

## Greeks Say “No to Austerity”: Tens of Thousands Back Syriza at Rally in Athens

"We believe that this ultimatum to the Greek people and democracy should be rejected," write international academics

By [Deirdre Fulton](#)

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Protesters participate in a demonstration calling for a “No” vote in the referendum on bailout conditions set by the country’s creditors, in front of the Greek parliament in Athens on June 29, 2015. (Photo: AFP)

Tens of thousands gathered in Athens on Monday night, adding their voices to the ranks of the Syriza government officials and international observers who are urging Greek citizens to act boldly and reject the terms of an aid deal offered by Greece’s austerity-loving international creditors.

While numerous governments and financial institutions [warned](#) Monday that the referendum vote could determine whether or not Greece stays in the Eurozone, other critical implications loom.

A ‘No’ vote would be a clear rejection of austerity measures as well as other regressive and punitive policies being foisted on Greece by the so-called Troika.

On the other hand, [notes Reuters](#), “a ‘Yes’ vote would pile pressure on Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to resign—given his adamant resistance to opening the door to new elections and possibly a return to the negotiating table with creditors.”

In fact, getting Tsipras out of the way appears to be a major goal of the European leaders and lenders, economist Joseph Stiglitz [wrote](#) on Monday.

“After all, it is extremely inconvenient to have in Greece a government that is so opposed to the types of policies that have done so much to increase inequality in so many advanced countries, and that is so committed to curbing the unbridled power of wealth,” Stiglitz argued. “They seem to believe that they can eventually bring down the Greek government by bullying it into accepting an agreement that contravenes its mandate.”

In an interview on Monday with Greece’s *ERT TV*, Tsipras said a robust ‘No’ vote would give the Syriza-led government a mandate and leverage to seek a better deal. “We’re asking you to reject it with all our strength,” he said.

The higher the participation & numbers of people voting “NO” / [#OXI](#), the stronger our position will be. [@ErtSocial](#) [#ert](#) [#Greece](#) [#Greferendum](#)

— Alexis Tsipras (@tsipras\_eu) [June 29, 2015](#)

Those who took to the streets in Athens on Monday night were largely in the anti-austerity camp. According to *Reuters*, “at least 20,000 defiant supporters of Alexis Tsipras’ left-wing government packed the main avenue in front of parliament,” many carrying banners that declared simply “No!” while others read, “Our lives do not belong to the lenders” and “Don’t back down”.

Tens of thousands in Syntagma Square tonight to say ‘NO’ to austerity – but ‘YES’ to democracy and social justice. [pic.twitter.com/mE9NfdzPxb](https://pic.twitter.com/mE9NfdzPxb)

— Kanjin Tor™ (@xugla) [June 29, 2015](#)

Their calls were supported on Monday by a letter penned by a number of international academics, including former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, Slavoj Žižek, and Judith Butler, expressing solidarity with those who would vote ‘No’ in the referendum. Published at the *Guardian*, it read:

Over the past five years, the EU and the IMF have imposed unprecedented austerity on Greece. It has failed badly. The economy has shrunk by 26%, unemployment has risen to 27%, youth unemployment to 60% and, the debt-to-GDP ratio jumped from 120% to 180%. The economic catastrophe has led to a humanitarian crisis, with more than 3 million people on or below the poverty line.

Against this background, the Greek people elected the Syriza-led government on 25 January with a clear mandate to put an end to austerity. In the ensuing negotiations, the government made it clear that the future of Greece is in the [Eurozone](#) and the EU. The lenders, however, insisted on the continuation of their failed recipe, refused to discuss a write down of the debt – which the IMF is on record as considering unviable – and finally, on 26 June, issued an ultimatum to Greece by means of a non-negotiable package that would entrench austerity. This was followed by a suspension of liquidity to the Greek banks and the imposition of capital controls.

In this situation, the government has asked the Greek people to decide the future of the country in a referendum to be held next Sunday. We believe that this ultimatum to the Greek people and democracy should be rejected. The Greek referendum gives the European Union a chance to restate its commitment to the values of the enlightenment – equality, justice, solidarity – and to the principles of democracy on which its legitimacy rests. The place where democracy was born gives Europe the opportunity to recommit to its ideals in the 21st century.

Meanwhile, solidarity actions took place in London and elsewhere, with Andrew Burgin from the UK’s Greece Solidarity Campaign [telling](#) *London 24*: “We are coming together today to stand with the people of Greece and say: no to austerity, yes to democracy.”

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