

# Modern Implications of a 1970s Military Regime: The Case of Greece

## Introduction:

Polity IV is a score-based analysis by the Center for Systemic Peace that rates individual countries by regime type going back to the 1940s and changes based on political events (e.g. Coup d'états) ("Polity IV Individual" 2014). According to the latest report, Greece is considered a full democracy although the country has gone through several regime changes ("Polity IV Regime" 2014). From the end of World War II to 1967, Greece was considered a partial democracy by Polity IV ("Polity IV Regime" 2014), possibly due to the repression of left-wing political parties and their supporters within Greek politics and society (Diamandouros 59). In 1967, the Greek military took power in a coup d'état, joining Spain and Portugal as authoritarian states in Southern Europe (Prindham 6). The junta ruled for seven years and would only fall due to the dispute with Turkey over Cyprus and a subsequent military invasion that failed (4). Following the end of the military junta, Greece underwent a regime transition in which democratic institutions were introduced and the existing system significantly reformed to reduce tensions within Greece (Diamandouros 52-53). At the same time, Spain and Portugal were also shedding their autocratic regimes and moving towards democracy, which has led scholars to combine the three cases as a unique wave of democracy among several in the last fifty years (Prindham 1). This paper

will explore the Greek transition to democracy in the 1970s and test theories regarding the role of nationalism in helping or hurting democracy and to what extent it is still a problem for Greece to this day. I will exclude Greece from the cases of Portugal and Spain due to Greek nationalism and the role it has had in the Greek political system through disputes with Greece's neighbor Turkey. In addition, the relative timespan of Greece's authoritarian regime compared to its counterparts in the region will be examined as a key distinction between Greece and other Mediterranean military regimes.

## Existing Research and Literature

In existing scholarly literature regarding the Mediterranean autocratic regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and their transitions to democratic regimes in the 1970s, it has been noted that Greece, Spain and Portugal share many similarities among their (former) autocratic regimes, transition to democracy and aftermath of transitions (Prindham 7). Recent events regarding the Eurozone's economic problems and social unease have created an entirely new atmosphere in Greece; recent surges in nationalism and support for right-wing parties have been claimed to be secretly supported by the military as a carryover of the old junta (Dabilis 2014). The military in Greece continues to remain an important part of society and is tightly intertwined

with Greek nationalism, which is fed by the Cyprus and Aegean disputes with Turkey (Prindham 4, 14). The case of Greek democratization is unique to academia because of how the long-term “Shadow” of the former military regime continues in the form of nationalism through disputes with Turkey. Such information and analysis on the case of Greek democratization would be useful to understanding nationalistic right-wing regimes, which can help in resolving the territorial disputes or other grievances that cause nationalism and ultimately affect the regime within one or more of the states involved in the dispute(s).

#### **Historical Background and Analysis**

Prior to the rise of the Junta in 1967, several important events going back to World War II and throughout the Cold War have had both direct and indirect influence on the military regime’s rise and fall and subsequent democratization of the Greek state. The most significant was the Greek Civil War, in which tensions between the Greek Communist Party (Supported by the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc States) and the right (Which consisted of the monarchy and its supporters, liberals and loyal Republicans) erupted into a conflict for power that became part of the larger Cold War (Luard 38, 40). In the end, the right-wing groups triumphed but the struggle for power was not over (60). Several years after the war’s end in 1952, the Greek constitution was amended which placed restrictions on left- and liberal-center parties, which was meant to halt the threat of communism and keep Greece an anti-communist stronghold in Southern Europe (Diamandouros 59). Law 509/1948

supplemented the amendments, which further isolated those identifying with the left and propping up those on the right (59). From the end of the civil war in 1948 until 1967, the country remained stable until a group of military colonels led by George Papandreou staged a coup d’état, taking power and immediately persecuting those they believed were undermining the Greek state (Dabilis 2014). The seven years of military rule upset the Greek population, who tried to fight back against the regime (Dabilis 2014). In 1974 when Turkey invaded Cyprus, the Greek regime intervened to stop Turkey but failed, which was the final straw for the Greek public (Diamandouros 53-54). After massive protests, the military officers were forced to hand down power and surrender to the people (54-56). While the military regime was over, the process for rebuilding the Greek political system to prevent a similar regime from rising in the future had begun.

#### **The Greek Democratization Process**

Following the fall of the Greek Military Junta, the process of forming not only a new government but a whole new regime began, with its leader being Constantine Karamanlis, a former Greek politician who had been in exile from 1963 until the junta’s fall (Diamandouros 55). Karamanlis had fled due to political clashes with the earlier monarchy and the results of the 1963 elections (In which his party lost), which led to the Junta’s rise (55). Despite this background, he received broad political and popular support for his democratization plans, which would begin upon being voted as Prime Minister on November 17 (55-56).

Such widespread support for Karamanlis and his goal to democratize Greece was very significant in ensuring a successful transition as Greek nationalism supported the transition, which has been noted by scholars as being critical for a successful regime change to take place (Bunce 712-713). To give political power back to the people and restore civilian control of the military, Karamanlis vetted new military leaders, ensuring they were in support and would continue to support his regime (Diamandouros 60). Furthermore, Karmanlis roused up pro-democracy feelings among the population by publically condemning authoritarianism and the military's historic rule in Greek politics during major Greek holidays (60). In addition to regulating the military, perhaps one of the most important steps for Greece to transition to democracy was to determine who and how the head of state would be selected; in a popular referendum, the Greek people chose to bar the old monarchy from retaking power, and it was decided that the new Greek head of state would be elected by the Greek parliament, ensuring civilian control over their leaders (60).

The situation of political parties in Greece was the most notable problem facing Karamanlis, because polarization of Greek political parties had dominated the era following the civil war and had been the cause of the Junta's rise (Diamandouros 59-60). To decrease political tensions within the Greek political system, Karamanlis legalized all political parties across the spectrum, building a sense of unity among Greeks to further democratization through increased political plurality (60). When combined with

existing national solidarity formed by opposition to the Junta's rule, it ensured that tensions would be kept to a minimum, thus allowing democratization to succeed (60). To supplement the newly enlarged political society, new political parties were created to balance out the ideological spectrum. New Democracy was founded and initially headed by Karmanlis as a center-right and anti-communist party, but was also more centrist than the pre-junta National Radical Union (61). New Democracy was formed to be a "Mass Party" designed to appeal to the general public, which differed from older Greek parties which were heavily exclusive and focused on the upper-class (61-62). Meanwhile, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) emerged as another new political party within Greece in 1974, with its base being those who had previously been repressed by the junta and wanted change in the new Greece (63).

With these reforms in place, the most critical point for Karmanlis's democratization experiment occurred in 1981, when Greece held historic elections in which PASOK triumphed over New Democracy and voter turnout reached a near majority (Although it was a significant proportion for the Greek state) (64). While Karmanlis's party lost to the populist PASOK, it also showed that the Greek political system was well-balanced ideologically, inclusive of all political ideologies and yet subject to popular opinion and discourse (64). This sense of peaceful transition ensured democratic consolidation was a success and reduced the chance that one side would use violence to gain power in the future (64).

## **Greece and Similar Cases of Democratization**

The course and outcome of Greek democratization can be compared to various democratization theories, but questions and gaps remain. For example, when comparing the case of Greek democratization to Linz and Stepan's theories about how previous regime type influences democratization, Greece seems to be an Authoritarian regime, which is evident by the fact that the new regime directly stifled any and all competition, but mainly those of left-wing ideology (United States 5). On the other hand, economic pluralism was allowed and even encouraged by the regime, while social and political pluralism was silenced during the junta's seven-year rule (United States 4-5). When comparing the democratization of Greece to Linz and Stephan's theories about how previous regime types influence democratization, it can be evident that the Greek junta was a unique political form, and that theories regarding both Authoritarian and Totalitarian regimes can apply to this case. For example, the Greek case of democratization seems to resemble Path #2 as an authoritarian regime, in which a regime that suffered a defeat by war would lead to a democratic transition with the prior regime leading it and the populace demands regime change (Linz and Stepan 57). This theory can be reflected in the Greek invasion of Cyprus in 1973, which was a disaster for the regime (Prindham 4), the subsequent democratization led by a politician from the pre-junta regime (Diamandouros 55) and popular opinion which favored democratization (57). On the other hand, the case of Greek democratization does not fit

with existing theories regarding democratization in Southern Europe because the Spanish and Portuguese regimes lasted for a generation while the Greek regime was short-lived (Prindham 21). In addition, the key contributing factor to the collapse of Greece's authoritarian regime was sudden, while Spain and Portugal's had their roots in the long-term (21). As such, the Theory Analysis section of this paper will explore how and why the Greek state shifted from authoritarianism to democracy and why the previous regime's short time-span in power influenced how the following regime would be formed.

### **Overview of the Mediterranean Democratic Transitions**

Jeffrey Pridham's paper *Comparative Perspectives on the new Mediterranean Democracies* explores the democratization cases of Greece, Portugal and Spain in the 1970s in an attempt to come up with common theories to explain all three. One of the most prominent arguments Pridham forwards in his research are the historical similarities in the autocratic regimes present in the Mediterranean during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (16-27). Most significantly, Pridham notes that all three autocratic regimes collapsed at the same time period, which could make it easy to combine all three cases as one larger case of democratic transition (Pridham 16). In addition, another significant similarity between the three cases is the leadership of transition; in all three cases it is noted that during each regimes' transition to democracy, leadership of such change was headed by elite politicians (18). Finally, all three cases saw a similar pattern of

systematic transformation, in that all three states had (Varying degrees and length of) previous democratic experience (17), which I think is important because by having such previous experience, the successors of the new regime have the experience to build upon rather than starting purely from scratch.

While Pridham's theories regarding the similarities between the three 1970s Mediterranean democratic transitions explain the general concept of the Mediterranean democratic transitions well, a significant gap can be found in the sub theory relating to the collapse of each regime. Most specifically, he argues that Portugal and Spain share a similar theme in that both regimes collapsed due to internal factors (Pridham 21). Meanwhile, his analysis distinguishes Greece from the two, arguing that in its case, an external factor (The Cyprus invasion) brought about the Junta's downfall (21). What Pridham does not explain clearly enough, and that I would like to explore further, is the fact that unlike Spain and Portugal's autocratic regimes, the Greek military junta was short-lived (21). When combined with the fact that an external rather than internal shock caused the Greek junta to collapse, it becomes apparent that the short time span of the Greek regime meant that it may not have had the capacity to respond properly to external events. While it can be easy to also call the cause of the Portuguese military regime's downfall as also external due to unrest within its empire, the difference I make between the two is that Greece's case involved inter-state relations whereas Portugal's problems were confined to its

own colonial territories (4, 21). Because of this gap in Pridham's theory, in the next section I will develop a new theory to explain how the timespan of an autocratic regime can play a significant role in its survival by looking at existing research and applying it to Greece.

### **Theory Proposal**

While the Greek military junta was a time of authoritarian oppression and strict nationalist rule, it was also short-lived in its duration. A CIA document from 1968 describes in detail the status of the regime after a year of rule in Greece (United States 1-2). According to the document, the regime had appeared to be consolidated because there were no signs of active dissent among the Greek population to oppose the Junta, which could be the result of the regime persecuting the opposition (United States 7). In addition, it is also noted that the new regime had made other changes to Greek politics that can make it appear consolidated, such as reforms to the existing constitution and political system (United States 4-5). Despite the fact that these and other signs can appear to make the Greek regime consolidated, in reality I believe it was not consolidated, and the regime's poor handling of the Cyprus crisis is indicative of this. Prior to the rise of the Greek Junta, Greece and Turkey had been locked in an ethnic and cultural conflict over the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean, which reinforced Greek nationalism (Danopoulos 259-260, 268). During the course of the Junta, the Athens government became even more hostile to Turkey and its interests on the island, which became ready to boil over (260). Due to cultural ties between the

mainland Greeks and the Cypriot Greeks, the Greek government staged a coup d'état in July 1974, installing a new government on the island (267). The intervention was a failure for the Greek government and military as Turkish forces immediately invaded and occupied half of the island, with many Greek Cypriots becoming refugees and Northern Cyprus declaring independence (Kiolt and Mansfeld 503-504). At home, the results of the military action were not taken lightly among the Greek people, who were already furious about the authoritarian nature of the regime due to the repression of a student protest the previous year at the Athens Polytechnic (Diamandouros 56). With the defeat on Cyprus, the regime and military lost all of its credibility, thus making it virtually unpopular among the Greek people (Pridham 14). Just several days after the failed intervention in Cyprus, a coup d'état rocked the country, deposing the Junta and allowing for the process of democratization to begin (Diamandouros 53-54). The fact that the Greek military regime attempted to intervene in an international conflict despite being young shows that those in charge were taking a large risk, as their short timespan in power would come crashing down if the operation failed. In turn, such a change causes citizen to voice upset with the contemporary regime and demand a regime change. Combined with Greece's previous democratic experience prior to the military junta, it is clear that Greece is indeed a unique case of democratization both in the Mediterranean and worldwide due to a combination of young age and the high risk

the regime took when they tried to protect their nationalistic interests.

Based on the above analysis, I propose to create a new theory to help explain the case of Greece's military junta and subsequent democratization. According to my proposed theory, the fact that the Greek Military regime was both young and nationalist meant that it took action to support such nationalism and consolidate its rule, particularly after witnessing recent protests against its rule (Diamandouros 56). When it failed to stop the Turkish Invasion of Cyprus, the Greek Junta quickly fell and Karmanalis began his work to make Greece a liberal democracy (59-67). In a wider context, young authoritarian regimes can be considered vulnerable to losses in inter-state conflicts involving nationalism or nationalistic goals if the state was previously semi- or fully democratic. Ultimately, the case of the Greek Junta is an important case for understanding nationalistic autocracies, as such regimes may have a high level of motivation to get involved in aggression with other states that interfere with its nationalistic goals. The results of such interventions to further nationalist ideologies can be considered risky, because if the autocratic regime loses, like with the case of Greece, it is likely that democratization will take place because of the failure of such interventionism to generate positive domestic consolidation and trust in the regime.

### **Conclusion**

During the first half of the Cold War, Greece was one of many countries that became entangled in the worldwide ideological conflict between communism

and anti-communism (Luard 40-43). At the climax of the Cold War in 1967, Greece, which had previously been a semi-democratic regime, underwent a coup d'état and became an authoritarian regime headed by the military (Dabilis 2014). During its seven years of rule, many left-wing groups were squashed, and human rights were restricted as the junta attempted to pursue a nationalistic agenda (United States 4-7). Part of that agenda was to defend the Greek population on the island of Cyprus, which also had a Turkish population and had been a source of controversy ever since the island's independence (Danopoulos 259-260). After the regime initiated a coup d'état on the island in an attempt to protect its interests, Turkey swiftly invaded, occupying most of the northern (Turkish) half of the island. In Athens, the military regime quickly collapsed due to its failure to protect its nationalistic ambitions, which had already come under scrutiny following earlier protests (56). Afterwards, Greek politician Constantine Karamanlis built a new democratic regime (With some inspiration from the pre-junta regime), hoping to patch up political divisions that caused the junta's rise and prevent any kind of non-democratic regime from rising again (55-64). Ever since the successful elections of 1981, in which PASOK secured a peaceful transition, Greece has been considered a fully liberal democratic state by Polity IV ("Polity IV Regime" 2014).

As a result of analyzing the democratization case of Greece, existing theories regarding democratization can be expanded on further by my analysis.

Political science theories that explain the role of nationalism, conflict and regime change will benefit from my analysis because Greece appears to be a unique case, in which nationalism caused the authoritarian junta to rise but also caused its demise. Further analysis on similar cases will be required to determine if the role of nationalism in this case is specific to Greece or has been seen with other regime changes in other parts of the world. Another (And in connection with nationalism) set of theories that are significantly assisted by the analysis of the Greek democratization case are theories regarding the role of interstate conflict and its relationship to both democracy and nationalistic goals. Existing theories regarding the role of interstate conflict and regime changes tend to emphasize the democratic peace theory although not necessarily the role of (Defeat in) war in creating democracy (Hermann and Kegley 1996). In the case of Greece, the failed intervention in Cyprus to stop the Turkish Invasion negatively resonated across the Greek population, who ended all support for their regime and demanded political change. After the military junta fell, Greece transitioned to become a liberal democracy and has not gone back since. As such, because my analysis has shown that authoritarian regimes that are also nationalist are very susceptible to the negative consequences of being defeated in war, existing theories regarding war and regime type need to be rewritten to accommodate the analysis presented in this paper.

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