



2025 Presidential Elections in Poland

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Cover: Rafał Trzaskowski, source: Rafał Trzaskowski Facebook, Karol Nawrocki, source: Karol Nawrocki Facebook, Sławomir Jerzy Mentzen, Source: Sławomir Jerzy Mentzen Facebook page

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2025 Presidential Elections in Poland

On May 18, 2025, Polish citizens head to the polls in order to elect their future President. This ballot is widely seen as a popular evaluation of the current pro-European government, led by Donald Tusk, that ended eight years of right-wing populist rule. The efforts of the Tusk government to reverse the right-wing reforms done by the Law and Justice party (PiS) have been met by several obstacles, not least by cohabitation with PiS President Andrzej Duda. Nonetheless, the relevance of these elections go well beyond Poland's borders. As foreign and security policy remain one of the most pressing topics of this year's elections, the Polish vote stands to determine the role and position of Poland in the European Union, the evolution of Warsaw's special relationship with Washington, and the future profile of Poland regarding Ukraine and the peace and reconstruction processes.

Context

Like many other European countries, Poland's political scene is marked by the battle between the pro-European, liberal status-quo and right-wing populism. The Law and Justice Party has led Poland from 2015 to 2023, with a national-conservative platform that is a textbook example of European right-wing populism - a political wave that still shapes 21st century European politics. What makes Poland such a peculiar case is that PiS is the only populist party in Europe that had lost its grip on power after being successful for a significant period. Of course, it is way too early for the liberal camp to declare victory over PiS, not least because of its 2024 relative success in local elections.¹ Nonetheless, after the 2023 general elections where the PiS still held the highest score, a broad coalition formed by the Civic Coalition (KO), the Polish People's Party, Poland 2050, and The Left supported a new government, led by Donald Tusk², former President of the European Council and the leader of the European People's Party.

The past two years were marked by the efforts of the governing coalition to undo many of PiS's past policies, which were deemed illiberal. Among these was the control of PiS over the national public broadcaster, a rejection of EU migrant quotas, and the appointment of conservative-leaning judges in the constitutional court.³ Another significant policy that greatly polarized Polish society was an almost total ban on abortion, criticized by the United Nations.⁴ The Tusk-led government failed to achieve many of its early targets, partly because of its limited majority and divergences among

¹<https://balkaninsight.com/2024/04/08/polands-local-elections-show-pis-still-a-force-to-be-reckoned-with/>

² <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-tusk-poland-sworn-in-prime-minister/>

³<https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2025-03/tusk-eyes-chance-purge-far-right-polands-presidential-election>

⁴ <https://reproductiverights.org/un-cedaw-report-poland-abortion/>

coalition members, but also because incumbent president Andrzej Duda, a PiS veteran, retains veto powers that blocked many KO-led initiatives. Tusk's parliamentary majority falls short of the three-fifths of seats that would be able to overturn such a veto.⁵

The battle over the judiciary⁶, the media⁷ as well as the diplomatic apparatus⁸, has been particularly fierce. Meanwhile, the KO failed to deliver on other fronts: an initial effort of the new leading coalition to introduce a law that would decriminalize abortion up to 12 weeks, without legalizing it, failed with only three votes when conservative Tusk allies sided with PiS.⁹ Nonetheless, this year's elections will deliver an important insight about the nature of this struggle between the liberal European status quo and its right-wing alternative. While the KO's 2023 victory over the PiS right-wing populists is clearly a big feat, to what extent is this victory sustainable? Right-wing populism is not just a phase, an experiment that Polish (and the wider European) society tried and now renounced - but a force to be reckoned with.

Rafał Trzaskowski

Rafał Trzaskowski is the candidate proposed by the Civic Coalition (KO), which is the main political force behind Prime Minister Tusk's government. Trzaskowski has been vice president of the Civic Platform, the strongest party within KO, since 2020, and Mayor of Warsaw since 2018.¹⁰ He enjoys a fairly solid support base as Mayor, winning the elections in Warsaw for a second time in April 2024 with 57.41% of the vote in the first round.¹¹ This support base is mainly targeted through his appeal to left-leaning voters, which is why Trzaskowski is viewed as a "progressive politician" who opposes Poland's strict abortion laws and supports civil unions for same-sex couples.¹² Winning the KO primaries against Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski with a vast margin,¹³ Trzaskowski is the frontrunner of this year's elections.

In order to secure a broader appeal in the increasingly polarized Polish society, Trzaskowski's campaign has mainly focused on security and economic issues.¹⁴ The

⁵<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/25/poland-prepares-for-election-crucial-for-ruling-coalition-and-progressive-reform>

⁶<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/21/new-polish-justice-minister-will-seek-any-niche-to-undo-rule-of-law-breaches>

⁷<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/22/battle-over-polish-tv-station-donald-tusk-bid-to-remake-poland>

⁸<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/21/new-polish-justice-minister-will-seek-any-niche-to-undo-rule-of-law-breaches>

⁹<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/25/poland-prepares-for-election-crucial-for-ruling-coalition-and-progressive-reform>

¹⁰ <https://wszystkoconajwazniejsze.pl/pepites/rafal-trzaskowski-program-2025/>

¹¹ <https://samorzad2024.pkw.gov.pl/samorzad2024/pl/wbp/kandydat/3417687>

¹²<https://tvpworld.com/83637730/who-is-rafal-trzaskowski-polands-main-ruling-partys-candidate-for-presidency>

¹³<https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-warsaw-mayor-rafal-trzaskowski-wins-donald-tusk-party-presidential-primary/>

¹⁴<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/25/poland-prepares-for-election-crucial-for-ruling-coalition-and-progressive-reform>

main concern of the Civic Platform remains reversing the course dictated by PiS in the past eight years: finalizing “our return to democracy” in the words of senator Tomasz Grodzki¹⁵, in a way that would maintain the alignment of Polish politics with the European mainstream.¹⁶



Donald Tusk (right) and Rafał Trzaskowski (left). Source: Rafał Trzaskowski Facebook page

Karol Nawrocki

Karol Nawrocki, 41, is the candidate proposed by the Law and Justice Party (PiS). This time, Nawrocki, its candidate, is far from an obvious choice, being a rather uncharismatic, relatively unknown figure to the Polish electorate. He was initially promoted as a non-partisan option who is relatively disconnected from PiS. His links to far-right activists makes him a viable choice for the more radical right-wing electorate, who would naturally gravitate towards the far-right alliance Confederation.¹⁷

¹⁵<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/25/poland-prepares-for-election-crucial-for-ruling-coalition-and-progressive-reform>

¹⁶ <https://www.ft.com/content/9a035cff-65d0-48ea-b235-60dbd53849da>

¹⁷<https://balkaninsight.com/2025/01/21/poland-in-2025-key-presidential-election-to-feature-in-busy-year/>



Karol Nawrocki, source: Karol Nawrocki Facebook

Nawrocki was the choice of Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the leader of PiS, and is well known for politicizing the Institute of National Remembrance (currently led by him) in Warsaw and the Museum of the Second World War in Gdansk.¹⁸ There is already a gap between the score Nawrocki is polling at and the regular appeal of PiS as a party. This incapability of mobilizing the PiS electorate might come from his lack of charisma and several allegations, including promoting one of his own books, published under a pseudonym¹⁹ and lying about the ownership of an apartment.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹<https://tvpworld.com/86190836/polands-presidential-race-the-favorite-the-plodder-and-the-dark-horse>

²⁰<https://balkaninsight.com/2025/05/07/polish-presidential-candidate-battles-allegations-of-lying-about-property-deal/>

Other Candidates



Sławomir Jerzy Mentzen, Source: Sławomir Jerzy Mentzen Facebook page

Another relevant candidate, who at some point in the campaign was closely trailing Nawrocki is far-right entrepreneur Sławomir Jerzy Mentzen. He polled as high as 18% around March²¹, running a platform promoting nationalist and anti-immigration policies, with great appeal to young conservative voters.²² Mentzen harshly criticized the presence of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, portraying them as ungrateful and burdensome, despite evidence of their contributions to the Polish economy.²³ His rather radical political stance includes strong opposition to abortion in all circumstances, and the liberalization of gun laws.²⁴ While his support has fluctuated, with recent polls showing a decline due to some of his more extreme views, Mentzen remains a significant figure in the election, considering the way his voter base might act in the second round, after he is eliminated. After all, his voters might share deeper ideological affinities with PiS conservative candidate Nawrocki, rather than Trzaskowski's left-leaning platform. The role of Mentzen's voter base as kingmakers is only countered by center and left-leaning voters.

Other than Mentzen, as many as five candidates are representatives of parties that are members of the ruling KO-led coalition, after the search for a common candidate failed. These include centrist Szymon Hołownia, Marshal of the Sejm and leader of Poland 2050, who supports institutional reform and environmental sustainability.²⁵ Representing The Left, Magdalena Biejat advocates for progressive policies, including

²¹ <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/poland/>

²² <https://www.polskieradio.pl/395/7784/Artykul/3487285,parliamentary-speaker-says-farright-presidential-candidate-is-grave-threat-to-poland>

²³ https://www.thetimes.com/world/europe/article/ukrainian-refugees-collateral-in-polish-presidential-election-5zwrhx63?utm_source=chatgpt.com®ion=global

²⁴ https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/meet-the-far-right-candidate-brewing-trouble-in-polands-presidential-race/polands-presidential-election/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

²⁵ <https://polska2050.pl/program/>

expanded social services and enhanced women's rights. Adrian Zandberg of Razem focuses on labor rights and economic equality, while Artur Bartoszewicz, an economist, emphasizes fiscal responsibility.²⁶ In spite of a large number of candidates attempting to distance themselves from KO and Trzaskowski, thus exposing some tensions within the current coalition members, it is still unlikely that the governing coalition will be disrupted by the campaign itself.

Polls & Scenarios

As of May 13, Trzaskowski is still consistently in the lead, but on a clear downtrend. If last year he was polling close to 40%, May left the KO candidate at 31%, according to Politico's Poll of Polls. Karol Nawrocki is enjoying a significant increase, with as much as 25%, after having polled between 22 and 26% in the past months. Mentzen appears to have lost his traction: back in March he was almost 5% away from 2nd place, but now is only polling around 13%, well below Nawrocki. Centrist candidate Hołownia is rated at 7%, while Zandberg and Biejat are the only other candidates to be at or above 5%.²⁷

In this situation, the most likely scenario for a second round is a Trzaskowski - Nawrocki duel, which would be a classic expression of PO / KO - PiS rivalry. What is important to understand about these parties is that, while both have a consistent support base, they are highly unpopular among young voters especially, who tend to vote for more radical parties, either on the left or the right. In this sense, in an eventual second round, both candidates would have a significant ~30% of the votes guaranteed. Even though current predictions for such a final predict a solid Trzaskowski victory, with margins between 7 and 18%²⁸, a vast portion of the electorate are supporters of other candidates, which makes the final result unpredictable. This result is all the more likely, considering Mentzen's radical platform only has a limited potential, and the leftist vote is fragmented among many other candidates. Many candidates are also in a delicate position in which they are forced to criticize Trzaskowski while their party is in coalition with KO.

How would Poland's international position shift under the tenure of either Trzaskowski and Nawrocki? It is unlikely that Poland's image as a staunch US ally and solid supporter of Ukraine will be damaged by either. However, there are certain nuances

²⁶https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/monitor/6521-rafal-kazimierz-trzaskowski-leads-the-polls-in-the-first-round-of-the-polish-presidential-election?utm_source=chatgpt.com

²⁷ <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/>

²⁸<https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/wybory/wybory-prezydenckie/najnowszy-sondaz-prezydencki-spadaja-wyniki-dwoch-kandydatow/8dvrqbw>; <https://tvn24.pl/polska/wybory-prezydenckie-2025-kto-wygra-w-drugiej-turze-nowy-sondaz-prezydencki-st8459403>; <https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art42260241-karol-nawrocki-czy-slawnomir-mentzen-kto-ma-wieksze-szanse-z-rafalem-trzaskowskim-w-drugiej-turze-wyniki-sondazu>; <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/wyniki-najnowszego-sondazu-nawrocki-traci-poparcie-7154626225343424a>; <https://tvn24.pl/polska/wybory-2025-nowy-sondaz-prezydencki-st8449129>.

regarding their views on Transatlantic relations, Europe and Ukraine which are worth inspecting.

Trzaskowski vs Nawrocki. What Foreign Policy Direction?

Poland is faced with a particular foreign policy contradiction: reconciling geostrategic realities with historical trauma. The radical shift in US discourse - and even policy - with regards to European defense is shaking the core pillar of Polish security: American security guarantees under NATO. The prospects of reduced American interest in NATO's Eastern Flank is obviously a nightmare for Poland, while any potential Western European guarantors are veiled in a certain history of unreliability going back to the Second World War. It is not only that Warsaw regards its European partners with skepticism, but also that the very idea of military guarantees from Western European allies traditionally sounded materially unrealistic.

Nevertheless, a turn towards Europe is already observable, not least through the "Treaty of Nancy" between Warsaw and Paris: a friendship treaty that contains a mutual defense clause in the case of aggression. Donald Tusk and Emmanuel Macron have enshrined the Polish - French implicit defense commitment in an unprecedented treaty, that French diplomats have described as a "premium".²⁹ Paris traditionally signed such documents only with its neighbours³⁰, with the language echoing that of the Aachen treaty between France and Germany. President Macron hinted that the French nuclear deterrent could be part of France's military assistance.³¹ Cold ties with Germany now face the promise of revitalization as well, with Friedrich Merz choosing Warsaw as his second international visit as chancellor.³² Merz and Turk agreed to bolster the military cooperation between the two countries, in the shape of increased German military presence. Poland requested the deployment of German Patriot missiles to defend Rzeszow, a logistical hub of invaluable significance for supporting Ukraine.³³ This comes, quite revealingly, after the US decision in early April to relocate the American troops that were defending the airport in Rzeszow.³⁴

²⁹<https://balkaninsight.com/2025/05/09/democracy-digest-tusk-and-merz-praise-new-beginning-in-german-polish-relations/>

³⁰<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20250509-france-and-poland-sign-new-cooperation-treaty-including-key-mutual-defence-clause>

³¹<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250509-france-poland-sign-treaty-with-mutual-defence-pledge>

³²<https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/05/08/merz-vows-to-tackle-illegal-migration-as-he-meets-donald-tusk-in-first-trip-to-poland-as-c>

³³<https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/05/08/merz-vows-to-tackle-illegal-migration-as-he-meets-donald-tusk-in-first-trip-to-poland-as-c>

³⁴<https://www.europeafrica.army.mil/ArticleViewPressRelease/Article/4147621/press-release-usareur-af-repositions-troops-in-poland/>



Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and French President Emmanuel Macron, in Nancy. Source: Emmanuel Macron on X

But any increased reliance on Western European states hints at Poland's greatest historical trauma: political abandonment. Poland's experience in the Second World War is riddled with memories of British and French inaction, the subsequent German and Soviet occupation, and the ultimate integration in Moscow's sphere of influence. Coupled with the embrace of Trumpian rhetoric, the nationalist side of Polish politics has little affection for Western European countries. This is unsurprisingly coupled with PiS's well-known euroskeptic stances. Karol Nawrocki would go as far as to blame the war in Ukraine on the "European elites", as well as on his political rival Donald Tusk.³⁵ Regarding Germany specifically, the historical situation is obviously more delicate. Nawrocki pledged to push for German reparations "on behalf of nearly 6mn Poles murdered by the German Third Reich".³⁶ This sensitive topic was picked up by his opponent: "We need to talk about what happened in Germany, what the Germans did in Poland. Without this it is impossible to build reconciliation," said Trzaskowski.³⁷ Still, Trzaskowski did not hesitate to blame his opponent for promoting Russian propaganda and "anti-German phobias".³⁸ Meanwhile, Prime Minister Tusk reinforced his reconciliatory stance towards Germany, in spite of his criticism of Berlin's border policy towards Poland.

³⁵<https://notesfrompoland.com/2025/02/20/polish-opposition-presidential-candidate-blames-european-elites-for-war-in-ukraine/>

³⁶ <https://www.ft.com/content/417f04d3-c80e-4bd9-a318-9de2658218b6>

³⁷ <https://www.ft.com/content/417f04d3-c80e-4bd9-a318-9de2658218b6>

³⁸ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-04-11/polish-presidential-candidates-spar-over-security-eu-in-debate?embedded-checkout=true>

One may expect the clash between Trzaskowski and Nawrocki to become the dialectical embodiment of this contradiction. But openly looking for alternatives to Washington's guarantees is too traumatic for Polish strategic thinking. It is therefore no surprise that security discourse in Poland is considerably less alarmist than the one in Western Europe: virtually all leading candidates are, at the level of discourse, doubling down on strong ties with the United States.³⁹ Only a few months ago, members of KO were quite critical of Trump. Nonetheless, Trzaskowski, who openly supported Kamala Harris' bid for the White House, changed his discourse on the topic, declaring that he is "convinced I would quickly form a good rapport with Donald Trump, because I have been talking to people in his circle for many years. We've even invited Republican politicians, those who advise Republican leaders, to the Campus Polska Przyszłości".⁴⁰ After Trump's election victory, the mayor of Warsaw became more and more accommodating of Trump's views: "Donald Trump has always spoken quite realistically about security, saying that the USA would help those who take responsibility for themselves. We are the ideal NATO member for Trump, as we simply take responsibility for ourselves," he declared for TVN24.⁴¹ While acknowledging the anxieties caused by the shifts in US discourse, Trzaskowski posited: "let's look calmly at what's happening in the United States at the moment and, above all, let's persuade the new administration that we have very similar interests".⁴²

It is the PiS candidate, however, that boasts closer ties with the US President. On May 2nd, Nawrocki met President Donald Trump in Washington, an opportunity for Trump to showcase his support for the PiS candidate. Nawrocki would eventually tell the Polish press that Trump said to him 'you will win'; Nawrocki stated that he read it as a kind of wish for my success in the upcoming elections, and also awareness of it, and after this whole day I can say that the American administration is aware of what is happening in Poland".⁴³ President Trump also boasted great relations with incumbent Andrzej Duda, Nawrocki's fellow PiS leader, during his first term as well. PiS attempted to reinforce the image of a strong connection with the Trump administration by bringing US President Donald Trump as a participant to the 2025 Three Seas Initiative Summit in Warsaw.⁴⁴ In the end, the United States sent US Secretary of Energy Chris Wright.⁴⁵ This can be interpreted as a signal from Washington that Nawrocki has at the moment uncertain chances of winning. Nonetheless, Trump maintains a poor image in Poland; a March 2025 poll showed that only 29% of Poles viewed Trump positively, while as many as 49% viewed his actions in a negative light.⁴⁶

³⁹ <https://visegradinsight.eu/visegrad-insight-breakfast-polish-presidential-elections/>

⁴⁰ <https://polanddaily24.com/trzaskowskis-sudden-shift-from-critic-to-would-be-ally-of-donald-trump/poland-today/50919>

⁴¹ <https://tvn24.pl/tvn24-news-in-english/warsaw-mayor-says-poland-is-an-ideal-nato-partner-for-trump-st8168810>

⁴² <https://tvpworld.com/84801858/liberal-candidate-says-next-president-has-to-work-well-with-trump>

⁴³ <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/trump-meets-polish-nationalist-candidate-ahead-presidential-election-2025-05-02/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.polskieradio.pl/395/7784/artykul/3462082.poland-to-invite-us-president-donald-trump-to-2025-three-seas-initiative-summit-in-warsaw>

⁴⁵ <https://3seas.eu/media/news/10th-three-seas-summit-begins-in-warsaw>

⁴⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/world/natos-eastern-flank-us-policy-shift-stokes-security-fears-2025-02-19/>



PiS presidential candidate Karol Nawrocki meets US President Donald Trump.
Source: The White House on X

A warmer KO stance towards the Trump administration also comes in the wake of staunch PiS critique. President Duda criticized Prime Minister Tusk for failing to secure a place for Poland at the negotiation table for peace in Ukraine.⁴⁷ At the same time, the tensions between the Trump administration and the ruling KO are very pressing. The social-media spat between Tusk's foreign minister, Radosław Sikorski and billionaire Elon Musk is probably the most illustrative example. Sikorski remarked that Poland has significant alternatives to Elon Musk's internet service Starlink, prompting Musk to reply by saying there's no such alternative and calling Sikorski a "small man".⁴⁸ In this sense, one can convincingly argue that Trzaskowski's switch towards Trump is just that: a mere change in KO rhetoric, not one in KO foreign policy thinking. But Polish reliance on the US is more than real: around 10,000 US troops are stationed in Poland, and Poland's impressive defense spending of almost 5% mainly goes to the American military-industrial complex.⁴⁹ Polish-US economic ties are also significant, and Poland's first nuclear power plant is built by a group led by an American company,

⁴⁷<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-04-11/polish-presidential-candidates-spar-over-security-eu-in-debate?embedded-checkout=true>

⁴⁸<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-03-09/poland-may-seek-alternative-if-musk-cuts-ukraine-from-starlink?srd=undefined&sref=Mkhc1AWW>

⁴⁹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2025-03-06/europe-s-defenses-against-russia-invasion-would-last-weeks-without-trump-support?srd=undefined&sref=Mkhc1AWW>

Westinghouse.⁵⁰ Once again, articulating the Polish strategic predicament generated by US realignment is too much of a disturbing reality - both for the political elite and the Polish public.

The future Polish president will be forced to navigate this strategic predicament, which consists of several short-term and long-term issues. The most pressing is Russia's aggression in Ukraine, recognized as Poland's most immediate threat. The candidates, however, have different views on the topic. Nawrocki's position has been quite contradictory, with several statements ranging from his openness to shake Putin's hand if it were in Poland's interest, to arguing in favor of cutting ties ("my position is that maintaining diplomatic ties with a barbaric state is not good for Poland") and isolating Russia ("in an ideal world, states like Russia -post-Soviet, neo-imperial, cruel, and barbaric- should not be engaged in diplomatic relations and should be isolated").⁵¹ At the same time, Nawrocki opposes Ukraine's integration in NATO and the EU, unlike Trzaskowski who remains a staunch supporter of Kyiv's bid.⁵²

The populist political logic, typical to PiS discourse, is most observable in Nawrocki's takes on Ukraine. Poland's support for Ukraine is translated in Nawrocki's foreign policy discourse as the continuation of the same populist opposition ('people' vs 'elite'), but transposed to the international. At the same time, he mobilizes the collective memory of Poles to justify his position. Regardless of context, the political subject in question is always the Polish people. For instance, he stated: "I do not see Ukraine in either structure, neither in the European Union nor in NATO, until those important civilisational issues for Poles are resolved." Here, Nawrocki points at the massacres of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia during the Second World War. PiS has long insisted on this, reinforcing the already existing dissatisfaction in Polish society regarding support for Ukraine. This is how the issue entered the political attention of Polish society, and resulted in subsequent exhumations done in cooperation by Polish and Ukrainian teams.⁵³

PiS is of course speculating dissatisfaction in Polish society that was generated by Russia's aggression. One of main issues is the impact of Ukrainian exports on the Polish market, which angered the Polish farmers. The wider Polish population vastly supported their cause: 81% of Polish citizens, according to a 2024 poll.⁵⁴ Another issue is the question of Ukrainian refugees. Although the number has been decreasing,

⁵⁰<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-01-07/poland-approves-14-7-billion-in-funding-for-nuclear-plant-project-amid-eu-probe?sref=LIL4jr17>

⁵¹<https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/pis-candidate-goes-hard-on-russia-opts-for-cutting-diplomatic-ties-after-criticising-zelenskyy/>

⁵²<https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/pis-candidate-backs-trump-no-nato-membership-for-ukraine/>

⁵³<https://suspilne.media/ternopil/1012081-u-puznikah-na-ternopilsini-pid-cas-eksgumacii-znajsi-ostanki-42-ludej/>; <https://news.liga.net/en/politics/news/poland-called-the-exhumation-in-puzhnyky-a-breakthrough-in-relations-between-the-two-countries>

⁵⁴<https://www.politico.eu/article/angry-farmers-push-poland-away-ukraine-war-russia-donald-tusk-rafal-trzaskowski-presidential-election/>

Poland still hosts almost one million Ukrainian refugees.⁵⁵ If these refugees were enjoying overwhelming support from Polish society at the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the number of Poles who want to keep supporting them is decreasing: from 94% at the beginning of the full-scale invasion to 57% in December 2024. PiS has of course promoted anti-refugee rhetoric, which forced KO to change its tone. Trzaskowski stated that “on migration benefits, we granted Ukrainians citizen-like treatment, which of course was commendable at the beginning, but we cannot keep it up forever”.⁵⁶

Very important is the topic of Polish participation in an eventual “Coalition of the Willing” that would serve peacekeeping purposes inside Ukraine. The position of the current government shows reluctance, with Foreign Minister Sikorski in April ruling out the potential deployment of Polish troops as part of a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine.⁵⁷ On the one hand, Sikorski argued that this would fuel Russian narratives of Polish irredentist designs towards Ukraine.⁵⁸ On the other hand, Polish Defence Minister Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz uttered a more convincing argument: “no country bordering Russia should be involved in such a stabilisation mission, as it could easily lead to provocations”.⁵⁹ After all, any limited skirmish between Polish peacekeepers (as compared to, say, Australian⁶⁰) and Russian forces on Ukrainian territory would have a very different impact, considering the history between the two countries.

Overall, the defense posture of Poland is likely to remain relatively solid. Trzaskowski argued in favor of increased defense spending, up to 5% of Poland’s GDP. What is of note is that half of related investments will be made domestically: “new technologies, communication systems, drones, and hydrogen initiatives can be developed here in Podkarpackie, turning the region into an industrial powerhouse,” stated Trzaskowski.⁶¹ Meanwhile, Nawrocki has not mentioned any specific defense spending targets.

Ultimately, Poland is cementing its role as a leading nation on NATO’s Eastern Flank. Besides its relatively impressive defense expenditure and deep connection with the US, this is also observable in its foreign policy efforts. For instance, the revitalization of the Weimar format, a trilateral cooperation between France, Germany, and Poland, reinforces Warsaw’s status and role within the European security architecture. In London, the expansion of this format as a response to both Russian aggression and

⁵⁵<https://apnews.com/article/poland-germany-ukraine-refugee-war-d0b3b810c8e9924bef1f4ccc21433682>

⁵⁶ <https://www.ft.com/content/9a035cff-65d0-48ea-b235-60dbd53849da>

⁵⁷ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/polish-foreign-policy-focus-on-standing-against-russian-threat/>

⁵⁸ https://global.espreso.tv/russia-ukraine-war-polish-troops-in-ukraine-could-fuel-russian-propaganda-says-sikorski?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁵⁹ https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2025/02/19/7499086/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁶⁰ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation%2Fdefence%2Felection-2025-labor-firm-on-tanks-and-ukraine-deployment%2Fnews->

<story%2F0a0bf689747209cc2818570e7198c312?amp&nk=9f2aa41e789f04c5e2f548140d8d911f-1746972226>

⁶¹ <https://www.polskieradio.pl/395/11354/artykul/3491133,trzaskowski-pledges-5-of-gdp-for-defense-vows-europe%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Csafest-border>

US realignment further confirms Poland's place among European major countries.⁶² At the last summit in Kiev, Prime Minister Tusk was among the leaders of Britain, Germany and France in a show of support for Ukraine.⁶³ There is no other country on the Eastern Flank that can claim such aspirations, with Romania being caught up in internal disputes and instability, as a result of canceled elections⁶⁴ and the absence of a stable government.⁶⁵

All in all, what one is to expect from a Trzaskowski presidency is quite clear. On the internal scene, a continued rollback of illiberal policies implemented by the PiS is to be expected. On the foreign policy front, one would see a Polish government that is more open to strengthening a European security pillar within NATO, including stronger relations with Germany and France, while trying to maintain strong ties with Washington. Warsaw would continue to show strong support to Ukraine and Zelenskyy's tenure, while limiting the extent of support awarded to refugees. This will also reinforce the current governing coalition. Meanwhile, Nawrocki's victory might damage the ruling coalition, which could, in a worst case scenario, lead to the absence of a parliamentary majority and early elections. Alternatively, a continued cohabitation between a KO-led government and a PiS president will hinder the reforms planned by KO through the President's veto powers and the emergence of a fully coherent foreign policy stance

To conclude, a victory for Prime Minister Tusk's candidate, Rafał Trzaskowski, will offer another guarantee that Europe can rely on Poland in spite of its complex and nuanced relationship with Washington. This would be the result of prevailing security concerns, which have also been the main topic of debate for this electoral campaign. Otherwise, a PiS victory will maintain a key ideological dimension in US - Polish relations, as Nawrocki will serve as an important ally for the Trump administration. This might also reinvigorate some regional cooperation formulae, such as the Three Seas Initiative, while the Visegrad group will likely remain paralyzed by divergent positions regarding the war in Ukraine. Regardless, Poland will remain radically preoccupied by the war to its East, where it will attempt to prevent Ukraine's weakening by continuing a firm stance towards Russian expansionism.

⁶²<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/weimar-statement-by-germany-france-poland-italy-spain-the-united-kingdom-the-european-external-action-service-and-the-european-commission>

⁶³<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/09/leaders-of-uk-france-germany-and-poland-to-visit-ukraine-in-joint-show-of-support>

⁶⁴ <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/the-cancelled-elections-and-the-mainstreaming-of-the-far-right-in-romania/>

⁶⁵<https://www.politico.eu/article/romania-prime-minister-marcel-ciolacu-resignation-presidential-election/>



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