several. Currently, those wishing to be cremated must use facilities in neighboring countries.

Diet

While tastes vary between urban and rural populations, certain foods are common to all Greeks. These include lamb, seafood, olives, and cheese. People also eat potatoes, rice, beans, breads, chicken, fruits, and vegetables. Olive oil is used in cooking. Garlic, onions, and spices are also popular. Salads often are eaten with the main meal. *Souvlaki* is a shish kebab with cubes of meat (pork, chicken, or lamb), sometimes served with mushrooms and vegetables or with onion, tomatoes, and a yogurt sauce. Eggplant, zucchini, stuffed tomatoes, and pasta are all favorites. Bean soup is popular in the winter. For Easter, Greeks enjoy roast lamb and *kokoretsi* (lamb liver, lungs, and spleen wrapped in intestines and roasted on a spit).

Recreation

Sports

With an Olympic tradition, the Greeks love sports, especially soccer, basketball, swimming, windsurfing, and sailing. Skiing is also popular, and Greece has more than 20 ski resorts. *Football* (soccer), basketball, and volleyball (to a lesser extent) are favorite spectator sports. People also like watching swimming, diving, and figure skating competitions. Track and field and running competitions are very popular as well. Beach volleyball, beach tennis, and windsurfing are commonly enjoyed in the summertime. Skateboarding and BMX bike riding are common among youth in urban areas; motocross is also popular among Greek youths.

Leisure

Neighborhood coffeehouses are a traditional place of leisure for men. While there, men play *tavli* (backgammon), watch television, and discuss politics. However, people of all ages and both genders may go out for coffee. Rural women are more likely to stay at home with other women to do crafts and converse. On weekends, city dwellers like to leave the city to visit a family-owned country home, go to the beach, or go skiing or fishing.

Cinema, theater, and concerts are popular. Throughout the year, but especially during the summer, cultural festivals are organized across the country and include concerts, theater, and dance performances. Nearly every town or city has at least one such festival. The best-known are the Athens Festival (June–September), the Epidaurus Festival of Classic Theater (July–August), and the Thessaloníki International Film Festival (November).

Vacation

Vacations are popular among all Greeks. Families usually go on vacation together, with two or three generations sharing a summer house, a village family house, or a couple of rooms at

a hotel. Young parents often choose to go on vacations with other families that have children of the same age. Students and youth usually travel together.

Greece has a couple thousand islands, of which about a tenth are inhabited. Some young Greeks consider it a rite of passage to go island-hopping, sleeping in cheap hostels, at camp sites, or even on the beach. However, the financial crisis has hurt domestic tourism, and many Greeks cannot afford to spend as much money or time on vacations as before.

The Arts

Greek literature is centuries old but continues to be revered and studied globally. Western literature, drama, and philosophical thought are influenced by Greek traditions. Greek plays are still produced on the ancient stages where they were once performed. Beginning in the latter half of the 20th century, Greek writers, poets, and playwrights began to deal increasingly with contemporary problems and situations. Many Greeks participate in societies devoted to archaeology, history, or folklore.

Modern Greek music combines Eastern and Western influences. Young people enjoy popular music from Europe and the United States. *Rebetiko* is a type of folk music with themes of poverty and suffering. Folk dancing is also common at special events. Traditional arts include embroidery, pottery, weaving, tapestry, and silver jewelry.

Greece has a large number of state art and archeological museums, as well as private specialized museums devoted to technology, popular art, folklore, craftsmanship, and more. Some private cultural institutions, such as the Benaki Museum, are subsidized by the state.

Holidays

Holidays include New Year's Day (1 Jan.), *Theophaneia* (Epiphany, 6 January), *Evangelismos* (Annunciation) and Independence Day (25 Mar.), Easter, St. Constantine and Helen Celebration (21 May), Assumption (15 Aug.), *Ochi* Day (28 Oct.), and Christmas (25 Dec.).

Greek Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas with Catholics and Protestants (25 Dec.) but Easter with other Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches. The Vatican has allowed Roman Catholics in Greece to celebrate Easter with their Orthodox fellow citizens and not with the rest of the Catholic community throughout the world.

Easter

Easter is by far the most important holiday, celebrated with special feasts and processions. *Tsiknopempti* (Fat Thursday, the last Thursday before Lent) is celebrated with all sorts of meat dishes. *Kathara Deftera* (Clean Monday, the Greek equivalent of Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent) is a day when people traditionally go on a picnic, fly a kite, and eat unleavened bread, an assortment of seafood, and vegetable dishes cooked with olive oil, as well as various dips.

During Lent, it is traditional to eat *halva* (a dense pastry made either with flour, butter, and sugar, or with a nut butter and sugar) and *skaltsounia* (pastries that contain raisins, almonds, walnuts, orange zest, and cinnamon). Good Friday is traditionally the day of the most severe fasting; observers

eat vegetables boiled in unsalted water. The Saturday before Easter is celebrated with *mageiritsa* (a meaty soup that contains liver, entrails, onion, and dill, seasoned with egg and lemon sauce).

Easter lunch is comprised of roasted lamb and *kokoretsi* (a dish of Anatolian origin that consists of lamb or goat intestines and offal, the organs and entrails of an animal), as well as lettuce, onion, and dill salad. Easter eggs (usually painted red or multicolored) are distributed, and an egg-tapping contest follows. The most common Easter cake is the *tsoureki* (a long, flat, and sometimes braided sweet bread topped with almonds).

Christmas

Christmas Eve (24 Dec.) is celebrated with turkey, *gemisi* (a stuffing that contains minced meat, cinnamon, nutmeg, and pine nuts), and potatoes all baked in the oven. Special Christmas sweets include *melomacaroni* (a confection spiced with cinnamon or orange zest and dipped in honey) and *kourambiedhes* (a large biscuit-like sweet made of flour, butter, and a flavor such as vanilla and covered in sugar).

Christmas decorations in Greece mirror those found throughout Europe: Christmas trees, gnomes, angels, stars, nativity scenes, and Santa Claus (or St. Basil, identically dressed). A common decoration on some islands is the Christmas boat, which has been promoted during the last decade as an alternative to the Christmas tree.

On the eve of the three important feasts of the *Dodekameron* (the twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany), children roam the streets, knock on doors and ring doorbells, and sing the *kalanda* (different carols for Christmas, the New Year, and Epiphany). They receive in exchange either sweets or pocket money. Greeks celebrate 1 January as St. Basil's Day and as a traditional day to give gifts, although many people now prefer to exchange gifts on Christmas (25 Dec.).

Other Holidays

Almost every city and village has a patron saint, who is honored with a yearly festival (*panygiri*). For many holidays, a traditional greeting is *Chronia polla* (May you live for many years).

On New Year's Eve, *Vasilopitta* (St. Basil's Pie), a special cake with a coin in it, is cut into various pieces at midnight. Whoever gets the coin is supposed to have good luck during the coming year.

The First of May is an old pagan holiday and is considered a day to go for a picnic and a walk in the countryside. In many regions, various pies (meat, chicken, cheese, onion, leek, spinach, and other kinds) are the dish of the day. The holiday is traditionally associated with flower wreaths and garlands.

Carnival is celebrated with dances and costume parties. On the last Sunday (called *Kyriaki ton Apokreo*, the Greek equivalent of Mardi Gras), several cities host a giant parade that features King Karnavalos on his chariot and assorted floats. The most famous Carnival procession takes place in Pátrai.

Ochi Day (28 Oct.) commemorates the day in 1940 that the Greeks said *Ochi* (No) to the Axis Powers and entered World War II on the side of the Allies. It is considered a

heroic decision because of the size of the German and Italian armies.

On 17 November, Greeks commemorate the Polytechnic school uprising in 1973 that is considered to have contributed to the fall of the dictatorship; a large demonstration is organized every year, during which riots often occur.

SOCIETY

Government

Head of State: Pres. Karolos Papoulias

Head of Government: PM Antonis Samaras

Capital: Athens

Structure

Greece is a presidential parliamentary republic. The president is head of state; the role is largely ceremonial. The president is elected by parliament to a five-year term and may hold a second term. The prime minister is head of government. The president appoints the prime minister but must select the person chosen by the party with the majority in Parliament; usually the leader of the majority party is chosen.

The unicameral Parliament (*Vouli ton Ellinon*, or informally, *Vouli*) has three hundred members elected by popular vote for four-year terms. Elections are held at least every four years. The *Areopagus*, the Supreme Court, is the highest court and adjudicates issues of constitutionality. All judges are appointed by the president for life terms.

Below the national level, Greece has 13 regions, which are divided into 74 regional units; the regional units are divided into municipalities and municipal communities. Local government is elected by popular vote. Regional governments are responsible for public transportation and most public utilities. Some political parties have quotas for female candidates; these quotas do not apply to national elections. Greek women made up a quarter of the cabinet after the 2009 elections.

Political Landscape

For a period of about 40 years, Greece had a series of single-party governments; historically, Greece has had few coalitions among political parties until recently. Generally, there is little cooperation among political parties on the national level. The three main political groups are the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK, a center-left party), Syriza (a radical left coalition), and New Democracy (a center-right party). Extremist right-wing parties, such as Golden Dawn, have become more popular since the economic downturn. Smaller parties have legislative representation and sometimes can have a significant impact on political events.

Major political issues include debt, austerity measures, unemployment, and illegal immigration. Many consider Greece's debt levels to be unsustainable, though austerity measures enacted to pay back the debt are also highly controversial. High levels of immigration are widely viewed as a burden on Greece's society and economy. Operation Xenios Zeus allows Greek police to enact sweep operations that target anyone suspected of not having citizenship, enabling the widespread detention of immigrants. Limited

numbers of immigrants may apply for citizenship or asylum (which would allow for free movement within much of Europe) but often are not given much information on their application status while in detainment camps.

Big businesses and special interest groups lobby the government to influence its decisions on a national, regional, and local level. People are concerned about how much influence business has over the government, and a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have tried to shed light on the problem.

Government and the People

All citizens are eligible and required to vote at age 18, but mandatory voting is not enforced. Voter turnout in Greece has historically been high, with at least three-quarters of the eligible population participating in elections, though recent elections have seen lower turnout. Greek elections have been considered fair since 1974, when the dictatorship fell.

Greeks often participate in political activity, largely through party-related organizations. They believe the government to be responsible for social security, health care, and education (including most college education), as well as for protecting the Greek environment and culture. Until recently, people had faith in their government to carry out its functions. Since the eurozone crisis, Greeks have less faith in the ability of the government to meet their needs and have actively protested austerity measures and budget cuts that diminish the government's social role. Recently, several cases of government corruption involving politicians from various political parties have been brought to light. The people are becoming increasingly upset by what is perceived to be widespread corruption. Many feel that politicians are self-serving.

Economy

GDP (PPP) in billions: \$267.1

GDP (PPP) per capita: \$23,600

Greece has traditionally been an agrarian nation, but services have grown significantly, accounting for about 80 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Agriculture now employs around 12 percent of the labor force, producing wine, wheat, corn, wool, cotton, olives, raisins, and tobacco. The industrial sector has made important advances. Food, tobacco, textiles, chemicals, metal products, and petroleum comprise some of the country's major industries. In addition to manufactured goods, exports include food and raw materials. Greece has a strong trade partnership with other EU members and is developing ties with eastern European and Black Sea countries. Tourism is key to the economy, accounting for nearly a sixth of overall GDP.

Greece's economy fell into recession in 2009 and received a series of loans from the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that continued into 2013. In exchange for these bailout loans, the government agreed to enact austerity measures, including government spending cuts totaling nearly US\$50 billion. The government also agreed to combat widespread tax evasion, overhaul the healthcare and pension systems, and reform the labor and product markets. Inaccurate and underreported statistics, consistent

underperformance, and eroding public finances contributed to Greece's economic decline. The government faces strong opposition to further austerity measures, which serve to lengthen Greece's recession and decrease tax revenue.

The black market is widespread. A quarter of the workforce is unemployed, and a fifth of the workforce is comprised of immigrants, who mostly hold jobs in agriculture and unskilled labor. Greece's bleak economic outlook is compounded by public discontent and political instability. The euro replaced the *drachma* in 2002 as Greece's currency.

Transportation and Communications

Internet Users (per 100 people): 60

Cellular Phone Subscriptions (per 100 people): 117

Paved Roads: 35%

Principal highways connect Athens with Thessaloníki and Pátrai. Roads may be poor in mountain areas, making travel to remote villages difficult. Buses and trains are the most common forms of public transportation. Greece has two international airports and many regional airports. In Athens, people commute by car, bus, and motorbike; many young Greeks ride motorcycles and scooters. Bikes have become more popular since the economic downturn in 2008. The government began building the Athens subway in 1992. Construction on new sections of the subway may continue until 2020. Because traffic congestion is so bad in Athens, cars with license plates ending in an even number are allowed to drive in the center of town only on even days of the month (with odd numbers driving on odd-numbered days).

There are over a dozen daily newspapers in Greece and about a dozen more weekly newspapers. The government used to own and administer the telephone, radio, and television systems, but these have largely been privatized. Greek laws do not inhibit the press; it is allowed to publish with very few restrictions. Television tends to be more conservative and restrained than print media. The National Council for Radio and Television asserts some control over radio and television, mostly concerning privacy protection and public mores. The media typically exercises self-restraint when reporting stories that relate to national security issues.

Education

Adult Literacy: 97%

Mean Years of Schooling: 10.2

Structure and Access

Education is free and mandatory. Children are required to go to school until age 15. This requirement is rigorously enforced. Although some kids start kindergarten at age five, all children begin elementary school at age six. Students are required to complete six years of *dimotiko* (elementary school) and three years of *gymnasio* (middle school). *Lykeio* (high school) is available in three-year courses, called orientations, that generally prepare a student for higher education. Four-year courses are available in a few private schools that offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) program.

A large majority of primary and secondary schools are

state (public) schools. These schools sometimes have inadequate facilities, especially in rural areas and underprivileged neighborhoods in large cities. Private schools are expensive and only affordable to wealthier families. These schools offer spacious grounds, libraries, sports facilities, and extracurricular activities. Most private schools are secular, and many target foreign language communities (mostly Western). Religious schools are extremely rare.

Books are free at all levels of education, from *dimotiko* to university. Books for primary and secondary education are mostly issued by the Ministry of Education, while books for university are usually issued by the university.

School Life

Education emphasizes moral, intellectual, vocational, and physical instruction. Generally, the curriculum is the same for both state and private schools. Private preparatory schools for entrance exams (called *frondistiria*, or coaching schools) are ubiquitous and play an important role in the process, largely because state schools are seen as inadequate. Coaching schools are a significant financial burden for the student's parents and family, who invest in the child's admission to a university.

Children attend *dimotiko* for 40 hours a week. Emphasis is given to the Greek language and arts, while math, science, and history also feature prominently. English is taught starting in the third grade, and a second foreign language (typically French or German) is added in the fourth grade. Sports, computers, and religion are also covered.

Gymnasio focuses almost equally on the humanities (literature, history, and foreign language) and the sciences (math, physics, chemistry, and biology). Arts, civics, home economics, technology, and career counseling are less emphasized.

Lykeio is divided into general *lykeio* and technical and vocational *lykeio*. General *lykeio* has three orientations: theoretical (humanities), practical (science and math), and technological. After the first year, general courses are supplemented by orientation courses to prepare pupils for university entrance exams. In technical and vocational *lykeio*, students choose an orientation in technology, services, or the merchant marine and prepare for technical colleges.

A large number of hours are devoted to studying in the classroom under teacher supervision, partially replacing homework. Homework is less intensive than it used to be. Study style focuses on memorization and tests; collaborative assignments and individual papers are less common. Students may bring their own lunch to school or, more often, buy food and drinks from school cafeterias. There is no tradition of school uniforms.

Higher Education

Universities, technical colleges, and schools of higher education are free to those who pass entrance exams that are carried out each year in June throughout the country. Students are admitted to universities based on grades, exam results, and stated preferences. There are 21 state universities in Greece, with at least one in each region. Attica (including Athens and Piraeus), Macedonia (including Thessaloniki), and Crete have the most institutions. The situation for higher technical education is comparable. Private institutions of

higher learning (called "colleges") are mostly found in Athens and Thessaloniki.

The constitution stipulates that university education must be public and not-for-profit. There are no private universities, though there are private colleges that are officially recognized as post-secondary educational institutions. They cooperate with foreign universities (mostly European, though some U.S. American) and offer joint programs and degrees recognized by foreign countries. The Greek state recognizes degrees earned this way only if the university is founded by an EU country. Those who have the money to do so often go to foreign universities, which has led to both Greek funds being used abroad and a brain drain.

Health

All workers are required to have health insurance from a state-supported healthcare system, such as the National Organization for Health Care (EOPPY). Insurance from private companies or agents is not compulsory, though many Greeks choose to pay the extra cost because of poor services offered by some state agencies. While the EOPPY provides all citizens with health benefits, it is not as efficient as people would like.

Hospitals generally are understaffed and overcrowded. Doctors who work in public hospitals are allowed to have private patients, though it must be through an independent private practice. A few private clinics exist, but their services are not covered by state insurance. Many people feel they would obtain better care through a private system. Patients often pay state doctors *fakelakia* (tips) under the table in order to receive good care. Still, Greeks generally enjoy good health. Lung cancer, claiming around six thousand lives each year, has become a major health concern; high smoking rates and air pollution are significant contributing factors.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Embassy of Greece, 2217 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 939-1300; web site www.mfa.gr/washington. Greek National Tourism Organization, phone (212) 421-5777; web site www.visitgreece.gr.

Country and Development Data

Capital	Athens
Population	10,775,557 (rank=80)
Area (sq. mi.)	50,949 (rank=97)
Area (sq. km.)	131,957
Human Development Index	29 of 187 countries
Gender Inequality Index	27 of 148 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$23,600
Adult Literacy	98% (male); 96% (female)
Infant Mortality	5 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	78 (male); 83 (female)
Currency	Euro

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