

A Primer on Poland

PARTIES

STAKEHOLDERS

THEMES

SCENARIOS

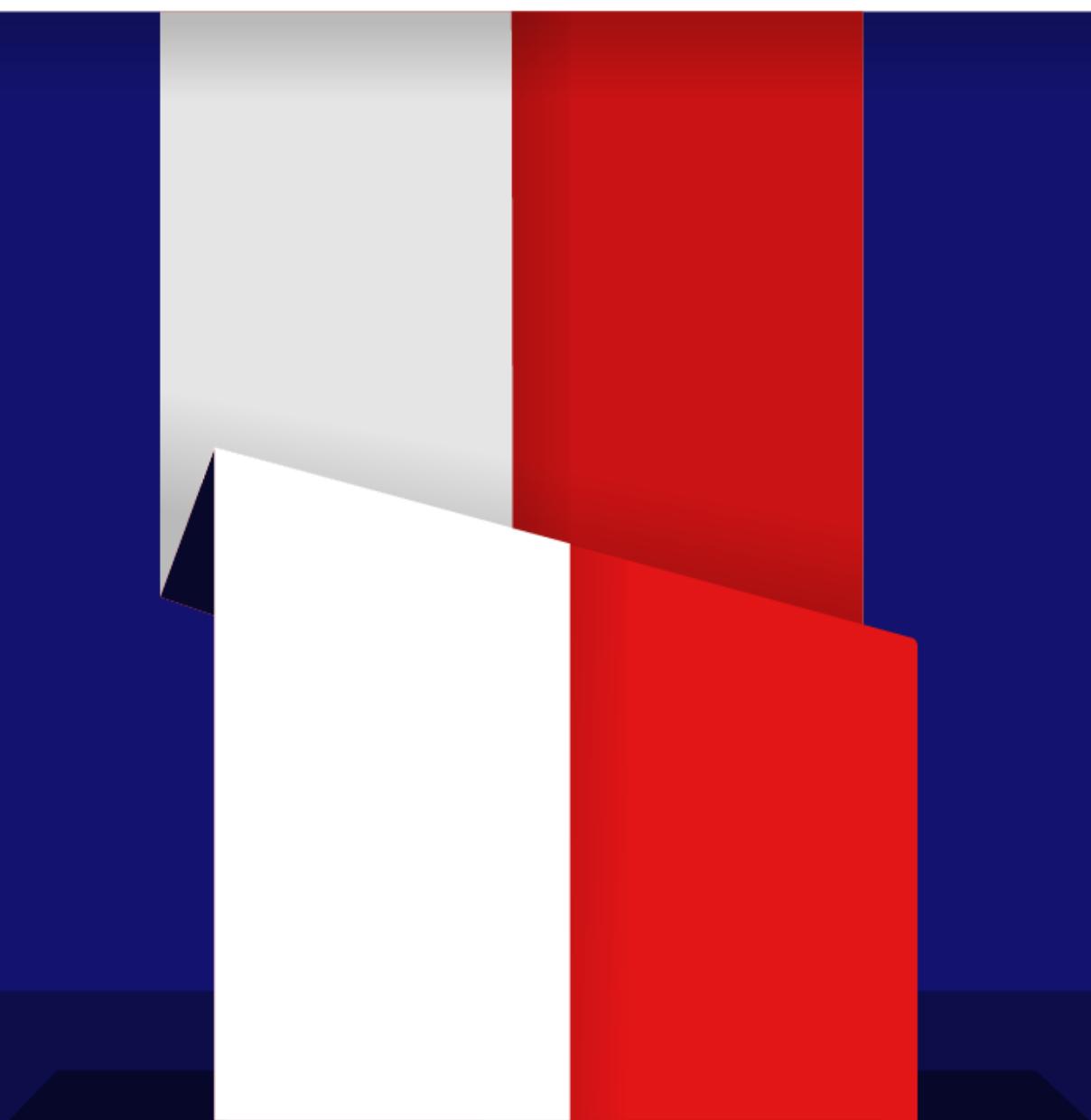


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**POLITYKA
INSIGHT**

POLITYKA INSIGHT is a source of knowledge about Polish and European politics and economy for business leaders, political decision-makers, and diplomats. For the past 10 years, it has been providing its subscribers with analytical services, preparing reports and presentations for Polish and international institutions upon request, as well as organizing debates and conferences. Polityka Insight's analysts can be heard in regularly published original podcast series, such as „Nasłuch” and „Energia do zmiany”.

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Warszawa, August 2023

Introduction

Every Polish parliamentary election feels like THE election that will decide on Poland's fate for years to come. Is this one different? Both sides of the political divide strongly believe that, depending on the outcome, Poland will either "fall into a dark age of quasi-authoritarian rule" or that "a change in government will reverse the progress that Poland has made over the past eight years and plunge it into internal chaos, resulting in a loss of sovereignty".

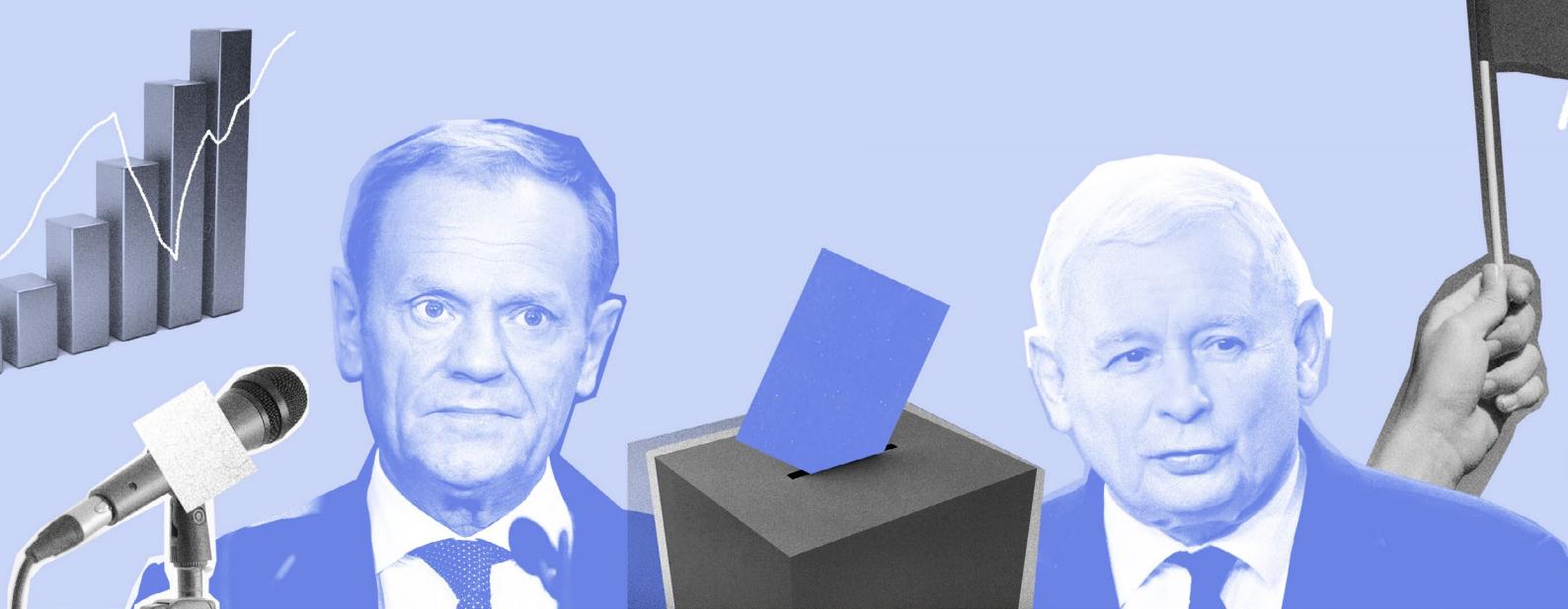
At Polityka Insight, we believe that this is a very important election with serious implications for Poland's democracy, position in the EU, and beyond. However, this is not that different from most previous or future elections. History will not end in October – rather, a new and interesting time will begin. And we will be fired up and ready to report back to you as events unfold.

This publication is Polish politics 101, with a focus on the upcoming elections. It covers the political system, parties and polls (up to August 2023), the main players and the key themes at the heart of the political debate in Poland over the next three months. We also present the most likely scenarios, though their probability is likely to change as the elections approach.

This primer to the Polish election campaign is a starter pack. Once you have read it, try out our new Weekly, designed specifically for the campaign. Every week, we put together a digest of the key events that will influence the outcome of the elections. The Weekly will allow you to stay on top of events — and if you want to take a deep dive into a specific issue during the campaign, please contact us to arrange an in-depth analysis or a conference call with our analysts.



Andrzej Bobiński
Managing Director
Polityka Insight



The Polish election - need to know

WEEKLY ELECTORAL DIGEST

A brief summary of Polish politics and campaign activities, provided each Thursday, until mid-December. Prepared in English, tailored for expats, investors, stakeholders and decision-makers who need to keep track of possible outcomes of the election.

Each edition of the Electoral Digest consists of:

- ▶ **Our take:** an editorial wrap-up of the week
- ▶ **Overview:** a selection of news covering the most important recent topics from the campaign trail
- ▶ **Hyde park:** quotes of the week
- ▶ **Spotlight:** a longer in-depth analysis

BOARDROOM PRESENTATIONS

A meeting with our experts that provides a thorough analysis and addresses the client's questions during a Q&A session. The meeting can be conducted online or offline and is tailored for those who want to find out more about the impact of the current situation on their specific activities or sectors. It is useful both during the heat of the campaign and right after the election to explain the forming balance of power and key stakeholders.

Each presentation consists of various modules depending on the client's needs:

- ▶ **Political situation:** current situation, our forecasts, campaign/elections winners and losers
- ▶ **Economy:** impact of campaign promises and outcome of elections on the Polish economy
- ▶ **Focus on sector:** impact of campaign promises and outcome of elections on a chosen sector, including energy, retail, finance and defence

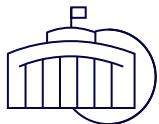
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How the system works



Parliament

● SEJM

In the current legislature, PiS and its partners have a slim majority. The Marshal of the Sejm is Elżbieta Witek (formally the second most important person in the state after the president; however, she does not have a strong political position).

The Polish parliament's lower and more powerful chamber, which normally meets twice a month, passes new bills. They can be proposed by MPs, the Senate, the president, the Council of Ministers, or by a popular initiative backed by at least 100,000 citizens. After the Sejm approves a draft law in a vote, it becomes a bill and goes to the Senate. Formally, the parliament provides checks

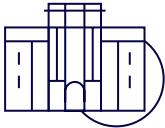
on the government. It participates in the election of many senior officials, including the president of the Supreme Audit Office (NIK), the Ombudsman (RPO), the president of the National Bank of Poland (NBP), members of the Constitutional Tribunal (CT), and part of the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) and the Monetary Policy Council (RPP). The Sejm also votes on the budget. If it is not passed, the president can shorten the parliamentary term. The Sejm can also decide to self-dissolve, triggering early elections. The Sejm is made up of 460 MPs, who are elected every four years.

● SENATE

In the current legislature, the opposition has a narrow majority in the Senate. The Marshal of the Senate is Tomasz Grodzki (formally the third person in the state; however, he does not have a strong political position).

In constitutional terms, the upper chamber of parliament is less important than the lower one as it does not play a role in forming the cabinet. It mostly works on bills that have been passed by the Sejm. After receiving a bill draft law, it has 30 days to accept, amend or veto it. Its decision is not ultimate, as the Sejm can override the Senate's amendment or veto with an absolute majority. Once it has

been accepted, the bill is sent to the president. The Senate is also involved in selecting the Ombudsman (among other officials), but it has less power than the Sejm in this respect. The Senate is currently controlled by opposition parties. Its term lasts four years and ends with the Sejm's term; that is, in November 2023. The Senate is made up of 100 senators.



Cabinet

Mateusz Morawiecki became prime minister in 2017 and stayed on after the 2019 parliamentary elections. The formation of a government is dependent on a vote of confidence in the Sejm.

Both the PM and ministers can be removed if the parliamentary majority passes a vote of no confidence in them. Poland has a chancellor-like system: the PM exercises

control over the executive branch and the majority of new legislation comes from the government. After being drafted in the ministries, new bills are presented to the Council of Ministers – first to the standing committee, which has to approve them, and then to the entire cabinet. After it has been adopted by the cabinet, new legislation is sent to the Sejm.



President

Andrzej Duda was elected president in 2015 and re-elected in 2020. The president's term lasts five years; the current term ends in August 2025. In Poland, the president's role is limited, as the PM has key executive powers.

The president is the head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He is also in charge of foreign policy, alongside the government. The president appoints the first chief justice of the Supreme Court and is involved in electing the Ombudsman (RPO), members of the Monetary Policy Council (RPP) and the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT), among others. He also

designates the candidate for PM, who is usually indicated by the parliamentary majority. In the legislative process, the president signs new bills after they have been accepted by the parliament and orders that they be published. The president can veto a bill, but his veto can be overturned by the Sejm with a three-fifths majority (with at least half of MPs present) which is highly unlikely. If the president believes that a new bill may be unconstitutional, he can send it to the Constitutional Tribunal for review, before or after signing it.



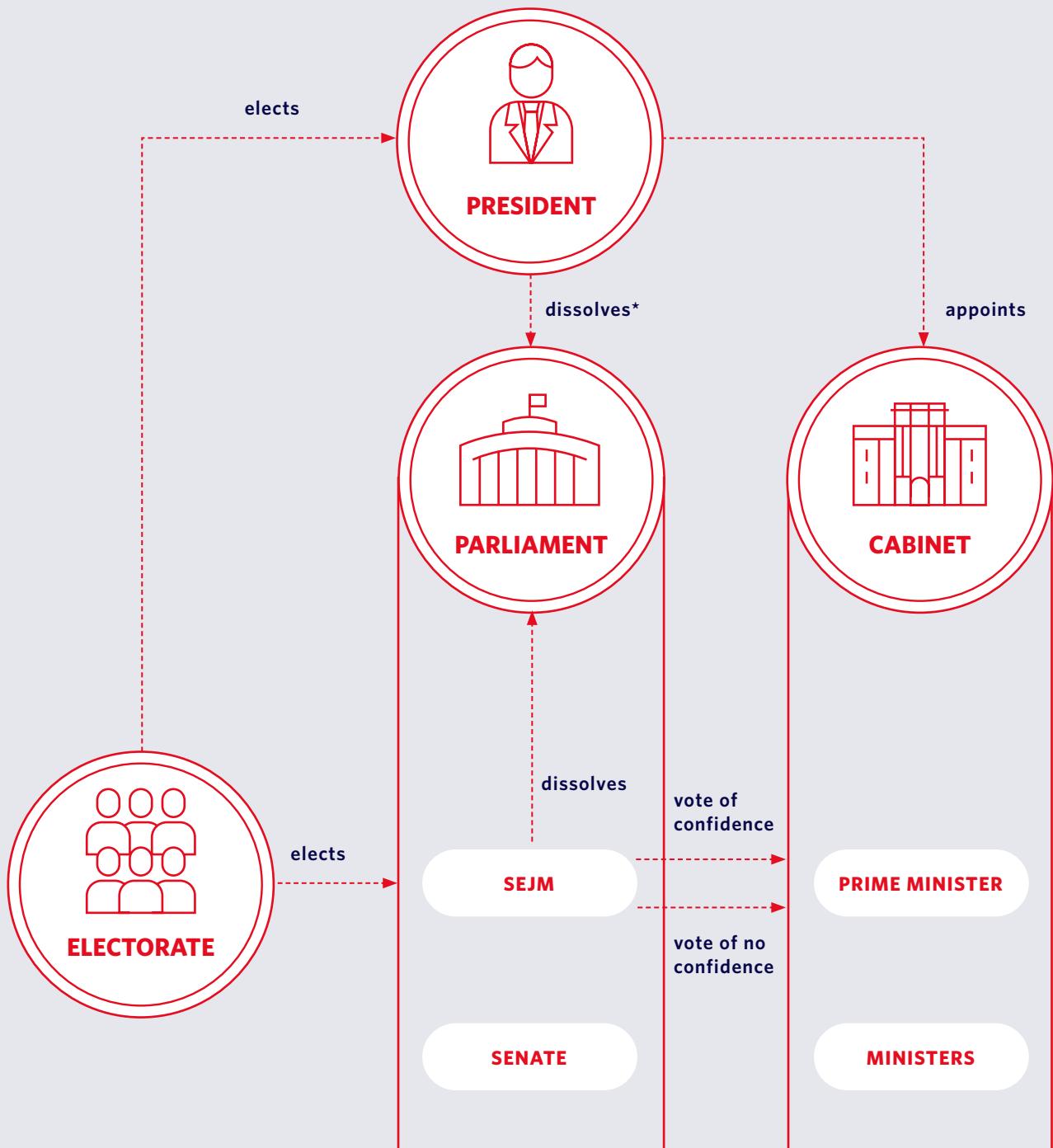
Constitutional Tribunal

A special court made up of 15 judges whose main task is to check whether laws passed by the parliament are constitutional.

The key state authorities, including the president, PM, MPs, and the first chief justice of the Supreme Court, can ask the CT to provide an opinion on a given bill. A constitutional complaint can also be filed by a citizen whose constitutional rights or freedoms may have been violated. The Tribunal's decisions are ultimate: if it deems a law unconstitutional, the bill becomes invalid (immediately or within 18-month period) and must be amended. Since the changes introduced by PiS in 2016, the CT has been dependent on the ruling party, but it is currently somewhat paralysed by internal disputes.

RELATIONS BETWEEN KEY STATE INSTITUTIONS

Poland is a parliamentary democracy with a bicameral parliament, a president with limited powers and a chancellor-like prime minister.



*only in exceptional case

Source: Polityka Insight.

Parties



United Right
(Zjednoczona Prawica)

● A MEMBER OF THE ECR



current support
(lowest and highest in
the past 6 months)



result in
the 2019 elections

The United Right is a coalition of right-wing parties that orbit Jarosław Kaczyński's Law and Justice (PiS — Prawo i Sprawiedliwość). PiS was founded in 2001 and, after a two-year stint in government (2005-2007), was in opposition for eight years. In 2015, Kaczyński teamed up with Zbigniew Ziobro's Sovereign Poland (SuwPol — Suwerena Polska) and the Agreement (Porozumienie) party. Later, Porozumienie left the coalition and was replaced by two smaller groups, Republikanie and Odnowa. Relations between PiS and its junior coalition partners have been fraught this term (2019-2023). Recently though we have noticed a slight rapprochement between them and it is likely that PiS will invite its coalition partners to its electoral lists.

Widely seen as a “new populist” party, PiS combines policies from the right and left. It is very socially conservative: it is against abortion and gay rights, supports traditional family values, and bows to the Catholic Church. At the same time, it has a strong social agenda, like its flagship child benefit programme or lowering the retirement age. Simultaneously, PiS PM Mateusz Morawiecki is a former banker who is open to business interests; he also

understands the need to obtain EU funds and transform the Polish energy sector. His nemesis is Zbigniew Ziobro, who has a more nationalist political agenda and is very eurosceptic and pro-coal. The government's programme is a bizarre compromise between these two approaches.

The party's electoral programme will centre on security and defence, fuelled by the war in Ukraine and Deputy PM and Defence Minister Mariusz Błaszczyk's ambition to fund the biggest land army in Europe. PiS will try to steer the debate away from the difficult economic situation (high inflation) and focus on local investments and social transfers to key groups of voters (parents, senior citizens and people in rural areas). Traditionally, PiS has used ideological issues to polarise the debate, scare voters and win support, but these issues are unlikely to play a decisive role in the upcoming elections.

United Right has been the ruling coalition since 2015. It maintains the lead in polls but its support is significantly lower than its electoral results in 2015 and 2019. Widely seen as a “new populist” party, PiS is very conservative but at the same time, it has a strong social agenda.



228 MPs



46 senators



current support
(lowest and highest in
the past 6 months)



result in
the 2019 elections

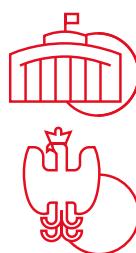
The Civic Coalition consists of a main party, the Civic Platform (PO — Platforma Obywatelska) led by Donald Tusk, and smaller partners: the liberal Nowoczesna, the Green Party (Zieloni) and the centre-left Inicjatywa Polska. The coalition in its current form was created in 2018 and ran in the 2019 parliamentary elections. Founded in 2001, PO is Poland's largest opposition party. It came to power in 2007 and governed for two terms, with Donald Tusk as PM. In 2014, Tusk left for Brussels to become president of the European Council, leaving his post to Ewa Kopacz. A year later, PO lost the elections to PiS. In 2019, PO lost again, triggering an internal leadership struggle and weakening the party. In 2021, Tusk took over the PO leadership again. Since then, the party has recovered from the crisis and gained support in the polls.

PO originally had very liberal economic views but its agenda has become more nuanced over time. For example, it has pledged to keep the social transfers introduced by PiS. As a centrist party, PO combines liberal and conservative values, with MPs ranging from pro-lifers to supporters of civil partnerships, although its rhetoric has become slightly more progressive since Tusk's return. Its voters mostly live in big cities and are wealthier, better educated and younger than PiS voters.

KO's electoral strategy is based primarily on highlighting the PiS government's failures and scandals, and using the unfavourable economic situation linked to high inflation to show its incompetence. KO also tries to emphasise that, due to violations of the rule of law, poor relations with other countries in the EU, and the government's conflict with Brussels, Poland still has not received the funds (EUR 57 billion) from the National Recovery Plan (KPO). So far, KO has only presented targeted electoral proposals determined by Tusk and his narrow circle of advisors. These have included a monthly benefit of PLN 1,500 for women returning to work after maternity leave (the so-called "granny" benefit), low-interest mortgages, greater access to abortion, and more nurseries.

Lately, however, we can observe that KO becomes rhetorically more populist than it used to, especially when approaching highly polarising social issues, including migration.

PO is currently the biggest opposition and has maintained this status for almost the entire 2015-2023 period. As a centrist party, PO combines liberal and conservative values, although its rhetoric has become slightly more progressive since Donald Tusk became its leader (again). Currently placed 2nd in polls, hopes to overcome PiS but is very unlikely to be able to form a government without other opposition parties.



126 MPs



39 senators

On April 27, Poland 2050 and PSL announced the formation of a coalition for the Sejm elections, and on May 15 they said they would run under the Third Way (Trzecia Droga) banner.

While the coalition has its ups and downs leading regularly to rumors about its break-up, it sees that due to mutual benefits of the coalition, its existence is not threatened.



Poland 2050 (Polska 2050)

● A MEMBER OF RENEW EUROPE

A circular gauge chart with a grey outer ring and a red inner segment. The text '8-11%' is displayed in red at the bottom left of the chart.

8-11%

current support
(lowest and highest in
the past 6 months)

A circular gauge chart with a grey outer ring and a red inner segment. The text '9-10%' is displayed in red at the bottom left of the chart.

9-10%

support for
the Third Way
(August 2023)

A circular gauge chart with a grey outer ring and a small red inner segment. The text '-' is displayed in black at the bottom left of the chart.

-

result in
the 2019 elections

Poland 2050 (Polska 2050) emerged as a result of political newcomer Szymon Hołownia's relative success in the presidential election in 2020 (he came third). Although it has not yet competed in any elections, Poland 2050 has six MPs, a senator and an MEP. In the upcoming elections, Poland 2050 will run with the centre-right, agrarian PSL.

Poland 2050 has been positioning itself as a centrist "third way" between PO and PiS, building a broad grouping that seeks to court disillusioned PiS voters, but has mostly drawn support away from the opposition instead.

In presidential elections Hołownia was primarily supported by centrist and left-wing voters, people with university degrees, residents of medium-sized cities and young voters (below the age of 35).

During the election campaign, Poland 2050 will try to distinguish itself from its main rival (KO) by emphasising its thoroughly-prepared proposals. The young party's main concerns are structural and financial: it does not receive subsidies from the state budget. This is one of the reasons why Hołownia announced that Poland 2050 will run with PSL under the banner of "Third Way".



Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe)

● A MEMBER OF THE EPP

A circular gauge chart with a grey outer ring and a red inner segment. The text '5-6%' is displayed in red at the bottom left of the chart.

5-6%

current support
(lowest and highest in
the past 6 months)

A circular gauge chart with a grey outer ring and a red inner segment. The text '10-11%' is displayed in red at the bottom left of the chart.

10-11%

support for
the Third Way
(June 2023)

A circular gauge chart with a grey outer ring and a dark blue inner segment. The text '8.6%' is displayed in dark blue at the bottom left of the chart.

8.6%

result in
the 2019 elections

The Polish People's Party (PSL) is an agrarian party led by Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, a 41 year old doctor by training, who served as one of the youngest ministers in Poland since 1989. The oldest Polish party (it was founded in the 19th century), PSL has been present in every parliament and in several ruling coalitions, including with SLD (1993-1997 and 2001-2003) and PO (2007-2015). With conservative and centre-right groups, PSL makes up the Polish Coalition (Koalicja Polska).

PSL has been competing for rural voters (including farmers) against the much stronger PiS, which has dominated in these areas. PSL has started to build support among the middle class in medium-sized cities. In addition to agricultural issues, it is trying to appeal to entrepreneurs. On worldview issues, it adopts relatively conservative positions. Kosiniak-Kamysz is trying to present the party as restrained, conciliatory and ready to cooperate. However, by opting to run with Poland 2050, he is also trying to present PSL as a "third way" distanced both from PO and PiS.



current support
(lowest and highest in
the past 6 months)



result in
the 2019 elections

Confederation is an alliance of far-right groups. The largest is the libertarian New Hope (Nowa Nadzieja) led by Sławomir Mentzen, a popular entrepreneur and tax advisor who is very active on social media. It also includes the nationalist National Movement (Ruch Narodowy) led by Krzysztof Bosak (a skilled orator and former Confederation presidential candidate) and the ultra-Catholic, anti-globalist and anti-vax Crown (Korona) led by Grzegorz Braun (known for his anti-Ukrainian and anti-semitic statements).

Confederation has recently adopted a successful strategy: showing its ultraliberal and technocratic face and putting the popular Mentzen and Bosak in the spotlight, rather than Braun. In addition to its far-right voter base, Confederation is attracting economically liberal voters (who formerly voted for KO), protest voters (who previously supported Poland 2050), and farmers disillusioned with PiS. Its campaign will focus on economic and anti-EU messages. It remains to be seen whether it can form a government with PiS after the elections, but both parties repeatedly deny any possibility of forming a coalition with one another.

LEWICA

Left (Lewica)



current support
(lowest and highest in
the past 6 months)



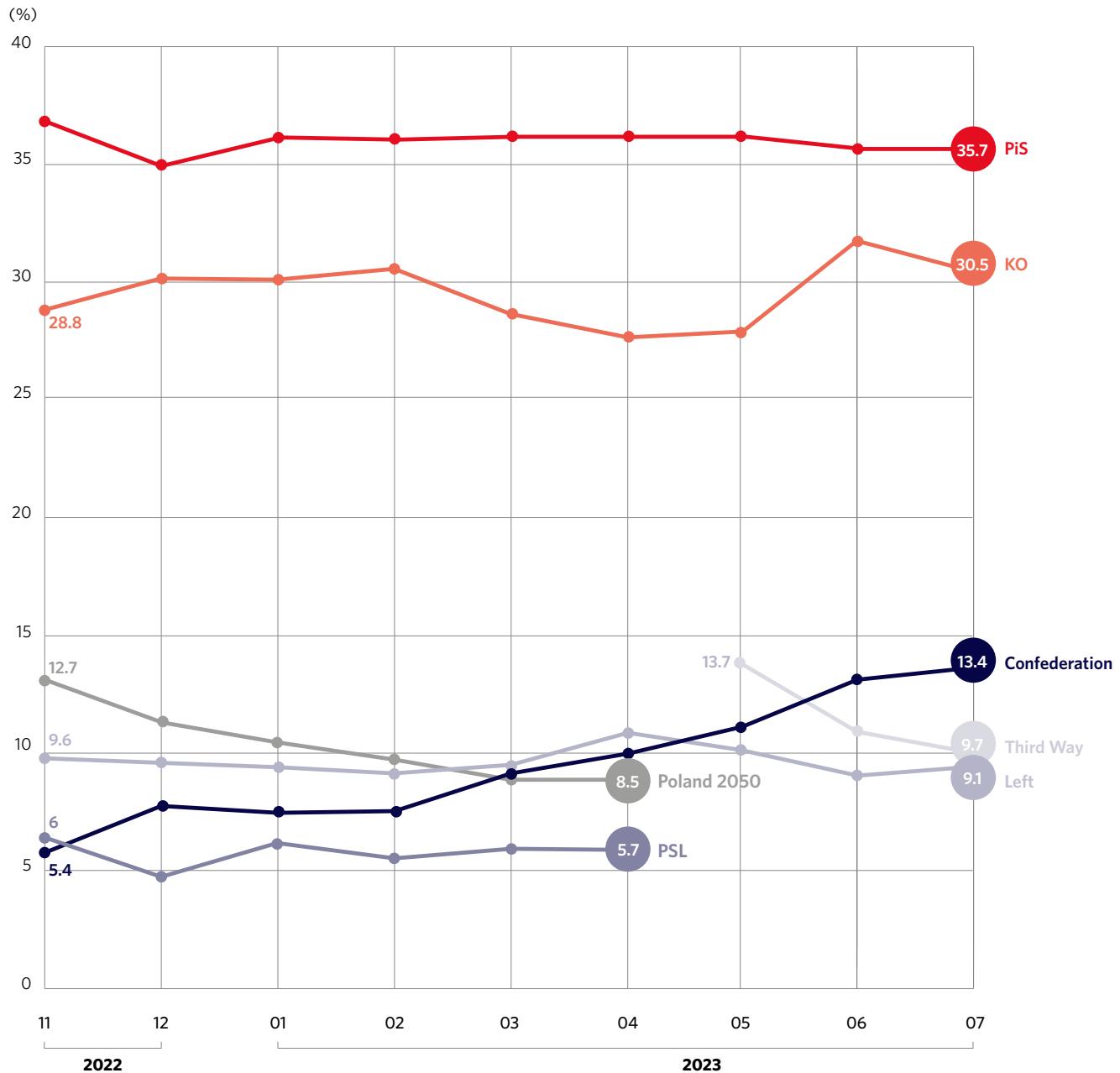
result in
the 2019 elections

The Left is a coalition of left-wing and social-democratic parties formed in 2019. It has 44 MPs and will run in the same configuration in the upcoming elections. The main party is the New Left (Nowa Lewica) led by Włodzimierz Czarzasty and Robert Biedroń. It was created from a merger of the post-communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the centre-left Spring (Wiosna). Its coalition partner Together (Razem), co-chaired by Adrian Zandberg and Magdalena Biejat, is the more progressive (social-democratic/socialist) of the two. Although it only has six MPs, it has a significant impact on the coalition's programme.

The Left takes a progressive stance on worldview issues: it wants to liberalise the law on abortion and stands up for LGBT rights and gender equality. It pledges to protect workers' rights, invest in public services and support social benefits programmes. It is also strongly pro-EU.

In the upcoming campaign, the Left will portray itself as the most progressive option, courting left-wing voters. It will emphasise its conciliatory attitude and ability to join a potential government made up of the current opposition parties (without Confederation).

RECENT POLLS



Source: Own calculations by Polityka Insight based on IBRiS, United Surveys, Ipsos, Pollster, Social Changes, Estymator and Kantar Millward Brown.

Key stakeholders

● RULING CAMP



Jarosław Kaczyński
(PiS)



Mateusz Morawiecki
(PiS)

The co-founder of PiS and its leader since 2003, Kaczyński has the strongest position in post-1989 political system in Poland. A skilled tactician, he survived eight lost elections as party leader before winning in 2015 and again in 2019. Although he only served as PM in 2006-2007 and Deputy PM in 2020-2022, he hand-picked the current PM and president. In June 2023, Kaczyński became Deputy PM again, which was meant to help him exercise rigid control over PiS's structures and the current government before the upcoming election. A right-wing ideologist with a bold vision of a conservative, welfarist and family-oriented state, he believes in personal leadership and centralised state power.



Andrzej Duda

Morawiecki is the second longest-serving PM since 1989. Formally, he is one of PiS's vice-chairmen, although he did not join PiS until 2016. His background is in banking; he served as CEO of Poland's third-largest bank, BZ WBK. In 2015, he stunned markets by moving into politics. He became deputy PM and took over the Ministry for Development and later the Ministry of Finance. In 2017, he replaced Beata Szydło as PM, but his position and choice of ministers have been heavily dependant on Kaczyński. He will most likely remain PM until the elections, but — even if PiS wins — his fate afterwards remains unclear. He has so far failed to build a strong faction within the party.



Zbigniew Ziobro
(Sovereign Poland)

Duda has been president of Poland since 2015. He was re-elected in 2020, beating Rafał Trzaskowski. He is highly popular and comes first in most polls measuring public trust yet recently, his position deteriorates. Before 2015, he was a presidential minister (2008-2010) during the late Lech Kaczyński's presidency, MP (2011-2014) and MEP (2014-2015), but was largely unknown and did not have a strong political position. Duda is formally non-partisan but is seen as politically deferential to PiS; he approves most of PiS's laws. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, he has arguably gained more authority and became slightly more independent. It is unclear how he would position himself towards a potential opposition government.

Known for his harsh rhetoric and hardline stance, Ziobro is Poland's longest-serving justice minister since 1989 and prosecutor general. He leads Sovereign Poland, PiS's anti-European junior coalition partner. A former PiS MP, Ziobro was expelled from the party in 2012 and founded his own grouping, which later joined forces with PiS ahead of the 2015 elections. He has 20 MPs and is in direct conflict with PM Morawiecki. Ziobro was responsible for the judicial reforms that undermined the rule of law in Poland and sparked the conflict between Warsaw and Brussels. He has also used his position as prosecutor general to strengthen his political power.

● OPPOSITION



**Donald
Tusk**
(PO)

The co-founder and leader of PO, Tusk is considered the most experienced and accomplished Polish politician. He has been a senator (1997-2001) and MP (2001-2014), the longest-serving PM after 1989 (2007-2014), and president of the European Council (2014-2019). In 2021, he became PO leader again, uniting the party under his strong leadership and driving its rise in the polls. Tusk comes from a strongly economically liberal and slightly conservative background, but in recent years he has moved towards social liberalism and became somewhat more progressive. Although Tusk is popular among his voters, he usually does worse than Trzaskowski, Morawiecki or Duda in polls measuring public trust. Nevertheless, if the opposition wins the elections, he is the most likely PM.



**Rafał
Trzaskowski**
(PO)

The mayor of Warsaw since 2018, Trzaskowski is the most trusted opposition politician and is sometimes considered the most popular politician in Poland. In 2020, he narrowly lost the presidential race against Duda, but won over 10 million votes. He has served as an MEP (2009-2013), Minister of Digitisation and Administration (2013-2014), Secretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2014-2015), and an MP (2015-2018). He is considered slightly more progressive than his party. Trzaskowski is on decent terms with other opposition parties and Tusk, and is not likely to threaten the latter's position as PO leader. PO may involve Trzaskowski in its election campaign with a view to benefitting from his popularity, but it is likely that his ambition and long-term purpose is to run for president again, in 2025.



**Szymon
Hołownia**
(Poland 2050)

The founder and chairman of Poland 2050, Hołownia went into politics in 2020, running for president (he came third). He had no prior political experience and had not held public office. He was previously a social activist, the founder of two charitable organisations, a Catholic publicist, and a TV talent show host. Although his party is made up of people with a variety of views, Hołownia himself is rather socially conservative and economically liberal. He is pro-European and pro-climate, and advocates for a strong role for local governments. He was previously highly popular, but support has started to decline in recent months. It stems from the fact that he has failed to create a coherent message, thus he proved unable to build a uniform and motivated electorate.



**Sławomir
Mentzen**
(Confederation)

A 36-year-old from Toruń, Mentzen became the leader of New Hope (one of the parties that make up Confederation) and co-chairman of Confederation in October 2022. He quickly marginalised his enemies within the party. Previously, from 2016, he was vice-president of the KORWiN party (New Hope's predecessor) and ran for the Sejm unsuccessfully in 2019. He has a PhD in economics and is an entrepreneur specialising in tax law. Mentzen is very active on social media; he is one of the most popular Polish politicians on Tik Tok. He holds ultra-liberal economic and ultra-conservative social views, but his message mainly focuses on the economy.

Themes during the election campaign



Security, defence and the war in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine has shaken up the Polish landscape, resulting in an influx of several million refugees, nearly one million of whom have stayed in Poland. The war has highlighted the importance of security issues and led to an increase in defence spending (from 2.5 per cent of GDP in 2022 to over 4 per cent in 2023). For PiS, security is supposed to be the most favourable campaign theme. It has pledged to build the largest land army in Europe and prides itself on good relations with the US (recently, Joe Biden visited Poland twice within a year) and active involvement in assistance for Ukraine. When it comes to security and the army, the opposition is on the defensive, unable to credibly differentiate its message about increased defence spending or support for Ukraine from that of PiS. Only Confederation seeks to use dog-whistling tactics to attract anti-Ukraine voters. Yet lately, PiS message regarding security measures lost some of its credibility. With multiple security-based failures in recent months PiS is struggling to maintain its position as the only political force which can guarantee national security.



The economy (inflation)

The unfavourable economic situation in Poland has been one of the main political themes in recent months. Inflation in Poland has risen steadily since the beginning of 2021 and peaked in late 2022 and early 2023 (from 2.7 per cent in Q1 2021 to 17.3 per cent in Q4 2022). We forecast that inflation will slowly decline closer to the elections, reaching 11 per cent in Q3 2023. According to Statistics Poland (GUS) data from May, pessimists still outnumbered optimists, but at the same time, consumer confidence was at its highest level since the beginning of the war.

The opposition blames the government for the high inflation and is striving to highlight the links between the unpopular central bank president, Adam Glapiński, and PiS. PO points out that inflation was much lower when it was in power and the Left is showing how price increases affect the poorest citizens the most. Confederation argues that the inflation is caused by the government's redistribution. In contrast, PiS blames the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, arguing that the alternative to high inflation is high unemployment. As inflation declines, the topic could become less important, but it will remain salient.



The conflict with the EU

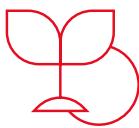
Poland is on poor terms with the EU, in part due to the conflict over the rule of law between Warsaw and Brussels. One result is that Poland still has not received funds (EUR 57 billion) from the National Recovery Plan (KPO) linked to the EU's post-COVID recovery package which would have a decisive effect on the economy. PiS has changed its strategy towards the KPO several times, balancing between a confrontational and a conciliatory approach. The funds remain blocked by internal disputes involving the ruling majority, the president and the Constitutional Tribunal. PiS is seeking to build coalitions of conservatives within the EU and promotes the concept of a Europe of Nations (as opposed to further "federalisation of the EU"). It has adopted a strongly anti-German stance and accuses Brussels of violating Polish sovereignty. Confederation uses even harsher anti-EU rhetoric. The opposition has promised to unblock the KPO money after the elections and to improve Poland's position in Europe.



Social policies

During recent election campaigns, direct social transfers, such as the 500+ child benefit or the 13th and 14th pension for senior citizens, have taken priority over plans to strengthen public services (including healthcare, public transport and education). We forecast that this campaign will be similar, although social transfers may hold less appeal due to the weaker economic climate.

For now, the PiS has pledged to raise 500+ to 800+ and more promises are expected later. Most opposition parties are aligning themselves with PiS, recognising that opposing social benefits would be dangerous in electoral terms. Only Confederation is radically opposed to "giveaways". In housing policy, one of PiS's biggest failures during the past two terms, PO proposes zero-interest mortgages and the Left proposes to build low-cost rental housing. The opposition also criticises the poor state of public services, but does not prioritise this message.



Rural areas and agriculture

According to Statistics Poland (GUS) nearly 15.5 million Poles live in rural areas and 1.3 million work in an agricultural sector.

Local investments have an additional 'dignity' dimension that fits in with the prominent urban-rural division. An agricultural crisis has recently erupted due to increased grain imports from Ukraine. The government initially failed to deal with it, then introduced a temporary import ban and additional measures to help the agricultural sector. Farmers are a highly organised social group, capable of fighting vocally for their interests.

PiS enjoys particularly strong support (over 56 per cent in 2019) among rural residents (including farmers). However, the structure of the electoral districts means that a hypothetical loss of several hundred thousand rural voters by PiS could result in the loss of a disproportionate number of seats and sway the outcome of the election. The Confederation is trying to seize disillusioned PiS voters in rural areas, while the PSL, as a traditionally agrarian party, is struggling to maintain its limited but vital electorate. The significance of agricultural issues could return if grain prices fall at the beginning of the formal campaign.



Climate and the energy transition

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the prices of commodities such as coal and gas skyrocketed, sparking an energy crisis. Poland has progressively cut itself off from fossil fuels imported from Russia, including gas, oil and coal. There is an ongoing discussion about the pace of the transition toward renewable energy, including in the context of the EU's RepowerEU programme, which raised the targets for renewables in response to the war. PiS positions itself as the defender of coal mining, struggling to balance the interests of a key group of voters in Poland's coal region, Silesia. More recently, it has criticised major elements of the EU's flagship climate package, Fit for 55, including the ban on new petrol and diesel cars, which is due to enter into force in 2035. PiS has also made progress with regard to Poland's nuclear programme: it has chosen American company Westinghouse as the technology provider for the country's first nuclear power plant in Lubiatowo-Kopalino. The opposition has pledged to reduce the share of coal in Poland's energy mix, supports renewables, and in principle agrees on continued investment in nuclear energy. Depending on the situation on global energy markets, the topic of energy prices could return at the end of the campaign, when the heating season begins.



Worldview issues (LGBT rights, abortion, immigrants)

In previous campaigns, strongly polarising themes — such as LGBT rights and attitudes toward the Church in the context of pedophilia scandals — were used for political purposes. In 2020, the Constitutional Tribunal (CT) ruled in favour of tightening the already harsh abortion law, which led to huge protests and a slump in support for PiS.

During this election season, Kaczyński made jokes about transgender people in an effort to present PiS as the party of "normality" and a defender of traditional values. In contrast, support for gay civil partnerships and the liberalisation of the abortion law is growing in the opposition, in line with social trends. Poland 2050 and PSL want to call a referendum on abortion, the Left and PO supports full access to abortion up to the 12th week of pregnancy which translates into a broader liberalisation than before the CT ruling. In mid-June Kaczyński announced that the government will organise a referendum on the EU law on the relocation of migrants. The referendum will probably take place on the day of the election, hence the parliamentary campaign is likely to be influenced by the referendum campaign.

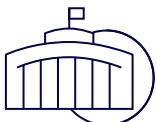


Free and fair elections

According to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, the 2020 presidential election in Poland was "free" but not entirely "fair" due to the state administration's and state-owned companies' involvement in Andrzej Duda's campaign, among other things. It also emerged that the head of KO's election team, Krzysztof Brejza, was wiretapped using the Pegasus system before the 2019 parliamentary elections. Moreover, the public television broadcaster, TVP, has been actively involved in supporting PiS during election campaigns since 2015. In reaction to that, opposition parties, led by PO launched the Citizen Control of the Election campaign. The campaign is meant to both, ensure the fairness of the election and to mobilise KO supporters who might get afraid of PiS stealing the election.

During the upcoming campaign, it is expected that PiS will take advantage of the support of Orlen, Poland's largest publicly-owned fuel company, and the well-funded public media. PO is using this to mobilise its electorate while warning that the upcoming elections could be rigged. We forecast that the next elections will not be entirely fair, but that the risk and potential for widespread fraud is extremely limited.

How the elections work



The Sejm

There are 460 MPs, elected in 41 districts. Depending on the number of residents registered, each district has 7-20 seats. Warsaw is the biggest and Częstochowa is the smallest.

One vote, one candidate. Each voter casts one vote on the ballot. The ballot consists of parties' lists of candidates. A party's overall result is calculated at the national level (the sum of the votes for all the party's candidates on all its lists, in every district). Parties need to win at least 5 per cent of the vote (8 per cent for coalitions) to make it into the Sejm. This threshold does not apply to the German minority, which has one seat in the Sejm.

Parties recommend, leaders decide. The number of candidates on the list must at least match the number of MPs from a given district, but it cannot be twice that number. The heads of the party's committees decide on the order of the names on the lists. This process usually causes tensions within the parties, with prominent politicians competing for high places, especially first place. Poland has an open-list proportional electoral system, so the order is not binding in the allocation of seats, but it has a psychological effect on voters.

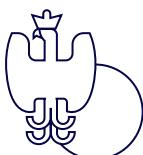
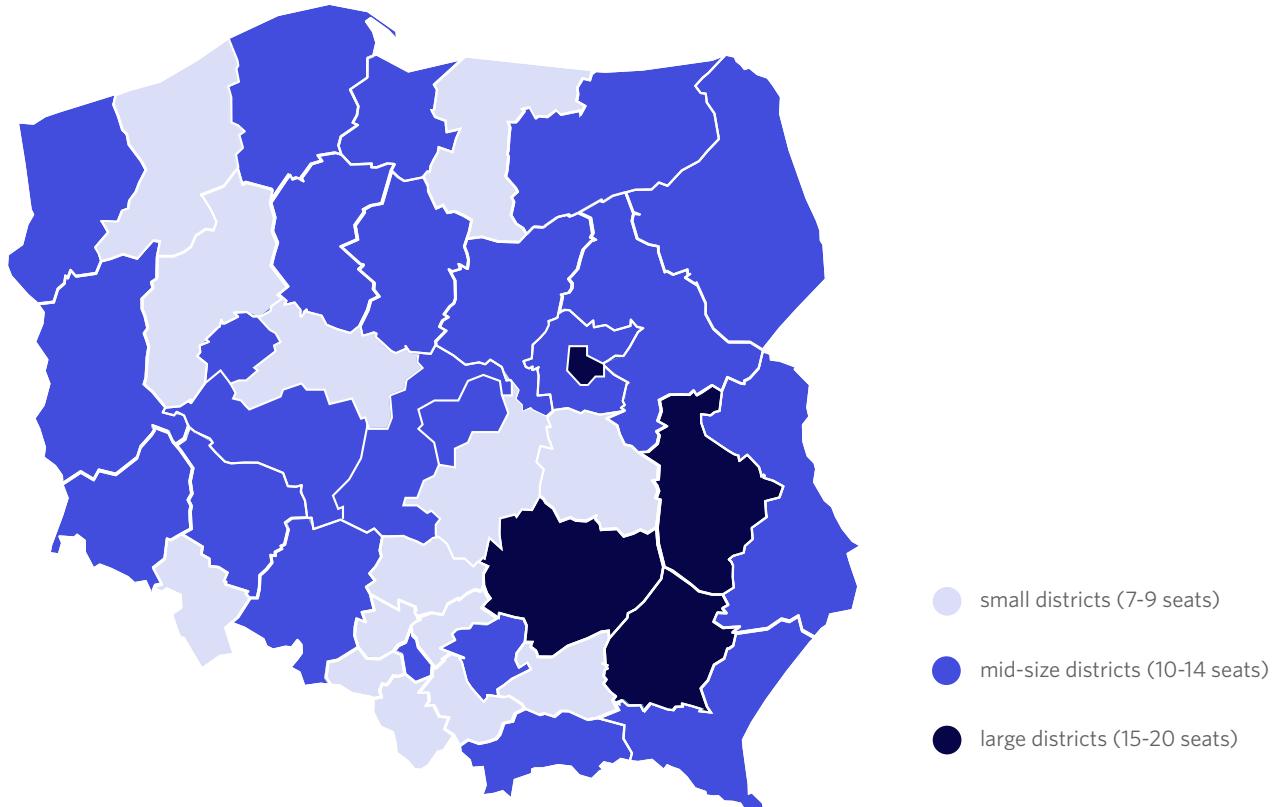
Allocation of seats. The seats are distributed based on the number of votes a committee (party) receives in a given district. The seats are allocated using the d'Hondt method: the overall number of valid votes cast for each party is divided by the next natural number and the seats are distributed based on the highest quotients.

For example, if there are 10 Sejm seats in a given district, the 10 highest quotients are chosen and the parties that reach them receive seats in the Sejm. Within a given party list, the candidates with the highest number of votes win seats.

460 MPs are elected in the open-list proportional representation electoral system. There are 41 districts, each has between 7 and 20 seats.

The Sejm is formally the 'lower house' of parliament, but in practice plays a much greater role in the system than the Senate.

SEJM ELECTORAL DISTRICTS

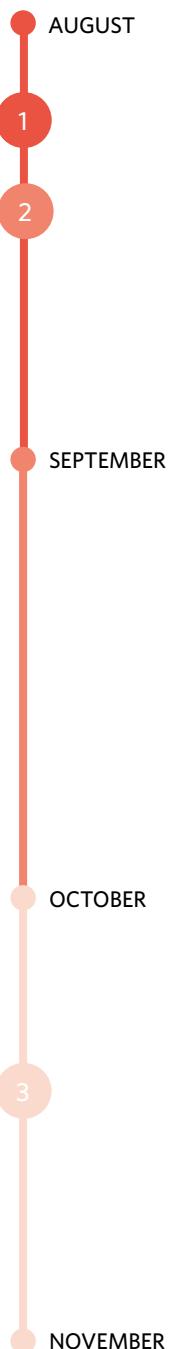


The Senate

Parallel to the Sejm elections, 100 senators are elected in single-mandate constituencies, which are smaller than the Sejm districts.

There are 100 senators, elected in 100 single-member districts. Each party selects one candidate in each district. Voters choose just one candidate. The candidate with the most votes (i.e. plurality, not necessarily a majority) becomes a senator. This is commonly known as the first-past-the-post system, like in parliamentary elections in the UK. Single-member districts were introduced in elections to the Senate in Poland in 2011. The Senate elections are held on the same day as the Sejm elections.

Election timeline



1 August

On August 8 the president announced that the election will take place on October 15. In Poland elections always take place on Sundays. October 15 is a somewhat symbolic date as a day later Poles will celebrate Pope John Paul II Day, marking the anniversary of Karol Wojtyła's election as pope. PiS hopes to gain advantage on that as it is the most ardent defender of John Paul's reputation, undermined by the allegations of covering up the cases of pedophilia among priests.

2 August-September

Collection of signatures and registration of lists. With the president's decision, the formal campaign officially started. Parties, coalitions and voters can now form electoral committees (they have time until August 26) and register lists of candidates (until September 5). To register a list in a district, at least 5,000 signatures of support are needed. A committee that registers lists in at least 21 districts can register lists throughout Poland, without having to collect signatures in each one. Once the lists have been registered, parties cannot remove candidates or change their order. In practice, parties usually announce their candidates, especially those who will head their lists, slightly earlier, even before the campaign begins. However, in 2015, PiS did not approve its lists until the end of August (the elections were held on October 25).

3 September-October

The peak of the campaign. On September 15 the State Election Commission (PKW) will draw election list numbers, which will determine the lists' order on the ballot. On September 30 the state media will start broadcasting free election videos created by the parties. The state television broadcaster is also obliged to host debates between representatives of the parties that have registered lists in all the districts. The details — that is, the number of debates, the dates, time and length, and the channel that will broadcast them — will be determined by the National Broadcasting Council after consulting the TVP board. The election campaign will end at midnight on October 13. After that, campaigning is forbidden. The last polls will be published on Friday.



Results

Exit polls are announced on the Sunday, October 15 at 9 p.m. The State Election Commission will probably publish the official results and the list of MPs a day or two after the vote. The State Election Commission is in charge of conducting elections, but the Supreme Court declares them valid.



Post-election – forming a government

The first Sejm session will be convened by the president no later than on November 14 after the elections (in 2019, the elections were held on October 13 and the Sejm convened on November 12). Within 14 days of the first session, the president will designate the PM, who will have 14 days to win a vote of confidence by absolute majority (abstentions will be counted as votes against). If no government is appointed in this way, the PM can be elected by the Sejm (by absolute majority) within 14 days. If this fails, the initiative returns to the president, who appoints the PM within 14 days. He or she then has 14 days to win a vote of confidence by simple majority. If he or she loses the vote, the president orders an early election.



Senate forecast

The opposition parties have agreed to form a common electoral bloc for the Senate elections. In each district, PO, Poland 2050, the Left and PSL will field just one candidate, who will represent the entire opposition. In 2019, a similar Senate pact gave the opposition a minimal (51 per cent) majority in the upper house. This year, the opposition hopes to win more than 60 seats (out of 100). The competition will be greater than in 2019, as not only PiS and the opposition want to field candidates throughout Poland, but also Confederation and various smaller initiatives. Their candidates are likely to take over some of the opposition candidates' voters and weaken their chances of being elected. Nevertheless, with support for PiS in the polls lower than in 2019 and the opposition determined to cooperate, we expect that the opposition will not only maintain its majority in the Senate, but also increase its lead over PiS.

Possible governments



1

Today's opposition forms a government

Polls from the first half of 2023 show that it would have to be formed by four parties: the Left, the centrist PO, and the centre-right PSL and Poland 2050 (the Third Way). Even that would not necessarily provide the opposition with the necessary number of MPs to form a majority cabinet. The obvious candidate for PM would be the leader of the biggest opposition party: Donald Tusk. However, Tusk has a large negative electorate, and his nomination could be opposed by more radical Left politicians and leaders other parties who fear that they could be marginalised. An alternative could be Rafał Trzaskowski, the popular mayor of Warsaw, who hails from PO. The parties would agree on the need to restore the rule of law and improve relations with the EU. Even after a government is formed, the process of removing PiS activists from institutions (including the state media) will take time and changes that require new laws could be blocked by the president. Conflicts are likely to arise when, after the "state repair" stage, the government starts creating its own policies and grappling with the economic crisis.

2

PiS forms a minority government

In this scenario, PiS wins the largest number of votes, but neither the opposition nor PiS has enough MPs to govern without the far-right Confederation. The opposition has ruled out an alliance with Confederation, but it would also be uncomfortable for PiS. Politicians of both parties claim that they do not want to govern with one another. The far-right politicians feel that they are the party of the younger generation and that if they do not join the government they will do better in the next elections. In this situation, Confederation could potentially vote for the formation of a PiS-led government, but choose not to join it. In terms of the choice of PM, this would rule out Mateusz Morawiecki, whom Confederation accuses of being too soft on the EU. To pass bills, the government would have to get along with other parties, which would lead to destabilisation. PiS's takeover of more state institutions would slow down or come to a standstill. In this scenario, early elections are very likely.

3

PiS forms a coalition with Confederation

In this scenario, PiS wins the largest number of votes, but does not have a majority in the Sejm without Confederation. To stay in power, PiS would tempt Confederation to join the government. Unofficially, Confederation politicians admit that they would only form a coalition with PiS if Sławomir Mentzen were given the post of finance minister and deputy PM, and other Confederation politicians appointed to posts that give them control over Poland's relations with the EU. Confederation would not allow Morawiecki to remain PM. The PiS-Confederation coalition would be extremely unstable, as they differ dramatically on economic issues: Confederation is radically liberal and PiS is strongly interventionist. The chaos would be amplified if PiS attempts to play off the Confederates against each other and marginalise the grouping. Poland's relations with the EU would deteriorate and the climate transition would falter.

4

Early elections in Spring 2024

In case Confederation refuses to support PiS in any way (either by creating a cabinet with them or by supporting PiS in the vote of confidence) and the opposition does not win the majority of the seats in Sejm, it is likely that Poland will face early elections next spring. Confederation politicians are young and many of them consider supporting PiS an unnecessary risk – they hope that in time Confederation will replace PiS as the mainstream right-wing party. In procedural terms, when three successive PM candidates (first nominated by the president, second by the largest group of MPs, third again by the president) fail to obtain a vote of confidence, the president will be obliged to cut the Sejm's term short and call a new election.

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