

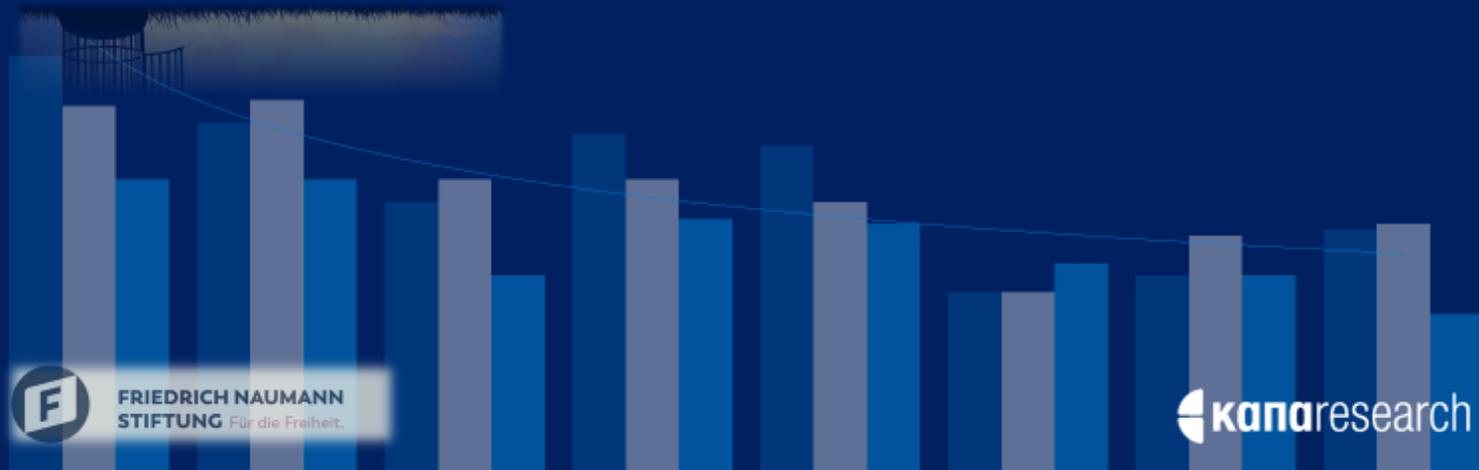


PERCEPTIONS & ATTITUDES IN GREECE

Liberalism in Greece today

Do we live in a liberal country?

October 2020 / Nationwide public opinion survey



Main findings

SECTION 1: Politics in Greece: Emotions – trust – values

In Greece, "politics" is a living process of controlling the public sphere and socializing at the same time. Politics is in every home and every gathering, informal or institutional, as more than 7 in 10 respondents (73%) state that they follow political developments very and quite often. Interest in politics - more evident among men than women - increases with age, as well as with the income of the respondent.

It is, therefore, important to notice the repulsion a citizen feels for the "political system" - with negative emotions such as anger/rage (29%), dissatisfaction/sadness (31%), insecurity/uncertainty (34%) dominating the positive ones such as satisfaction (12%), hope/optimism (10%), security/confidence (6%). In particular, more significant is the aversion felt by the more educated citizen, one who has a

worldview less influenced by religion, one who votes for SYRIZA or who supports a smaller party. Similarly, the public's distrust in the ability of politics to provide solutions to the country's problems is considerably high (57%), as well as the belief that politics cannot address the problems of the household (69%). One possible interpretation is that citizens attribute to the political system the characteristics of individuals and not institutions, while placing its scope in the dimension of their microcosm (household, family). Distrust over the managerial capabilities of the political system in Greece is higher among women and among the most 'productive' age group of 35-54.

Despite the successive crises it has gone through and continues to go through (e.g., economy, politics, refugee crisis, Covid-19 pandemic), the Greek society seems to have moved away from the "age of the extremes": the view that democracy is the best system of governance, despite its imperfections, is universal (91%), while it is also worth noting that trust in institutions has partly recovered from the heavy blow it suffered during the difficult decade of the Greek economic

crisis. Moreover, accelerating the digitalization of the state during the COVID-19 crisis, as well as the outcome of the Golden Dawn trial, offered a boost of trust in the education system (45%), the public services (27%), but also in the justice system (42%), three institutions that are seeing an increase of 10 percentage points since October 2019. In contrast, institutions that signaled Greece's transition to democracy since 1974 – i.e., political parties (19%), trade unions (14%), media (13%), and NGOs (12%) – continue to lay at the bottom of the public trust scale. More generally, the middle class trusts the institutions of the Greek State more than the rural, working, and lower-middle classes, perhaps because, historically, the rise and fall of the middle class in Greece is closely linked to the functioning of the state's institutions.

Economic growth (38%) and territorial integrity (32%) are considered high-priority national goals; while the vehicle for achieving these goals is justice (68%), meritocracy (68%), growth (62%) and productivity (49%), political, social and economic values that citizens would like to see dominating the Greek society in the coming years, as an antidote to a personalized political system that – in its current form – reaches its limits.

SECTION 2. Foreign Policy: Major issues

Geographically and historically, Greece is a border area between West and East. This dual character of the country is reflected both in its tradition and culture as well as in its official foreign policy and the views associated with it.

Today's Greece seems to be swinging between Europeanization, on the one hand, and the Eastern/Balkan crises, on the other: acceptance of the European integration plan reaches 69%, while the belief that the country will have a better future within the European Union is expressed by 75% of respondents. In favor of the EU, but also in favor of globalization – for which there has long been public distrust in surveys conducted by Kapa Research – are those with higher education (EU 83% - globalization 51%), those who are less religious (EU 73% - globalization 42%), and those placing themselves in the upper socioeconomic

class. This is the same population group that fueled the new "great migration wave" of the 2010s, the "children of globalization" who left Greece when the economic crisis broke out in look for better living conditions.

While Greece's position in the EU is considered indisputable, the country's position in the East is faced with fear: Greek-Turkish relations and the issue of exploitation of natural resources in the Aegean (94%), but also the refugee-immigration issue (72%) are the most important ones the country has to manage in terms of foreign policy. Meanwhile, ensuring peace in the Southeastern Mediterranean region goes through the enforcement of active diplomacy according to 73% of respondents and less through military power (24%). On the issue of exploitation of natural resources in the Aegean and the Southeastern Mediterranean, public opinion appears divided as 47% believe that Greece should reach a peaceful compromise with Turkey through targeted diplomatic moves and 50% believe that the country should not relinquish its firm positions at all, even if this leads to war. Support for the diplomatic path is found mainly among women (78%) and the older population, especially those who have memories of and experience from previous war/critical events (81% in the age group of 65+).

The fact that public opinion is in favor of increasing military service from 9 to 12 months (59%) and in favor of enlistment at the age of 18 (54%) should be perceived as a manifestation of insecurity, especially by residents of the Aegean and Crete (64% in favor of increasing the term and 60% in favor of enlistment at 18), who are more exposed to the crises in the Aegean. The most religious are also in favor of the increase in military service associating "Greekness" with Christian Orthodoxy (79% in favor of the increase in service and 71% in favor of conscription at 18), but also the conservative voters of ND (82% in favor of increase of term and 74% in favor of conscription at 18). On the contrary, SYRIZA voters disagree with both the increase of the military service (67%) and the enlistment at 18 (63%).

Finally, the Prespa Agreement, which settled the lasting issue of naming North Macedonia – a

contemporary expression of the various Balkan issues – seems to have multiple recipients with different views: 25% believe it was a good deal for both countries, 33% believe that it was a product of a necessary compromise, while 40% believe that it was a bad agreement and should not have been signed by Greece. However, since its first presentation to the public in 2018, the agreement is today accepted by a larger segment of the Greek population.

SECTION 3. Human rights and the State

46 years of uninterrupted democratic life since the 1974, 35 years of smooth transition in government by two major ruling parties that established liberalism in the economy (ND) and in society (PASOK) acted as a counterweight to the difficult decade 2010-2020 that shook the economic and political foundations of the country. Today, the Greek society is unquestionably a politically democratic and liberal society: it is clearly in favor of individual freedoms, justice, and democracy (68% versus the triptych security-strong leadership-stability 31%).

Similarly, the image of the "ideal state" is more related to a state of welfare than to state of order, since, for the majority of respondents (62%), the priority of the state should be to ensure the rights and freedoms of the citizen, while maintaining law and order is considered a priority only for the lesser part (37%). Government and opposition supporters unfold their ideological differences in this field in a clear way: for ND voters, the priority of the state should be first to maintain law and order (60%) and then to ensure rights and freedoms of the citizen (39%), while, on the contrary, for the voters of SYRIZA the priority is mainly to ensure the rights and freedoms of the citizen (89%) followed by maintaining law and order only (11%).

Ensuring human rights is considered a protected right in Greece: no government can restrict human rights even in a time of crisis (64%). However, there seems to be a tolerance of public opinion with regard to the ongoing pandemic crisis – for which restrictions are tolerated by 57% of citizens – as well as in a possible national security crisis in which the restriction of rights would be

accepted by 51% of citizens. The politically liberal perception of human rights also includes attitudes towards the issue of abortion (over 70%) – an issue that has long been associated with the perception of the position of women in Western societies – the legalization of cannabis (47% in favor), the death penalty (71% against), and, also, the occupation of public buildings/spaces (64% against), a neo-Greek practice of social claiming in favor of specific social and political groups.

Compliance with state laws is at times a difficult equation for some population groups (e.g., opponents of masks against Covid-19 or deniers of the benefits of child vaccination etc.). Despite the general impression regarding the number and influence of these groups, 92% of citizens are in favor of vaccinating children, 89% are in favor of using a mask against the coronavirus, and 60% stand in favor of vaccination against the coronavirus (when it becomes available). Greek society declares itself "lawful", 71% obey the laws of the state, even if they sometimes disagree with their spirit. In this context, the police is an institution that enjoys trust, with 57% of respondents positively evaluating its operation as an institution that enforces the law and not as an abuser of "legal violence" (most police officers in Greece *move within the limits support the law and do not use excessive violence* the majority of respondents (62%) believes, while there are far fewer (34%) of those who believe that *most police officers in Greece often exceed the limits of the law and use excessive violence*). The way the police operates is also an issue that divides people into groups with clear views based on their party affiliation (ND/SYRIZA) and their relationship with religion.

SECTION 4. The State and the Market

Greece is a country that has integrated in its institutions and has consolidated in the perceptions of its citizens the operation of the free market and the democratic regime. For 54% of respondents, *a financial system based more on the free market is better than a system based more on central government planning*, something that is supported by the 40%. The distinction between free market and state intervention in the economy brings to the surface the classic division of classes where the middle and upper classes

are clearly in favor of the free market (69% and 68% respectively), while the rural and working classes are in favor of state intervention (48% and 64% respectively). The lower-middle class is divided between state intervention (45%) and the free market (48%).

The different perceptions about the operation of the economy go together with the distinction between ND and SYRIZA voters. However, the overall picture of the state projected by the survey is that of the regulatory state which leaves room for the market functions but, at the same time, regulates the economy by preventing social inequalities and marginalization: market regulation by the state is necessary to safeguard the public interest (65%); the state must control the prices of basic goods (e.g., bread, milk, meat, etc.) according to 71% of respondents; while 78% stand in favor of the guaranteed minimum income. In conclusion, the development of the country is more associated with centrist or social democratic views and ideologies, which a) leave room for business – entrepreneurship is an institution that has accumulated high levels of public trust over the last decade: private companies have offered jobs to the Greek family and have greatly contributed to the progress of the country state 7 out of 10 respondents – and b) affect attitudes towards the financial system, as, according to the 63%, *banks in Greece do not help as much as they should in market liquidity and growth*.

No matter how popular the free-market views/theories are in Greek society, they are not enough to eliminate beliefs-remnants of an older culture rooted especially in lower-income groups: *individual progress takes place more through connections and less through hard work*, according to 63% of public opinion.

SECTION 5. The role of religion: Stance against different doctrines

Greek society could be described as secular: faith largely determines the worldview of a significant portion of the population (42%) – a percentage that increases even more among the elderly, the less educated and the conservative – but the country's central political direction *must be completely independent of any religion* is what the overwhelming majority (62%) supports.

The refugee crisis has undoubtedly bewildered society. Respondents stand skeptical against the Muslim community in Greece: 30% argue that they would not like a mosque to be built in their neighborhood, while an extra 30% believe building a mosque should be forbidden by law. However, on an interpersonal level, closeness to individuals/families of Muslim denomination is treated as normal: when questioned *how would they feel if a Muslim family moved to the house/apartment next door?* 62% of the people respond *same as with any other neighbor*, while 6 out of 10 say they *would not have a problem if someone from their family embraced another religion or doctrine* (although most would not encourage it).

SECTION 6. Gender: Perceptions on women and homosexuality

The position of women in Greek society has improved drastically compared to previous decades: 93% of respondents consider it acceptable for *women to earn more money than their husbands*, a perception that was reinforced by the financial crisis of the last decade when many Greek women – the majority of them employees – were required to provide for the whole household on their own, especially in families that included self-employed men, families in which incomes shrank dramatically. Women, however, *continue to face significant obstacles that hinder their progress in Greece* (49%), a view more strongly held by residents of the Attica region (53%), those with higher education (58%), private sector employees (52%), the unemployed (64%), as well as by SYRIZA voters (66%). This sociological approach around the position of women in Greece can also be seen as an anatomy of the local society of Attica, where half of the country's population lives. The opposing view, according to which *most of the obstacles that once made it difficult for women to progress in Greece have now disappeared*, is mainly held by men (63%) and the elderly.

The Greek society also shows broad acceptance of another minority, homosexuals: *homosexuality must be accepted by society*, according to 71% of respondents, and homosexuals should have *equal rights with other citizens*, according to

almost all respondents (90%). On the other hand, while *same-sex marriage* is accepted by 56% of respondents, the *adoption of children by same-sex couples* is met with disagreement from almost the same percentage (57%).

Finally, being close to a homosexual person is treated as a normal incidence: *how would you feel if a gay man or woman moved into the house/apartment next door? The same as with any of my neighbors* is the stance of 82% of respondents, while if someone in their family had a homosexual relationship, 65% would not have a problem with it.

SECTION 7. Immigration: Discrimination

In the last 30 years, the Greek society has been transformed from one exclusively “exporting” migrants to one that is mainly receiving immigrants. The conditions for coexistence have changed, the familiarity with the dissimilar has also changed, as has the degree of tolerance towards immigrants who came from Eastern Europe in the 1990’s. Despite the strong public resistance of the past (e.g., against letting students of Albanian descent bear the Greek national flag during national holiday school ceremonies/marches), today 81% of respondents believe that *immigrants from the former Eastern countries* (Albania included) *are strengthening the country by doing jobs that most Greeks refuse to do*. The same degree of familiarity, however, does not apply to the immigrants of the 2010’s, for which 66% of respondents consider that *they aggravate the situation in the country*. Religious doctrine is another factor of attraction/repulsion between natives and immigrants: 57% would feel the same as with any neighbor *if a Muslim family of refugees or immigrants moved to a neighboring house/apartment*, but this attitude is significantly more prevalent (85%) if the hypothetical new neighbors were *a Christian family of refugees or immigrants*.

SECTION 8. Mass Media: Freedom of the press & fake news

Freedom of the press and credibility of the news are considered the cornerstones of democracy,

precisely because a democratic process cannot exist without informed citizens. Greeks choose to get informed primarily from new media, i.e., news websites and blogs (43%), and secondarily from traditional media such as television (21%), a medium that seems to be preferred mostly by women, but also from voters of the older New Democracy-PASOK (now KINAL) two-party dichotomy which are mostly senior citizens.

Sensitive to press freedom, nonetheless, the majority of respondents is in favor of banning the publication of opinions that are *generally regarded as wrong or inappropriate* (52%), such as *incitement to violence* (according to 66% of those in favor of banning opinions), *racist/xenophobic views* (46%) and *anti-democratic views* (46%), that is, the triptych of *hate speech* that prevailed in the country during the Golden Dawn heyday.

As far as the credibility of the news is concerned, more than 8 out of 10 citizens (88%) are concerned about the fake news phenomenon and have reservations about the mass media, an institution that, as has been documented over the last years, does not enjoy the trust of citizens: 67% of respondents consider news broadcasted by the Greek media to be *partially or completely fake*, while the habit of checking the validity of a news item from alternative sources is almost universal (94%). The Center-Left seems to be more familiar with checking the validity of information than the Center-Right. In Greece, the media are seen as being largely controlled by the government, a “tradition” that was valid both in the past and today (*traditionally in Greece, each government influences the media to about the same extent*, according to 50% of respondents, while 44% claim that *in recent years the media are influenced by the respective government to a greater extent*).

SECTION 9. Data privacy: Concerns and responsibilities

At a percentage of as high as 76%, Greek citizens are sensitive to the use of their personal data and are concerned about the existence of entities – *public or private* – that exploit their private information and data *without their consent*. The exploitation of personal data without consent of

the citizen is perceived to occur more for commercial purposes, i.e., by mobile network providers (91%), internet search engines (88%), social networks (86%) and e-shops (77%), and less for citizen monitoring purposes by government agencies (60%) or the government directly (50%).

SECTION 10. Liberalism: Popularity – threats – representatives

The general appeal of liberalism in Greek society reaches 53%. This practically means that more than half of the Greeks associate the concept of liberalism with a positive content and classify it among other popular ideologies of organization of the economy and society, such as the center (72%), socialism (59%), the center left (56%) and social democracy (56%). Moreover, the combination of liberalism (29%), social democracy (26%) and, to a lesser extent, socialism (20%) is considered to be able to guarantee the faster and fairer growth path for the country. Again, here, Greeks reveal their tendency to promote the value of a regulatory state and its significance in the country's economy.

Liberalism in Greece has also an institutional dimension, either through the European and international organizations in which the country participates – EU, IMF, NATO are considered liberal-oriented organizations – or through the Greek political parties and especially ND and KINAL, two parties that show remarkable convergence of views on issues of growth and international relations. However, in the political/electoral geography of the country, there seems to be a gap, which could be filled by a new, independent political formation that better represents the area of the liberal center, supported by 48% of respondents in general, and more specifically, younger age groups (17-44 years), women, middle/upper class, higher incomes, and also by the 61% of those who are not represented by any of the existing parties and voted invalid/white or abstained from the last parliamentary elections.

The positive attitude of Greek society towards liberalism, however, should not lead to complacency: western liberalism is threatened by the *refugee crisis*, according to the 44%, a crisis that forces the coexistence of numerous and disparate groups with little or no resources and prospects; it is threatened by *poverty* (41%), which, according to 38% of respondents, is exacerbated by the latest economic developments (mainly due to the pandemic); and also by *the emergence of leaders with authoritarian and demagogic characteristics* (38%). In the eyes of the islanders of the Aegean and Crete, the refugee issue is considered an even greater threat to liberal ideas (48%), as well as to the inhabitants of Northern Greece (46%), populations that are more exposed to the inflow of immigrants.