



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate. Covering 50,942 square miles (131,940 square kilometers), Greece is just smaller than 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). Earthquakes are common and sometimes severe. The fertile valleys, plains, and coastal areas are densely populated. Nearly 20 percent of Greece is arable. The country includes an archipelago of more than two thousand islands, the largest of which is Crete. These islands comprise about one-fifth of Greece's total land area, but only 166 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. Although the history of ancient Greece stretches back to 3000 B.C., Athens had its beginnings in 1300 B.C., and city-states began forming around 1000 B.C. From this point, Greek culture began to thrive. The first Olympics were held in 776 B.C., and literature, philosophy, and art began to flourish. Ancient Greek civilization reached its peak by 400 B.C. During that period, Athens was the center of a vast overseas empire. Many of the West's first studies of government, law,

and the concepts of justice and liberty began in Greece. The country's rich heritage of architecture, sculpture, science, drama, poetry, and government established a foundation for Western civilization.

Philip of Macedonia conquered Greece in 338 B.C. 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 B.C., the empire declined, and by 146 B.C. it had become part of the Roman Empire.

Centuries later, along with Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey), Greece was the center of the Byzantine Empire, which fell in A.D. 1453. 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, supported by Britain, France, and Russia. In 1832, Prince Otto of Bavaria was selected as king of Greece. 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. A group of army colonels staged a coup in 1967, and the royal family fled. From 1967 to 1974, the colonels ruled as a repressive dictatorship. Their fall in 1974 allowed for general elections, through which a republic was established when voters rejected a return to a monarchy. In 1981, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK)—led by Andreas Papandreou, the former prime minister's son—

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won a majority in Parliament. Prime Minister Papandreou was reelected in 1985 but lost the majority in 1989 in the face of various financial and political scandals.

Elections had to be held three times before Constantine Mitsotakis and his New Democracy Party received enough votes to form a government in 1990. Mitsotakis worked to privatize state enterprises, cut government spending, and prepare Greece for greater economic integration within the EU. Austerity measures that were necessary to accomplish those goals led to voter discontent. Hence, in the 1993 elections, the Socialist Party regained parliamentary leadership and Andreas Papandreou was returned to office as prime minister. He immediately began to reverse various privatization efforts and other economic policies.

After experiencing months of poor health, Papandreou resigned as prime minister in January 1996; he was replaced by Costas Simitis. Simitis became party leader of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) after Papandreou's death in June 1996. Seeking a broad mandate for austerity measures needed to revive the country's ailing economy, Simitis called for legislative elections in September 1996, a year early. The governing Socialists enjoyed a solid victory, enabling Simitis to retain his position as prime minister. The government is currently working to reduce inflation and unemployment, promote private sector investment, curb government spending, and improve Greece's infrastructure.

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 recent negotiations aimed at resolving the problem, disputes over control of the island of Cyprus continue to strain relations with Turkey.

THE PEOPLE

Population. The population is nearly 11 million and is growing annually at 0.6 percent. About 92 percent of the population is ethnic Greek. Immigration from neighboring countries is a major population trend. About 400,000 Albanians, 76,000 Turks, 120,000 Roma (or Gypsies), and many other groups are now living in Greece. More than half of Greeks live in urban areas. Athens, the capital and the largest city and industrial center, has a population of about 3.7 million.

Language. Greek is the official language of Greece. The language has changed relatively little since the days of Homer (ninth–eighth century B.C.). 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. Many of Greece's ethnic minorities speak Turkish and Albanian. English and French are widely understood, and English is a popular subject in schools.

Religion. About 98 percent of the people belong to the Eastern (Greek) Orthodox Church, which is the official religion in Greece and is quite powerful. Although freedom of religion is guaranteed, the state supports the Eastern Orthodox Church through taxes, and other religions are not allowed to proselytize. The Orthodox Church is a Christian church directed by an archbishop (independent of the Roman Catholic Church) and the Holy Synod. Eastern Orthodox principles are taught in the schools. Religion is an inseparable part of the Greek way of life; however, Greeks generally are not religious. Older people, particularly women, attend church more frequently than

young people. The Christian Orthodox patriarch based in Istanbul, Turkey, visited Athens in 1999 to improve ties with the Greek Orthodox faith.

More than 1 percent of the people (mostly of Turkish origin) are Muslim; there are also small groups of Jews and other Christians. Jewish communities are located in Thessaloniki and Athens.

General Attitudes. Greek society traditionally has been dominated by males, although in recent generations, women, particularly those in urban areas, have gained greater prominence and rights. Men consider it a matter of personal honor to fulfill obligations to their families and others. They may attribute their failures to external circumstances rather than to personal inadequacies. Also, a man may praise the food served in his home as especially good or he may be the hero of his own tales. Such self-praise is not considered bragging. 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. Greeks see themselves as individualistic, brave, and hard-working.

Personal Appearance. Greeks generally wear clothing influenced by 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 North American women. Traditional costumes are worn at folk festivals and on special occasions.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings. Greeks are often expressive in their greetings. Friends and relatives hug and kiss when they greet each other, while others shake hands. Young men often slap each other's back or arm at shoulder level instead of shaking hands. People use a variety of verbal greetings; the situation dictates the greeting they choose. One term meaning "Good morning" is *Kaliméra sas*. "Good evening" is *Kalispéra sas*.

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.) and 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 either backward or side to side. To indicate "yes," one nods the head slightly forward. Pointing a finger at someone is impolite; it often indicates a threat or contempt. A Greek may smile not only when happy but also sometimes when he or she is angry or upset. 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. People use the hands a great deal in conversation, both to accompany and to replace verbal expressions.

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.

Invited guests usually take a gift to the hosts, including 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 mean it, 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 everything 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 a number of different dishes that everyone shares. It is not unusual for guests to go into the restaurant kitchen and choose their dinner by looking into the various pots of food. Because service is often included in the bill, tipping is not standard in most restaurants. Tipping is more common in formal restaurants.

LIFESTYLE

Family. The family unit a high priority in Greece, and it is vital that no member bring shame or dishonor to the family. If the parents of a family die, the oldest child usually helps younger siblings finish their education and get out on their own. The elderly are respected; they are 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. Adults traditionally have disciplined their children firmly; however, this practice is changing. Still, parents (even the poorest) usually spend a large portion of their income on clothing, feeding, and educating their children. Parents believe it is their duty to provide for a good education, and they will always help their children, married or not, if they can. Some newlywed couples live with their parents or in-laws until they can afford a home of their own. An increasing number of women are pursuing careers outside the home.

Dating 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, except among rural people. Young people socialize as they do throughout Europe, and it is common for a couple to live together before or instead of marrying. On Sunday afternoons in rural areas, groups often gather in the village square to socialize. The average age for women to marry is 26; men usually marry at age 30. Civil marriage and divorce were only legalized in 1982. Divorce rates remain relatively low.

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 or lamb), mushrooms, and vegeta-

bles. 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. Coffeehouses were once the focal point of leisure activity for men. Now less common in urban areas, they still provide a place for men to play cards, watch television, and discuss politics. Rural women stay at home with other women to do crafts and enjoy conversation. Movies (both Greek and foreign) and the theater are also popular. Greeks enjoy festivals throughout the year that highlight ancient Greek theater and literature. With an Olympic tradition, the Greeks love sports, especially soccer, basketball, swimming, windsurfing, and sailing. Skiing is also popular; Greece has more than 20 ski resorts. On weekends, city dwellers like to go to the beach or go skiing or fishing.

The Arts. Greek literature is centuries old but continues to be revered and studied around the world. 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 fiction writers, poets, and playwrights began to deal increasingly with contemporary problems and situations. Many people participate in societies devoted to archaeology, history, or folklore.

Modern Greek music combines Eastern and Western influences. *Rebetiko* is a type of folk music with themes of poverty and suffering. Folk dancing is also common at special events. Popular traditional arts include embroidery, pottery, weaving, tapestry, and silver jewelry.

Holidays. Almost every city and village has a patron saint who is honored with a yearly festival. Easter is by far the most important holiday, celebrated with special feasts, processions, and gatherings. 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.). For many holidays, a traditional greeting is *Chronia polla* (May you live for many years). At midnight on New Year’s Eve, a special cake (*vasilopitta*) with a coin in it is cut into various pieces. Whoever gets the coin is supposed to have good luck during the new year. Other holidays include Independence Day (25 Mar.), St. Constantine and Helen Celebration (21 May), Assumption (15 Aug.), and *Ochi Day* (28 Oct.). *Ochi Day* commemorates the day that Ioannis Metaxas, then prime minister, said *Ochi* (No) to Hitler, and Greece entered into 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.

Commerce. Work and business hours vary, depending on the season and type of business. Banks and government offices generally are open between 8 a.m. and 2 p.m. Shops may set their own hours. During the hot summer months, many close between 2 and 5 p.m. In the past, most Greeks worked from 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and from 5 to 8 p.m., Monday through Friday; however, this practice has nearly disappeared. These days, employees of corporations and large department stores commonly work from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

SOCIETY

Government. Greece is a presidential parliamentary republic. The president (currently Constantinos Stephanopoulos) is head of state; his role is largely ceremonial. The prime minister (currently Costas Karamanlis) is head of government. The president appoints the prime minister, but he or she must select

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the person who is chosen by the party with the most seats in Parliament.

Greece's unicameral Chamber of Deputies (*Vouli ton Ellinon*) has three hundred members. Informally, the body is called simply *Vouli*. Elections are held at least every four years. All citizens are eligible and required to vote at age 18. The two main political parties include PASOK and the New Democracy. Smaller parties have legislative representation and sometimes can have a significant impact on political events.

The Special Supreme Tribunal is the highest court and adjudicates issues of constitutionality. All judges are appointed by the president for life terms.

Economy. Greece has traditionally been an agrarian nation. However, government services have grown significantly and now account for about half of Greece's gross domestic product. Agriculture currently employs around 20 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, fuels, 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. Greece's currency is the euro, which replaced the *drachma* in 2002.

Strict monetary policy has lowered inflation, reduced large budget deficits, and accelerated economic growth. The government faces strong opposition to further austerity measures. Tax evasion is widespread, and unemployment is high, averaging about 10 percent.

Transportation and Communications. Principal highways connect Athens with Thessaloniki 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. The government began building the Athens Metro subway in 1992. Construction on the metro may continue until the end of the decade. 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 more than one hundred daily newspapers in Greece and at least thirty are published in Athens. The government used to own and administer the telephone, radio, and television systems, but these have largely been privatized.

Education. Education is free and mandatory. It emphasizes moral, intellectual, vocational, and physical instruction. Generally, the curriculum is the same for both public and private schools. Although some kids start kindergarten earlier at age five, all children begin elementary school at age six. Students are required to complete six years of elementary school and three years of *gymnasio*. *Lyceums* are alternately available in three- or four-year courses that generally prepare a student for higher education. Universities, technical colleges, and schools of higher education are free to those who achieve enrollment through entrance exams.

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	24 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women	24 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$17,740
Adult literacy rate	99 percent (male); 96 (female)
Infant mortality rate	6 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	76 (male); 81 (female)

Health. All workers are required to have health insurance from either state-supported health-care systems, such as the Institute of Social Insurance (IKA), or through other agents. While the IKA 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 not allowed to have private patients. A few private clinics do exist, but their services are not covered by state insurance. Many people feel they would obtain better care through a private system. 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

Events and Trends.

- In March 2004, the conservative New Democracy party led by Costas Karamanlis won general elections in Greece, ending more than a decade of PASOK government. This change took place after Costas Simitis, the former prime minister, announced that after three consecutive terms in office, he would not seek reelection.
- Ever since it was picked in 1997 to host the 2004 Summer Olympic Games, the Greek government and police had been working to prepare Athens for the event. The pace sped up after 2001, when the International Olympic Committee warned the country that it had to expedite preparations, including security, if it was going to meet deadlines for 2004.
- Security seemed unsure in June 2000 when a British military attaché was assassinated by the November 17 terrorist organization. However, in December 2003, the leader and main hit man of the group were convicted and jailed for life. Officials hope the convictions will help the country seem safer.
- The Greek government is lobbying Britain for the return of carvings that once adorned the Parthenon. Greece claims that the fifth-century carvings, called the Parthenon Marbles in Greece and the Elgin Marbles in Britain, were wrongfully taken by a British ambassador more than two centuries ago. Authorities have so far refused requests, but the Greek government is building a museum at the foot of the Acropolis in Athens to house the artifacts.

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