

**MPRA**

Munich Personal RePEc Archive

# **Golden Dawn and the Right-Wing Extremism in Greece**

Lymouris, Nikolaos

November 2013

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/106463/>  
MPRA Paper No. 106463, posted 08 Mar 2021 07:42 UTC

## Golden Dawn and the Right-Wing Extremism in Greece

Dr Nikolaos Lymouris  
London School of Economics

### - Introduction

There is an ongoing controversy as to whether extreme right has been a longstanding political phenomenon in Greece or whether it is associated with the ongoing economic crisis. The first view suggests that the extreme right ideology has been an integral part of modern Greek political history because of its tradition of far-right dictatorships. The other view emphasizes the fact that the extreme right in Greece never actually existed simply because of the lack of a nationalist middle class. In effect, the emergence of Golden Dawn is simply an epiphenomenon of the economic crisis. At the same time, a broad new trend was adopted not only by the mass media but also -unfortunately- the academia in order to expand – by using false criteria - the political boundaries of the extreme right, to characterize as many parties as possible as extreme right. In any case, the years after the fall of the Greek junta (from 1974 until today) there are mainly two right-wing parties in the Greek political life: the “United Nationalist Movement” (ENEK in its Greek acronym), a fringe organisation acted during the mid 80’s and has ceased to exist, and the Golden Dawn, whose electoral success provoked an important political and social debate.

### **1. Emergence of Golden Dawn**

#### a. Brief History

Golden Dawn (GD) was founded in December, 1980 by Nikos Michaloliakos, as a neo-Nazi organisation whose main activity was the publication of a magazine under the same name. In 1983, the publication of the magazine was suspended to begin again a few months later in 1984, when it finally stopped, as Nikos Michaloliakos assumed the leadership of the youth of the “National Political Union” (EPEN in its Greek acronym), a party founded by the former dictator Georgios Papadopoulos while imprisoned. EPEN’s electoral failure in the European Parliamentary elections of the same year (2,29% and 1 MEP) and Michaloliakos’ criticism over the organizational efficacy of EPEN’s youth caused continuous frictions between him and the party’s leadership and finally led to his secession.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> It is worth mentioning that Michaloliakos’ successor in the leadership of EPEN was Makis Vouridis (currently a Member of Parliament with Nea Dimokratia), who retained that position until the dissolution of EPEN in 1994.

The “Popular Association- Golden Dawn” was established in 1985, but it was only activated in 1993 through its participation to the rallies for the Macedonian issue and the naming of the FYROM.

In December 2005, GD’s Secretary General, Nikos Michaloliakos, announced the suspension of its autonomous political activities. GD became the founder of the nationalist party “Patriotic Alliance”, the empowerment of which seems to be the reason for the cessation of its political activity.

In March 2007, GD’s members and leadership withdrew their support for the “Patriotic Alliance” which led to the suspension of its activity. According to the GD, the “Patriotic Alliance” began as a nationalist organisation but over time the cooperation with various personalities with irrelevant action to the organisation’s one led to the creation of a vague political landscape which had to be brought to an end<sup>2</sup>. During the same month, Golden Dawn held its 6<sup>th</sup> congress.

Just four months later, GD’s members participated to the first pan-European nationalist movement against the G8 summit in Berlin, alongside with the German neo-Nazi NPD and other fascist and nationalist organisations.

Golden Dawn’s first electoral success is noted in 2010, when it succeed to win a seat in the municipal council of Athens, gaining 5,29% of the votes. Nikos Michaloliakos was the one who took that seat.

In the parliamentary elections of May 2012, the party entered for the first time in the Greek Parliament, gaining 441.018 votes (6,97%) and 21 seats, which were reduced to 18 after the June 2012 elections.

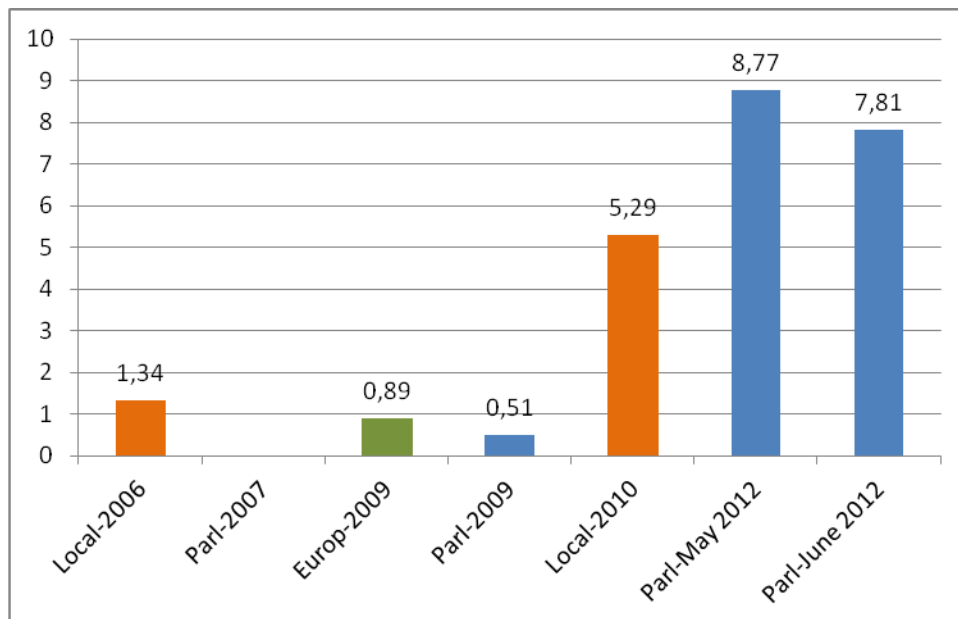
<b>Results 1994-2012</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>Election Type</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Seats</b>
1994	European Parliamentary Elections	7.264	0,11	0 / 25

---

<sup>2</sup> Dimitris Zarifopoulos held the leadership of the “Patriotic Alliance”. Zarifopoulos was a close associate of Michaloliakos during 2002-2007 (No. 2 of the Golden Dawn). One year after the dissolution of the Alliance, Zarifopoulos and his wife were attacked with spray and beaten severely by a group of at least 30 members of Golden Dawn, including the incumbent MP of the party, Ilias Kasidiaris. Zarifopoulos later participated to the “Popular Orthodox Rally” (LAOS in its Greek acronym) and currently he is the editor of the nationalist newspaper “Free World”.

1996	Parliamentary	4.487	0,07	0 / 300
1999	European Parliamentary Elections <sup>3</sup>	48.5321	0,75	0 / 25
2000	Parliamentary <sup>3</sup>	12.1251	0,18	0 / 300
2009	European Parliamentary Elections	23.566	0,46	0 / 22
2009	Parliamentary	19.624	0,29	0 / 300
May 2012	Parliamentary	440.894	6,97	21 / 300
June 2012	Parliamentary	425.990	6,92	18 / 300

GD's rates in the Municipality of Athens/ "Athens A" constituency (2006 – 2012)



<sup>3</sup> Electoral cooperation with the "Front Line" party of the lawyer Kostas Plevis, the main theoretician of nationalism in Greece.

b. Ideology, symbols and propaganda

Golden Dawn supports the cultural superiority of the Greek nation and the white race. In its publications, nationalism is described as the organisation’s ideology. Its ideology is further based on National Socialism,. That is why it opposes in such an extreme way immigration, Marxism and its internationalist approach, globalisation, and multiculturalism, while also having strong anti-Semitic trends. Indeed, the MPs Ilias Kasidiaris and Michael Arvanitis have openly advocated the Holocaust denial.

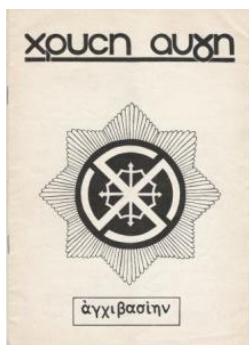
GD supports strongly the historic restoration of the reputation of the dictator Ioannis Metaxas. More specifically, the party defends the legitimacy of the dictatorial regime and holds the view that his answer to the Italian ultimatum demonstrates patriotism and political aptitude. Additionally, it refers to the reforms and the social measures implemented by the dictatorial government.

In a similar spirit of historical revisionism, the party defends the operation of the security battalions that were set up by the German occupation army and the puppet government of Rallis against the forces of the Greek People’s Liberation Army during the Occupation and honors the victims of the battle and the massacre of Meligalas.

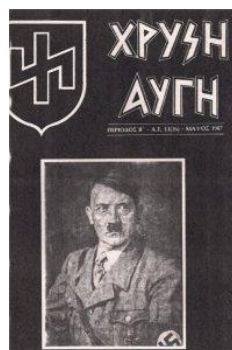
The party’s obsession with National Socialism as well as with Adolf Hitler and other leaders of Nazi Germany is evident by a number of elements like the following:

- in the party’s Declaration of ideological principles, drafted in the late 80’s, there is an explicit reference to both the idea of National Socialism and the “noble biological instincts of the Aryan Creator”, as well as to the “the great defender of our race’s indestructible values, the founder, incarnator, and pioneering hero of National Socialism and European civilisation, ADOLF HITLER”.

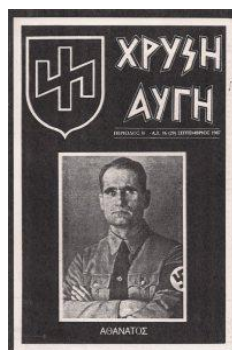
- a series of tributes to Hitlerism by the Golden Dawn magazine.



December 1980  
Issue No. 1



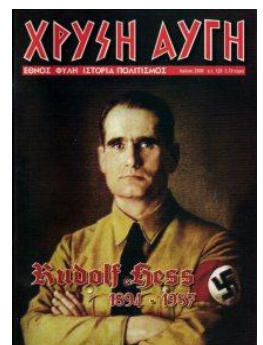
May 1987



September 1987



April 1989



July 2006

- the use of Nazi salutes<sup>4</sup>, Nazi slogans<sup>5</sup> and Hitler's march.<sup>6</sup>

### c. Internal Party Organisation, Internationalisation

Despite the fact that the GD acquired a considerable number of voters and new members, it is obvious that it still functions according to the "Führer Prinzip" and retains a strictly national socialist structure, which evolves around its founding (and seemingly), permanent leader, as well as mentor of its political publications, N. Michaloliakos. Around him, there is a leading team of likeminded people, some of whom participate to the organisation from its beginning, such as the deputy leader Christos Pappas, who transmits the ideological line as a doctrine to the executives and party members. Even if we assume that there are diverse opinions or disagreements within the leading team, they have not been made public and it is expected that they won't until Golden Dawn begins to lose steadily its electoral power and political influence.

In terms of international networking, GD is affiliated with the "National Popular Front" (E.L.A.M) of Cyprus, while in the past it was in contact with the American organisation "National Alliance". Since November 2012, it maintains close relations with the German, neo-Nazi organisation "Freies Netz Süd", with its members visiting the Greek Parliament in February 2013 after GD's invitation.

### d. Violence

Since 1992 more than 100 attacks by GD members have been reported. It is estimated that only 1-2% of the assault cases by GD, or other right-wing groups, have been brought to justice. This poor record is due to the unwillingness of the police to track, identify and arrest the perpetrators and the unwillingness of victims and witnesses to testify because of fear of retaliation by the organisation<sup>7</sup>.

The following cases reflect Golden Dawn's typical action:

---

<sup>4</sup> On 18/01/2011 the Secretary General of G.D. did not hesitate to use the Nazi salute in the hall of the Athens municipal council. [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCKwQMvuM74>].

<sup>5</sup> E.g. the current slogan "Blood, Honor, Golden Dawn" is directly related to the «Blut und Ehre», which was engraved in the stilettoes of the Nazi youth.

<sup>6</sup> More specifically, during the food distribution of 24/07/2013, the party's loudspeakers played the «Die Fahne Hoch»!

<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it should be noted that both the official police authorities and media tend to blame GD's members for any crime against immigrants or members of left parties, regardless if it is proven or not in the court of justice. In Kasidiaris case (see below), the reason that provoked the eruption of his anger was the accusations made by the two representatives of left parties of being an outlaw due to a pending charge. Few weeks later the court found him innocent.

- Case of Pantelis Kazakos, who on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> October 1999, killed two immigrants and seriously wounded seven others because of their color and religion. Despite the attempt to present Kazakos as suffering from psychological disorders, he was sentenced to two consecutive life imprisonments,
- Case of Antonis Androutsopoulos. The GD leading member, Antonis Androutsopoulos, also known with the alias “Periandros”, was fugitive for four years, as he had been accused by Greek authorities for the assault against three persons in June 1998. The main target of the (almost lethal) attack was Dimitrios Kousouris, who by that time was a member of the coordinating committee for the occupation of the Faculty of Philosophy in the University of Athens and a member of the youth “Communist Liberation”. On September 13 2005, Antonis Androutsopoulos surrendered to the authorities and a year later was convicted unanimously for three murder attempts to 21 years imprisonment without parole. Members of the organisation were present in the court to support him but the official leadership did not appear. Androutsopoulos used the Nazi salute to wave at his fellow companions.
- Case of Ilias Kasidiaris. On June 7, 2012, the newly elected MP and GD’s spokesperson slapped in the face a MP of the Communist Party during a live TV program.
- Murder of Pavlos Fyssas. Undoubtedly, the most important case is the murder of Fyssas (34 years old, known with the nickname Killah P). He was a hip- hop musician, leftist and known for his anti-fascist activity. He was stabbed with a knife by 45-year Georgios Roupakias (a Golden Dawn member) in the night of Tuesday, September 17, 2013. As a result, on Saturday, September 29, 2013, the Greek judicial authorities ordered the arrest of the party’s Secretary General and the vast majority of its MPs on charges of forming a criminal organisation.

## **2. Reasons for the popularity of Golden Dawn since 2010**

The key question is how GD can flourish in an educated and democratic European society such as that of Greece. What should be emphasized is that the problem of illegal immigration, the legitimacy crisis of the political system, or even the economic crisis itself, which are considered as the main causes of this phenomenon are permissive factors rather than its root causes. The ideological grounds are far stronger than the sociopolitical: the Greek society has gradually captured itself in an isolative nationalism that is traditionalist and outdated, fanatic, xenophobic and anti-European. That is the reason why patriotic characteristics are adopted by executives and supporters of both the socialist and left parties (e.g. Communist Party of Greece- KKE in its Greek acronym). All the above explain why the Greek society could not resist to the ideas of the far right and shows instead an unlimited tolerance for its empowerment.

The mass media turned the once unknown members of the extreme right into famous TV personas, thus, contributing decisively to the legitimization and societal dissemination of extreme right ideology. However, apart from these ideological factors that fuel the far right-wing phenomenon, the political conditions that favored GD's rise and allowed the winning of 7% in the elections of May are at least four:

i) ***The legitimization of the radical populist right*** by the very mainstream domestic political system that accepted the participation of LAOS in the Papademos government, even though such a move was not necessary in parliamentary terms.

ii) ***The collapse of the electoral influence of LAOS*** and the image of its leader, which was a result of the abovementioned participation in the Papademos government. From 9% in October, 2011, the voting intention for LAOS was dramatically decreased to 2% in April, 2012. George Karatzaferis' attempt to turn a protest party into a government partner did not succeed.

iii) ***The belated emergence of the "Independent Greeks"*** which constitutes GD's main competitor in the field of the right wing populism. The "Independent Greeks" party was founded on February 24, 2012, when LAOS had already collapsed and the rise of GD was evident.

iv) Last but not least, the transformation of the Greek far right and GD's emergence were decisively favored by ***the operation against illegal immigration***, that was - after the 2012 elections - implemented by the Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection. The emphasis given in insecurity and immigration, Law and Order, as the main pillars of the election campaign backfired for the parties of the governmental coalition.

### **3. Voters and supporters of Golden Dawn**

#### ***a. Social Structure***

The overturning of the social contract that had been achieved since the fall of the dictatorship, which is being pursued through the policy of the Memorandum<sup>8</sup>, is rupturing the social alliance formed by the ruling classes in Greece during the post-dictatorship period. Competing openly with the other party of the anti-Memorandum Right, Independent Greeks, GD hopes to undertake the representation of the conservative low-income, working class and 'sub-proletariat' supporters of Constantine Karamanlis' post-dictatorship New Democracy, who no longer follow Antonis Samaras.

It should be noted that GD also maintains strong ties of political representation with the inner core of the state machinery. This fact, with obvious political significance, is typically exemplified

---

<sup>8</sup> The term "Memorandum" does not refer to the text per se, but to:

1. the governmental policies in the name of Memorandum
2. the popular perception of what Memorandum represents.



by the electoral behavior of the security forces. According to one empirical estimate, it emerges, by way of indication, that in Ambelokipi, where police officers of the Attica Immediate Response Division (ZITA and DIAS motorcycle units and DELTA rapid deployment teams) cast their ballots, GD garnered 50.7% in May, whilst in Kaisariani, where personnel of the Attica Police Operations Division (Riot Police), 46.7%, which at the same time transformed the traditional leftish political profile of the historic municipality (since 1990, the elected Mayors are the ones supported by KKE / SYRIZA / PASOK).

#### 4. Indications of voting behavior of the Security Forces in May 2012 parliamentary elections

	AMBELOKIPI	KAISARIANI
Constituency	27 <sup>th</sup> & 28 <sup>th</sup> Athens Municipality	1 <sup>st</sup> Kaisariani
	Attica Immediate Response Division	Attica Police Operations Division
PASOK	3.8	2.0
ND	8.4	9.3
KKE	2.5	8.4
LAOS	5.0	5.5
SYRIZA	3.6	1.2
XA [Golden Dawn]	<b>50.7</b>	<b>46.7</b>
ANEL	12.5	10.7
DIMAR	4.0	4.6
Ecologists	1.2	1.4
Others	8.2	10.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Processing of Election Results. Estimate based on special electoral lists

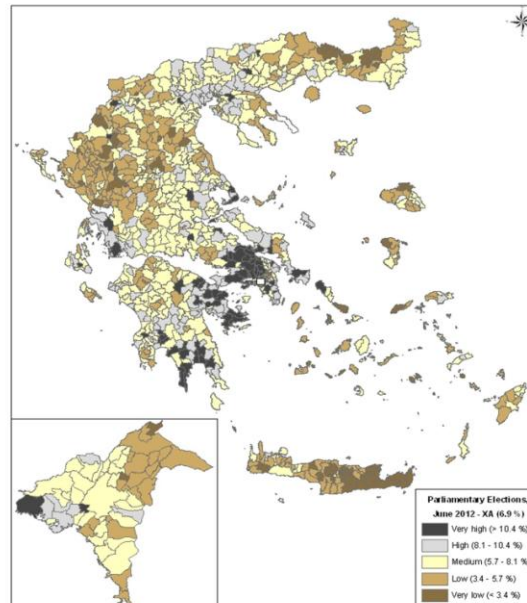
#### b. Geography

GD's electoral geography reveals certain characteristic elements pointing to historical 'continuity' with the electoral geography of the Right not only since the restoration of democracy but also prior to the military dictatorship (1967-1974). The **Peloponnese** (8.95%), **Central Greece** (8.07%), **Attica** (7.6%) and **Central Macedonia** (7.2%) have proven to be the party's best electoral regions. In others, it polled below the national average and lower than 5% in Epirus (4.8%) and in Crete (3.9%), particularly in eastern Crete. In the context of the past, the party's electoral geography appears to exhibit a revival of the 'Old Greece / New Territories' division. Apart from Crete, GD has lower support in the 'New Territories' (Thrace, E. Macedonia, W. Macedonia, Epirus) and higher support in 'Old Greece' (Peloponnese, Central Greece and Attica). In June, the party fared best (surpassed 9%) in Laconia (10.9%), Corinthia (10%), Argolida (9.4%), Rest of Attica (10%), Piraeus B (9.3%), Viotia (8.8%) and Evia (8.6%)

## 2. Electoral geography of Golden Dawn in June 2012 parliamentary elections

Percentage of voter support by municipality (as per the 'Capodistrias' reform)

---



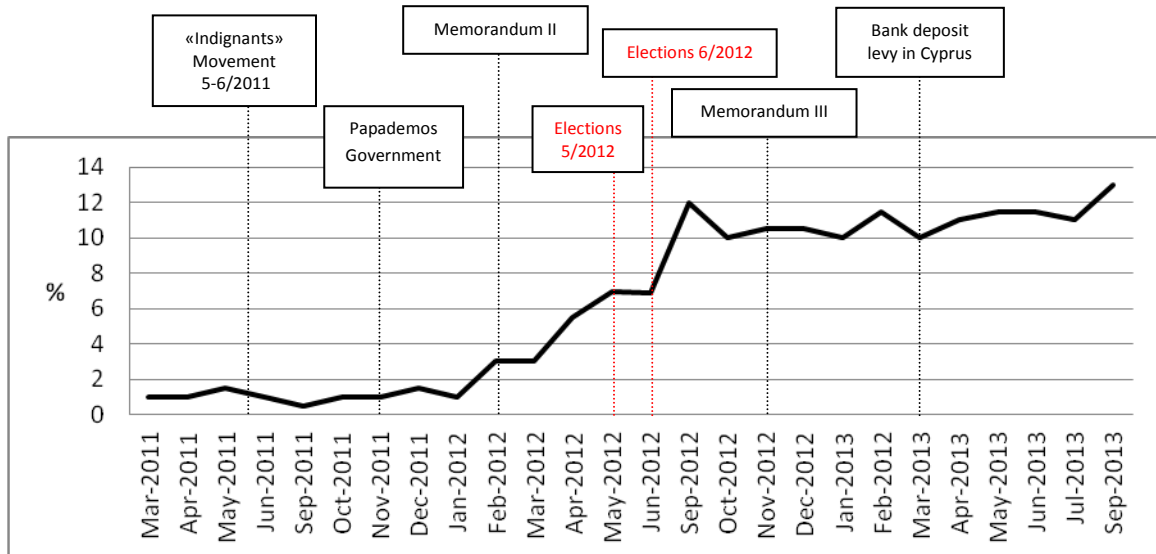
**Source:** Public Issue – Processing of election results

### 4. Outlook

What should be firstly understood is that the GD's high rates are not due to the increase of the numbers of friends and fans, but to the voters who want to send a multiple message to multiple recipients by voting in favor of that particular party. This message combines:

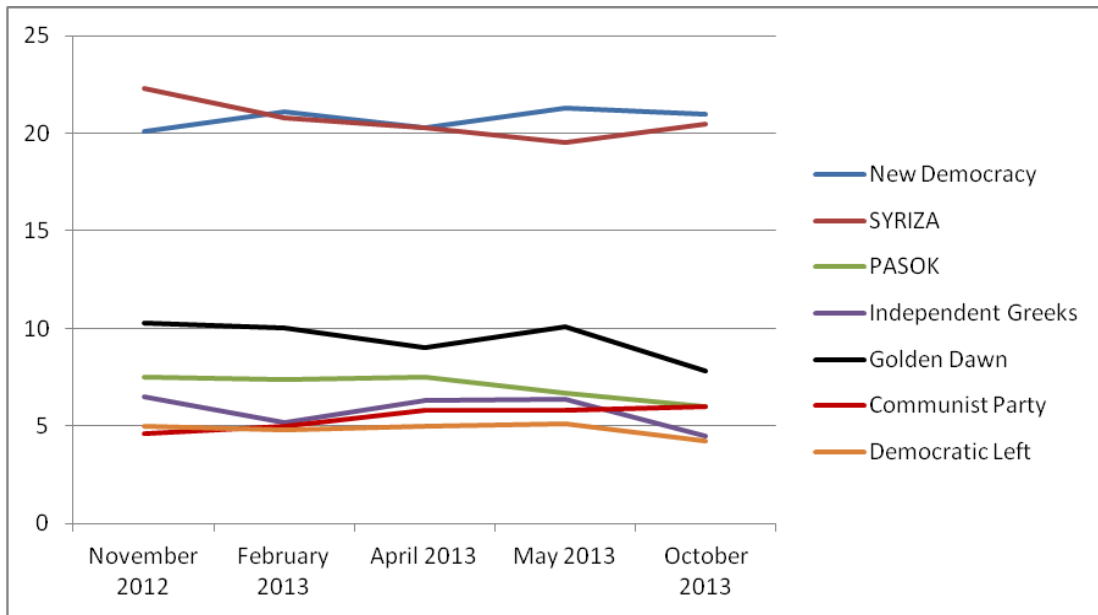
1. the lack of trust for the new (since 2009) leadership of New Democracy
2. their opposite views regarding the Memorandum policy
3. their hostility towards illegal immigrants, which are considered responsible for the rise of crime as well as the unemployment
4. the disintegration of the existing political system.

The following chart illustrates GD's rates (according to the polls- with the exception of those of May and June, 2012, where the electoral rate is stated) in relation to events taking place at that time.



Simultaneously, what is noted is that the incident of Pavlos Fyssas murder and the subsequent arrest of GD's members, did decrease its pollster rates but not to the expected and desirable level. From the last poll (GPO / October 2013), which is presented below, we may conclude with the following remarks:

- i. The electoral power of the party is still strong
- ii. No party takes advantage from the slight decrease of Golden Dawn's rates
- iii. Golden Dawn's voters do not quit the party but choose not to talk openly due to the recent incidents.



It is evident that the Golden Dawn phenomenon has not yet weakened. On the contrary, the public opinion continues to support the party, as it is considered to be antisystemic and provokes a certain nuisance to the current status quo. Its possible ban could boost its rates, especially during the forthcoming municipal and Europarliamentary elections.

The GD phenomenon cannot be achieved simply by prosecution or media propaganda. As proven, it constitutes a phenomenon with deep roots in the state mechanisms and society. The “media storm” had limited results and undoubtedly one of the reasons is the crisis of confidence towards media. It is extremely difficult that the GD popularity will be reduced to single digits, especially in the upcoming European Parliamentary elections; and in particular, after voters been informed for the success of relevant parties (not in the full sense of the term) in other European countries, such as the Front National of Marine Le Pen in France, which the polls currently show first and with continuously increased rates.

At the same time, the difficulty of the governing party to discover a figure that will have the prerequisites to win in the Municipality of Athens and suspend the Kasidiaris candidacy dynamics<sup>9</sup>, shows that GD will strengthen its position after the battle of the municipal elections, and especially if they will take place at the same time with the European Parliamentary elections.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that a considerable mobility is taking place in the area of the far right. More specifically, the “National Front” party, an organisation that was active mainly during the 80’s, restarts its operation. Former disappointed members of the GD and LAOS are enlisted as the party’s supporters. The National Front is getting ready to participate in the upcoming elections.

<sup>9</sup> Pulse’s poll on 26/9, after the Fyssas assassination gives him 19%!