

Greece

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Introduction

Greece became a democratic country at the end of 1926, after a series of wars and violent changes of power (Clogg, 1992). Even though the so-called Royal Democracy was abolished in 1924 and the republic that lasted until 1926 was established, this republic was ruled by a military officer who occupied the presidency—Lieutenant General Theodoros Pangalos (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010). Pangalos was the last military officer to be overthrown by force in the 1920s, after which the country's first democratic elections were held, using a proportional representation system.

Although the first elections that followed the overthrow of Pangalos were considered a critical juncture that marked the beginning of Greek interwar democracy, the first democratic constitution was adopted only a few months later, in June 1927. The constitution defined Greece as a parliamentary republic with bicameral legislature and removed any reference to the pre-existing monarchy (Black, 1948). This is considered as the beginning of the Second Hellenic Republic that would cease to exist in 1935. A reactionary, pro-royalist government under Panagis Tsaldaris, democratically elected in 1935, abolished the Senate and called elections for a Constituent Assembly. After these events, the royalist constitution of 1912 was reinstated and the Greek democratic episode between the two world wars ended (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010).

The political landscape throughout the interwar period was divided into two hostile camps whose battle shaped interwar Greece until the Italian invasion in 1940: republican Venizelists and royalist anti-Venizelists (Berg-Schlosser and Mitchell, 2016). The former was a liberal bourgeoisie that succeeded in breaking the 80-year monopoly of the aristocratic forces in the early 20th century and in introducing comprehensive reforms in the country. (Hatzivassiliou, 2010). The liberals won most of the elections in the first half of the century, but the process of taking and retaining power was anything but peaceful. For instance, the Venizelists reform process was interrupted by a civil war between the two blocks in 1916-1917. The balance of power between them was redefined again after Greece's defeat in Asia Minor in 1922 and the expulsion of 1.2 Million Greek refugees from Turkey to Greece (Berg-Schlosser and Mitchell, 2016). Thus, the struggle for control

of the army and the state apparatus was characterized by constant unrest and violence until, in 1926, it took on democratic characteristics and developed into a relatively peaceful political competition between the parties representing the two sides of the conflict: Venizelos' Liberal Party and the People's Party.

Elections

The democratic transition brought an electoral law that introduced a three-level system for the allocation of seats: constituency level coincided with administrative division of the country, remaining seats were then allocated on the basis of 9 larger regions the country was divided into, and the third level was the country as a whole (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010). The drop quota—or the Hagenbach-Bischoff system—was used for calculating votes. Finally, for the first time since 1864, voting balls were replaced by voting by ballot paper (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010).

The majority voting system with relative majority and rules for the representation of small minorities was reintroduced in 1928 and applied in the elections in the same year. However, the 1932 electoral law reintroduced the 1926 proportional system, which remained in force until the end of the country's democratic period in 1935 (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010). In total, five democratic elections took place during the interwar period: 1926, 1928, 1932, 1933 and 1935. Below is a brief description of the context of each of these elections.

7 November 1926

In the 1926 elections 962,304 of 1,567,378 registered voters cast their votes, representing a voter turnout of 61.4%. The Liberal Union was the strongest political force with 31.6%, followed by the Popular Party and Free Minders Party with 20.3% and 15.8% respectively (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010). This parliamentary structure required a willingness to reach consensus in order to form a governing coalition. Consequently, a pro-Venizelists national unity government (with moderate conservatives) was formed consisting of all

major parties in the parliament (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010). The government was headed by independent Alexandros Zaimis, whose appointment was the result of a consensus. The government and the prime minister stayed in power until July 1928, replaced by the coalition of Venizelists parties and Eleftherios Venizelos as the new prime minister, a month and a half before the new elections took place.

19 August 1928

The liberals came up first again in 1928. The Venizelists block was again stronger and more united than the anti-Venizelists who were divided into People's Party and the Free-thinkers' Party. Attempts to form a broader anti-Venizelists front failed and the liberals stayed in power until the next elections (Dafnis, 1955). Interestingly, the Communists participated in the 1928 elections under the name "United Front," but ultimately failed to secure a seat in parliament.

25 September 1932

In the 1932 elections, 1,175,983 people exercised their right to vote. The anti-Venizelist and pro-royalist People's Party finally won, beating the Liberals in terms of the popular vote, albeit by a very small margin: 33.8% against 33.4% (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010). Nevertheless, the liberals still secured more seats, 98, compared to 95 of the People's party. The election results showed a very divided political landscape. Given the increased tensions, it was very difficult to form a coalition. Eventually, the anti-Venizelists managed to form a short-lived coalition led by the People's Party prime minister Panagis Tsaldaris. The coalition lasted a bit more than two months when Venizelos-led coalition took over and governed the country until the next election that were held in march 1933 (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010).

5 March 1933

In the 1933 elections, the anti-Venizelists gained even more electoral strength and their lead over the Liberals increased. In other words, the People's Party won 38.1% and 118

seats out of the total 248, while the Liberal party won 33.3% and now secured only 80 seats (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010). This marked the end of the dominance of the Liberal Party and the coalitions led by Eleftherios Venizelos.

The shock of the electoral defeat and the fear of restoration of monarchy triggered a coup attempt by a number of Venizelist officers. The coup attempt was foiled by a four-day provisional emergency government led by General Othonaios. Immediately after the emergency government had achieved its goal of stopping the coup attempt, power was returned to the civil authorities (Lampe, 2020). More precisely, on March 10, 1933, a cabinet led by the People's Party took power under the tenure of Panagis Tsaldaris as Prime Minister. The former prime minister Eleftherios Venizelos was forced to leave the country.

9 June 1935

The shifting political landscape was confirmed by the results of the 1935 elections. The alliance of the anti-Venizelist People's Party and the National Radical Party won a landslide victory with 65% of votes, securing 287 of 300 in parliament (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010). To this results contributed the fact that all Venizelist parties boycotted elections following arrests of a couple of pro-Venizelist generals after the coup attempt.

The anti-Venizelist alliance used this opportunity to call a referendum on the reinstatement of the monarchy. The referendum was held on November 3, 1935, with over 97% of people voted in favor, although serious doubts were raised about the freedom and fairness of the referendum. (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010; Miller, 1936). With the entry into force of the results of the referendum, the Greek interwar democracy officially came to an end.

Parties

Liberal Party

Liberal Party (Casal Bértoa and Enyedi, 2022), also known as *Liberals* (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010) was a Venizelist party and one of the strongest political forces during the country's interwar democratic period. The party often held cabinet positions during the aforementioned time and gave the prime minister. It often participated in the elections under the somewhat broader coalition, called the *Liberal Union* (Hering, 1992). More precisely, Liberal union was a list that simply added a number of smaller liberal Venizelist parties.

During its interwar existence, the party split several times, such as in 1924 the *Conservative Democrats* and the *Progressive Liberals*. The splits were mainly driven by disagreements over the relationship between the government and the military and the over administrative division of the state (Hering, 1992).

People's Party

This was the second largest party during the interwar period, and the representative of the opposite block, i.e., the anti-Venizelist and royalist forces. It was also known as *Populists*, *Popular Party* and *Populist Party* (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010; Hering, 1992; Casal Bértoa and Enyedi, 2022). Its founder was Dimitrios Gounaris. The party's leader during the democratic period between the two world wars was Panagis Tsaldaris, who became prime minister in 1933, two years before the anti-Venizelists helped George II return to the throne and restore the monarchy. The party's splinters were Independent Royal Supporters and Liaison of Popular-free Believers.

Freethinkers' Party

This party was also known as *Free Minders Party*, *Free Opinion Party* (Hering, 1992; Casal Bértoa and Enyedi, 2022; Nohlen and Stöver, 2010). In 1935 elections, this party created a somewhat broader coalition and ran under the name Royal Supporters Union.

In other words, the leaders of two smaller movements, Ioannis Rallis and Georgios Stratos (two controversial prominent far-right Greek politicians), as well as several independent royalists and former members of the People's Party, joined the Freethinkers Party. To reflect the broader coalition, the alliance took the name Royal Supporters Union (Mavrogordatos, 1983).

Hellenic Agrarian Party

The *Hellenic Agrarian Party* was in the centre-left of the political spectrum. It was pro-agrarian. From mid-1930s on it became more and more socialist (McHale and Skowronski, 1983; Hering, 1992). After the failure of Greek democracy, the party collaborated with the communists and was therefore banned during the Greek Civil War (Panagiotopoulos, 2022; Ploumidis, 2012).

In the 1933 elections, a split into three factions occurred. The split was caused by the National Schism. The first faction, led by Ioannis Sofianopoulos, was more socialist and had an independent stance. This faction kept the name Hellenic Agrarian Party. The second was under Alexandros Mylonas and wanted collaboration with venizelists. It was named Agrarian Democratic Party. The third under Dimitrios Chatzigiannis, wanted collaboration with antivenizelism and named Group of Agrarians.

Communist Party

The formula of a "United Front of Workers, Peasants, and Refugees" served as the official electoral name of the *Communist Party* in 1926 and 1928. The "refugees" part of the label was later dropped, leaving a "United Front of Workers and Peasants" in 1929, 1932, and 1933. This was then replaced by a "Popular Front" in 1935-1936 (Mavrogordatos, 1983). The Communist Party was not a significant political force in interwar Greece.

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