

# Greece

Greece is a unitary parliamentary republic on the edge of the Balkan Peninsula, often regarded as the birthplace of democracy in Europe and a catalyst to western civilisation. The country has seen steady economic, social and legal changes in recent years with leftist government attempts towards towards secularisation of the country. However, Greek Orthodox privilege still exists is still prevalent across the country and religion is still firmly woven into the fabric of major institutions. Financial crisis and the rise of far-right politics have been significant factors in the past several years.

Constitution and government	Education and children’s rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
<u>There is systematic religious privilege</u> <u>State-funding of religious institutions or salaries, or discriminatory tax exemptions</u>			
	<u>State-funded schools offer religious or ideological instruction with no secular or humanist alternative, but it is optional</u>	<u>Localised or infrequent but recurring and widespread social marginalisation or prejudice against the non-religious</u>	<u>Some concerns about political or media freedoms, not specific to the non-religious</u>

Legend

## Constitution and government

The constitution, other laws and policies protect freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Freedom of speech and press are protected under Article 14, ‘every person may express and propagate his thoughts orally, in writing and through the press in compliance with the laws of the State’. However the “blasphemy” law was abolished only in 2019. Article 3 of the constitution states that ‘the prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ’, recent governments have proposed for this Article to be amended to one emphasising ‘religious neutrality’ <[hri.org/docs/syntagma/artcl25.html#A3](http://hri.org/docs/syntagma/artcl25.html#A3)>

### Orthodox Privilege

The government financially supports the Orthodox Church; for example, the government pays for the salaries and religious training of clergy, finances the maintenance of Orthodox Church buildings, and exempts from tax Orthodox Church’s revenues from properties it owns. However, the recent government has seen changes towards the relationship of state and religion, towards disestablishment.

Whilst state sponsorship of the Greek Orthodox religion is still entrenched, recent leftist governments have taken steps toward disestablishment of the Orthodox church.

The former government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras proposed changes to significantly reduce the role of the Orthodox Church in the public sector. The government announced to 'free up' 10,000 civil service roles occupied by the clerics of the church, however they would continue to pay the salary of clerics with a subsidy of €200 million annually. The government also proposed to introduce 'religious neutrality' in to the constitution. A government spokesperson informed that religious neutrality would not regard religions with greater value than others, thus attempting to remove any kind of 'privilege' from religions in the state. These changes and proposals were highly criticised by the religious conservatives who scrutinised the government for their lack of faith.

<[secularism.org.uk/news/2018/11/greece-takes-major-step-towards-disestablishment-of-orthodox-church](http://secularism.org.uk/news/2018/11/greece-takes-major-step-towards-disestablishment-of-orthodox-church)>

<[religionnews.com/2019/01/18/greeks-bridle-at-historic-deal-to-split-orthodox-church-from-state/](http://religionnews.com/2019/01/18/greeks-bridle-at-historic-deal-to-split-orthodox-church-from-state/)>

## **Education and children's rights**

Orthodox religious instruction in primary and secondary schools, at government expense, remains mandatory for all students during their 12 years of compulsory education. Although non-Orthodox students may exempt themselves, in practice public schools offer no alternative activity or non-Orthodox religious instruction for these children.

Until 2019, references to the student's religious affiliation and citizenship were stated on school leaving certificates. As per decisions of the Data Protection Authority and the Supreme Administrative Court, this requirement has been removed. In addition there is no longer a mandatory reference to the non-Orthodox religion of child students who seek exemption from religious education, as they can now invoke reasons of conscience.

## **Family, Community and Society**

Religion was and still is often assumed in Greek society with polls supporting the prevalence of the Eastern Orthodox religion. A 2005 poll revealed that 96.6% of the census were Orthodox Christian and only 2% identified as atheist. However, a more recent poll (2015) showed that this had changed significantly to 81.4% Orthodox Christians and 14.7% non-religious.

Greek atheists report that their previous affiliation with religious identity was forced onto them by family rather than existing from their own genuine beliefs. Despite a rise in non-religion, the Orthodox faith is still embedded in many activities and traditions of local communities. Some atheists claim that they still participate in communions, attend church and partake in other religious activities for the social benefits of bonding with family and friends rather than their beliefs in the religion.

<[nsrn.net/2017/01/16/research-atheism-in-greek-society-breaking-the-chain-of-religious-memory-and-the-emergence-of-atheist-identity/1/](http://nsrn.net/2017/01/16/research-atheism-in-greek-society-breaking-the-chain-of-religious-memory-and-the-emergence-of-atheist-identity/1/)>

<[religiongoingpublic.com/archive/2017/moving-from-traditional-religion-to-atheism-in-greek-society-like-a-ship-distancing-from-the-coast](http://religiongoingpublic.com/archive/2017/moving-from-traditional-religion-to-atheism-in-greek-society-like-a-ship-distancing-from-the-coast)>

There remain mandatory entries on birth certificates for the religion of the parents and the presumed religion of the child.

## **Freedom of expression, advocacy of humanist values**

Greece is a free country with an open and vigorous parliamentary democracy, according to Freedom House, however "Ongoing concerns include corruption, discrimination against immigrants and minorities, and poor conditions for undocumented migrants and refugees."

<[freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/greece](https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/greece)>

The rise of the far-right in recent years is cause for concern and has resulted in harassment and acts of violence or hatred.

In October 2019 humanists protested the harassment through parliamentary procedures of Panayote Dimitras, a human rights activist associated with Greek Helsinki Monitor and Humanist Union of Greece, by the president of a far-right nationalist party.

<[humanists.international/2019/10/nationalist-party-president-harassing-humanist-activist-in-greece/](https://humanists.international/2019/10/nationalist-party-president-harassing-humanist-activist-in-greece/)>

## **Blasphemy law abolished in 2019**

After a number of high-profile blasphemy cases and international criticism, the “blasphemy” law was abolished in 2019.

Article 198 of the Greek Penal Code stated that “1. One who publicly and maliciously and by any means blasphemes God shall be punished by imprisonment for not more than two years; 2. Anyone, except as described in par.1, who displays publicly with blasphemy a lack of respect for things divine, is punished with up to 3 months in prison.”

Article 199 declared similar provisions against anyone who “blasphemes the Greek Orthodox Church or any other religion tolerable in Greece”, imprisonable for up to two years.

The ‘blasphemy’ law had been actively used to persecute individuals and groups for portraying, mocking or insulting the Orthodox religion in the form of art or on social media outlets (see “Highlighted cases”, below).

Human rights groups including the Humanist Union of Greece campaigned for the abolition of the ‘blasphemy’ law and it was removed from the constitution on 1 July 2019 as part of a package of measures to clean up the criminal code.

<[end-blasphemy-laws.org/2019/06/greece-quietly-drops-blasphemy-laws-new-criminal-code/](https://end-blasphemy-laws.org/2019/06/greece-quietly-drops-blasphemy-laws-new-criminal-code/)>

## **Highlighted cases**

9 June 2012, three actors in the play “**Corpus Christi**” were arrested on the charge of blasphemy following a lawsuit filed by Greek Orthodox Bishop Seraphim of Piraeus. Then, in November, the Athens public prosecutor charged the organizers, producers and cast of the play with blasphemy. If convicted, they could face several months in prison. According to newspaper reports, Bishop Seraphim was accompanied to court by members of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party.

<[csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2012/1002/Blasphemy-in-democracy-s-birthplace-Greece-arrests-Facebook-user](https://csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2012/1002/Blasphemy-in-democracy-s-birthplace-Greece-arrests-Facebook-user)>

In late September, 2012, a man was arrested in Evia, Greece, on charges of posting “malicious blasphemy and religious insult on the known social networking site, Facebook”. The accused, 27-year-old **Phillipos Loizos**, had created a Facebook page for “Elder Pastitsios the Pastafarian”, playing on a combination of Elder Paisios, the late Greek-Orthodox monk revered as a prophet by some, and the Greek food pastitsio, a baked pasta dish made of ground beef and béchamel sauce. “Pastafarian” refers to the spoof religion of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, itself an intentional pun on aspects of Creationism. A manipulated image on the Facebook page depicted Elder Pastitsios with a pastitsio where the monk’s face would normally appear. Despite efforts from anti-blasphemy campaigners to abolish the law, Loizos faced the appeals court in 2017 and his

sentence was only repealed due to being treated as a long-standing crime of misdemeanour.

<[greece.greekreporter.com/2012/11/16/greece-prosecutes-corpus-christi-for-blasphemy/](http://greece.greekreporter.com/2012/11/16/greece-prosecutes-corpus-christi-for-blasphemy/)>

<[end-blasphemy-laws.org/countries/europe/greece/](http://end-blasphemy-laws.org/countries/europe/greece/)>

On March 14th, 2013, Greek artist **Dionysis Kavalieratos** was tried in court on blasphemy charges for three of his Christian-themed cartoons that were displayed in a private Athens art gallery. The gallery owner was a co-defendant. He was acquitted

<[onthewaytoithaca.wordpress.com/2013/04/19/greek-artist-acquitted-of-blasphemy-charges/](http://onthewaytoithaca.wordpress.com/2013/04/19/greek-artist-acquitted-of-blasphemy-charges/)>