

## Survey

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### G. Papandreou's referendum and public opinion

The initiative taken by George Papandreou in announcing on the evening of Monday, 31 October his intention to hold a referendum for the approval of the new loan agreement acted as a fuse for the further deepening of the political crisis. Under the pressure of widespread political reactions not only and mainly abroad, but also in Greece, the proposal was withdrawn. However, apart from the fears for the euro and concern about the stability of the Eurozone which were raised by the proposal, the announcement of the referendum proved to be socially undermining for a number of other reasons too.

**First**, it is clear that the prime minister no longer has the political capital to attempt a political undertaking of such broad scope. The political damage he has sustained is irreparable. In today's survey, **only 1 in 8 respondents** continues to trust him for the handling of the economy (13%, against 17% last September). In addition, the premier's blatantly manipulative use of the new form of popular participation caused a general outcry against him and undermined among public opinion, from the very outset, the referendum itself as a political tool. It is therefore no surprise that, to the extent the initiative was identified with Papandreou himself, the holding of such a referendum was negatively viewed and rejected by **70% of citizens, irrespective of party affiliation**, even by 61% of PASOK voters.

**Second**, Papandreou's choice to have recourse to 'society' was not consistent with the way in which the latter had been treated up to now. During the past two years, the ruling PASOK party did not appear to be troubled about the country going to the IMF, nor about the approval of the Memorandum and the medium-term program. On the contrary, the handling of social discontent was left to the forces of order.

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#### Survey profile

The results presented in this analysis are based on a telephone opinion survey, with a general population sample of 603 adults (18+) from across Greece. The survey was carried out: 1-3/11/2011. Published by: newspaper KATHIMERINI.

**Third**, the referendum suffered the same fate as other ‘good’ and ‘innovative ideas’, such as ‘green growth’ and ‘open governance’. The relevant discussion regarding ‘direct and participatory democracy’ was cursory, the law having been passed by parliament as recently as 5 October, while its implementation was attempted hastily, in the midst of a political crisis.

**Fourth**, Papandreou’s exceptionally weak argumentation against the holding of elections and the – in juxtaposition – choice of the referendum as a substitute for them was also far from convincing. In his initial speech to PASOK’s parliamentary group (31/10/11), Papandreou clearly attempted to bypass the political parties and devalue the electoral process itself, with the argument that: “holding elections would simply be evasion, but also a petty political struggle that would divide the people”. However, faced with the dilemma ‘referendum or elections’, **2/3 of citizens (66%)** prefer the latter and just 14% choose the former. Given the historical entrenchment of parliamentary ideology within society and the considerable experience of elections among the electorate, the juxtaposing of the referendum and elections proved to be damaging, since it was inconsistent with domestic political norms. If there is one thing that is an institution in Greece, it is elections, not referendums. Taking only the period since the restoration of democracy, i.e. the 38 years since 1974, a total of 25 elections have been held in Greece (parliamentary, European, municipal, prefectural, regional) and only one referendum.

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