



MNI POLITICAL RISK ANALYSIS – Poland Presidential Run-Off Preview

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Executive Summary

- Poland's neck-and-neck presidential race is down to the wire after centrist liberal Rafał Trzaskowski (KO) took an unconvincing lead in the first round.
- He is up against conservative Karol Nawrocki (de jure non-partisan, de facto supported by PiS).
- The first round brought a surprisingly good result for right-wing candidates, who garnered more than 50% of the vote.
- This puts Trzaskowski in a difficult position, but his team is hoping that higher turnout might work to his advantage.
- Poland will observe election silence from Saturday midnight until polling stations in the country close at 20:00BST/21:00BST on Sunday.
- This is when exit polls will be published but the process of counting votes will likely extend into the morning.





Background Information

The first round of Poland's presidential election failed to yield a decisive result as none of the candidates managed to reach the 50% threshold. In line with expectations, Mayor of Warsaw and deputy leader of the ruling Civic Coalition (KO) Rafał Trzaskowski advanced to the runoff alongside Karol Nawrocki, the current head of the Institute for National Remembrance (IPN) supported by the main opposition Law and Justice (PiS), which won both the presidency and an unprecedented sole majority in the Sejm in 2015. PiS lost this parliamentary majority in the 2023 election and its administration was replaced by Prime Minister Donald Tusk's coalition government, leading to a period of tense cohabitation with President Andrzej Duda, who has kept Tusk in check by using or threatening to use presidential veto. At stake in this election is the ability of Tusk's centrist, pro-EU coalition to consolidate power and press ahead with the implementation of its political agenda.

Perhaps the main takeaway from the first round was a surprisingly strong showing from right-wing candidates, which set the tone for the second leg of the election campaign. In a preview published before the first round of the election, we argued that run-off participants would use first-round results to try and define the position of the median voter in the policy space. This mechanism was in play during the now almost two weeks since the first round, pushing the narratives of both candidates to the right, in a continuation of a trend that became evident in the lead-up to the presidential race. In consequence, both Nawrocki and Trzaskowski have tried to portray themselves as advocates of free-market economic policies and have kept flexing their muscles on migration or foreign policy matters.

At face value, this should put Nawrocki in a favourable position ahead of the run-off. Conservative Law and Justice's candidate took second place with only a narrow gap to Trzaskowski, far-right Confederation's Sławomir Mentzen came third with a better-than-expected 14.8% of the vote, while ultranationalist Grzegorz Braun was fourth with 6.3%. The commentariat was quick to note that cumulative support for Nawrocki, Mentzen, Braun and minor right-wing candidates exceeded 50%. Based on these figures, one could speculate that it should be enough for Nawrocki to double down on his conservative messaging to get over the 50% threshold. Our best guess is that this was the reason behind a dramatic shift in local betting markets, which started showing Nawrocki as the favourite to win the race – although this has reversed since (see the chart pack at the bottom of this report).





Figure 1. Official first round voting results. Source: <u>National Electoral Commission</u> (PKW).

First round voting results			
Surname and names	Number of votes $\ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \$	Percentage of votes	Results
TRZASKOWSKI Rafał Kazimierz	6 147 797	31,36%	Candidate participates in the second round
NAWROCKI Karol Tadeusz	5 790 804	29,54%	Candidate participates in the second round
MENTZEN Sławomir Jerzy	2 902 448	14,81%	
BRAUN Grzegorz Michał	1 242 917	6,34%	
HOŁOWNIA Szymon Franciszek	978 901	4,99%	
ZANDBERG Adrian Tadeusz	952 832	4,86%	
BIEJAT Magdalena Agnieszka	829 361	4,23%	
STANOWSKI Krzysztof Jakub	243 479	1,24%	
SENYSZYN Joanna	214 198	1,09%	
JAKUBIAK Marek	150 698	0,77%	
BARTOSZEWICZ Artur	95 640	0,49%	
MACIAK Maciej	36 371	0,19%	
WOCH Marek Marian	18 338	0,09%	

Even before new important facts came to light in recent days, jumping to quick conclusions based on a simple addition of far-right votes may have been misguided. The conservative electorate is quite heterogenous, both between and within the support bases of different candidates. Crucially, Confederation is an umbrella party grouping together two alt-right movements, Mentzen's conservative libertarian New Hope and Krzysztof Bosak's nationalist National Movement, united by their contestation of the hegemonic KO-PiS duopoly. Grzegorz Braun parted ways with Confederation and attracts voters disillusioned with mainstream politics and media, some of whom may stay at home in the second round. Furthermore, the outperformance of right-wing candidates has had a significant psychological effect and mobilise centrist and left-wing voters, who refrained from voting in the first round, knowing that it was unlikely to decide the outcome. In any case, the ability of candidates to mobilise selected groups of voters may ultimately tip the balance.

On the other hand, it is no easy task for Trzaskowski to maintain his first-round lead. The results put him in a predicament, where he is forced into a difficult balancing act. Contrary to Nawrocki, who can focus on targeting right-wing voters, the Mayor of Warsaw will be trying to attract the supporters of both left-wing (Zandberg, Biejat, Senyszyn) and right-wing (Mentzen) candidates. Paradoxically, this is a difficult but not an impossible challenge. Trzaskowski's strategy has been to campaign on a liberal platform, both on economic and social issues in a bid to secure the support of younger urbanites, regardless of their first candidate of choice. Still, the balancing act is not a symmetric one, considering Mentzen's strong showing in the first round.

On that note, although its candidate failed to advance to the run-off, Confederation has gone to great lengths to capitalise on its co-leader Mentzen's individual result to strengthen its position ahead of the 2027 parliamentary election. Mentzen initially refused to endorse either Trzaskowski or Nawrocki and invited each of them for an interview broadcast on his YouTube channel. Each interview involved a discussion of a list of eight policy proposals compiled by Mentzen, which a candidate could then sign. Nawrocki agreed to all proposals,





even at the cost of having to repeatedly criticise the Law and Justice government and negotiated an extended phrasing of one of them. Trzaskowski agreed to four of them and negotiated the others, ultimately refusing to sign the document.

In the wake of the interviews, Mentzen refused to explicitly endorse any of the candidates, but dropped some hints regarding his preferences. He said that Karol Nawrocki signed his eight-point programme, which was an 'important gesture', even if the candidate lacks credibility. He also said that he 'saw no reason to vote for Rafał Trzaskowski' (a quote used as a lead in the post on Confederation's website) who 'just represents this leftist agenda, with which I don't agree.' Other senior Confederation officials have been open about their intention to vote 'against Trzaskowski' but opinion polls suggested that the party's electorate was divided. However, the interviews themselves may have been impactful, considering that they attracted very large audiences and gave both candidates an opportunity to interact with Confederation voters, who have less exposure to institutional news outlets.

The two weeks leading into the run-off have been marked by a series of apparent setbacks for Nawrocki's campaign over the span of just a few days, allowing Trzaskowski to return as bookmakers' favourite. Law and Justice's candidate indirectly admitted past participation in football hooligans' fights, admitted the possession of firearms for personal defence, and attracted attention by taking nicotine pouches during televised debates. A few days later, Onet reported that he may have been involved in arranging escorts for the guests of the Grand Hotel in Sopot while working there as a security guard during his student years. Nawrocki denied these allegations and said he would press charges against the outlet. However, his decision not to use an expedited procedure for election-related matters raised some eyebrows, weakening his line of defence. This has thrown some sand into the gears of Nawrocki's campaign but may also result in a divergence between exit polls and actual results by raising the perceived social cost of admitting to voting for Nawrocki while being interviewed by a pollster.

While it would be premature to rule out some unanticipated last-minute game-changer, there is limited scope for such surprises going forward, with the media space already saturated with stories about the candidates. Similar to the first round, Poland will observe election silence from Saturday midnight until local polling stations close at 20:00BST/21:00CEST on Sunday. Technically, voting will continue in some polling stations abroad (crucially in the US, where the conservative Polish diaspora tends to vote for Law and Justice) as well as those local stations where voters are still queueing (although no additional ones will be allowed to join the queues). Once election silence expires, major media outlets will release the results of an exit poll, followed by a late poll, with official results expected in the morning. Note that the precincts located in larger cities tend to report vote counts later on, which may result in Nawrocki taking an early lead and Trzaskowski playing catch-up afterwards.

Regardless of who wins the election, the margin of victory may potentially prove significant. Poland remains in a protracted constitutional crisis that can be traced back to 2015, when Law and Justice started enacting its controversial reforms of the judiciary. As a result, there is an unresolved dispute over who should confirm the validity of the election. There is an outside risk that if Nawrocki loses by a very narrow margin, Law and Justice could challenge the result through a sympathetic organ of the Supreme Court, which could exacerbate the existing political crisis and further destabilise the system.





Candidates

Rafał Trzaskowski

Profile: *Party*: Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform) – *National affiliation*: Koalicja Obywatelska (Civic Coalition) – *European affiliation*: European People's Party – *Ideology*: centrism, liberalism, pro-EU, big tent – *Background*: Mayor of Warsaw 2018-, MP 2015-2018, Minister of Administration and Digitalisation 2014-2015, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs 2013-2014, MEP 2009-2013, political scientist

Economy: Trzaskowski's economic agenda broadly aligns with the manifesto of the ruling Civic Coalition (KO), which he is deputy leader of. The party's general orientation is towards liberal, free-market policies, although it has embraced some of the social policies of its political rivals, supporting a boost to Law and Justice's flagship child benefit scheme, now known as Family 800+, and hiking wages in the public sector. In the course of his election campaign, Trzaskowski tried to present himself as someone who could facilitate the implementation of the Civic Coalition's liberal programme, with a <u>focus on de-regulation</u>, support for entrepreneurs, and increasing annual tax-free allowance. He promised to support a 'two-for-one' approach to regulations, meaning that each new regulation should imply the removal of two old ones.

• Bottom line: Calls for support for entrepreneurs, liberal economic policies.

Foreign Affairs: The Civic Coalition's approach to foreign affairs is founded on the doctrine of 'dual insurance policy', which requires maintaining good relations with both the EU and the US. Within the EU, the party has tended to side with the mainstream, trying to influence its direction from within. Trzaskowski generally subscribes to this approach, which he tried to substantiate through frequent references to his meetings with European leaders. In contrast with some Civic Coalition politicians, he has tried to avoid alienating the current US administration by avoiding any controversial statements in the lead-up to the US presidential election. Throughout the presidential campaign, he has also claimed that he maintained contacts in the Republican Party. In Eastern policy, Trzaskowski is an advocate of continued support for Ukraine, leading to its eventual admission to the EU and NATO, albeit he ruled out contributing troops to any peacekeeping mission in the country.

• Bottom line: Aligned with EU mainstream, advocates steadfast support for Ukraine.

Domestic Policy: Trzaskowski broadly supports the domestic agenda of his Civic Coalition, which places strong emphasis on holding the previous Law and Justice administration accountable for various alleged transgressions and on reversing some of its reforms. He pledged that some of the first bills he would sign into law as President would 'repair' the judicial system after its controversial overhaul by the PiS administration, liberalise stringent abortion regulations, end state funding for religious communities, and support the construction of public housing by local governments. In line with prevailing sentiment, Trzaskowski backed the proposal to stop paying out 'Family 800+' benefits to immigrants (in this context, mostly from Ukraine) who live but do not work and pay taxes in Poland, which would have little fiscal impact but reflects recent trends in social mood.

• Bottom line: Socially liberal, ally of the current governing coalition.





Karol Nawrocki

Profile: Party¹: Prawo i Sprawiedliwośc (Law and Justice) – National affiliation: Zjednoczona Prawica (United Right) – European affiliation: European Conservatives and Reformists – Ideology: conservatism, right-wing populism, Atlanticism, Euroscepticism – Background: Head of the Institute of National Remembrance 2021-, Director of the Museum of the Second World War 2017-2021, historian

Economy: Nawrocki's rarely commented on economic issues, placing more emphasis on foreign, historical and cultural affairs instead. Whenever he did speak on the economy, he demonstrated lack of consistency and a degree of discomfort with the subject matter (at one point asking for a clarification of the relationship between inflation and interest rates). On the one hand, Nawrocki branded himself as a 'guardian of the social accomplishments of the Law and Justice government'. The unprecedented social transfers launched by the party, including the flagship 'Family 500+' cash benefit scheme or relatively aggressive minimum wage hikes, formed the basis of its electoral successes in 2015 and 2019. On the other hand, Nawrocki announced a 'Tax Contract', his pledge to implement a slew of tax relief measures, which would disproportionately favour wealthier households and complicate the government's fiscal consolidation plans. Furthermore, Nawrocki signed off on a list of policy demands issued by Mentzen, which include commitments never to raise any taxes, and signalled his alignment with Confederation's libertarian economic agenda.

Bottom line: Calls for sweeping tax cuts mostly targeting families.

Foreign Affairs: Nawrocki's political camp generally prioritises Poland's strategic alliance with the United States as a lynchpin of national security. Within the European Union, it has sided with parties contesting the current European establishment, trying to influence the bloc's trajectory from outside of the mainstream. Law and Justice opposes tighter European integration and the delegation of any further national prerogatives to the European level. Nawrocki signalled his agreement with the Atlanticist approach and emphasised his alignment with the incumbent US administration. Nawrocki agrees with the general perception that Russia is the main threat to national security but has adopted a very assertive rhetoric towards Ukraine, alternating between outright disagreement to its integration into Western political structures and making it contingent on the resolution of bilateral historical disputes.

Bottom line: Prioritises relations with the US, more assertive towards Ukraine.

Domestic Policy: Nawrocki is an opponent of the incumbent government and would likely leverage the presidency to paralyse its activity. He holds conservative social views, including a refusal to return to the 'abortion compromise' expunged by the Constitutional Tribunal under the PiS administration, which triggered a wave of 'Black Protests' across the country. He also repeatedly signalled a relatively hardline stance on immigration.

• Bottom line: Socially conservative, opposed to the current governing coalition.

¹ Nawrocki is not a member of any political party and has been branded as a 'citizens' candidate' but is running with the political and material support of Law and Justice (PiS) and his candidacy was unveiled at the party's convention.





Campaign Pledges & Manifestos

Manifestos

The table below is a summary of main campaign pledges based on the manifestos published on the websites of both candidates.

Rafał Trzaskowski

- Central Industrial District
 Implementing a plan to invest
 PLN250bn into railways, roads,
 industry, infrastructure and local
 enterprises in the Subcarpathian
 region to turn it into an economic
 and security hub.
- A Pact for Security
 Holding National Security Council meetings at least once every 60 days, increasing defence spending to 5% of GDP, introducing a programme where veterans and exofficers would train new specialists, spending at least 50% of funds earmarked for the modernisation of the army in Poland.
- Economic Patriotism
 Active promotion of Polish firms abroad, simplifying commercial law and support for SMEs, protecting Polish farmers against unfair foreign competition, striving for energy independence through investment into renewables.
- Common Sense in Social Life
 Limiting access to the 'Family 800+'
 programme for Ukrainian citizens to
 those who live and work in Poland,
 liberalisation of abortion law, support
 for in vitro fertilisation programme,
 promotion of regional identities.
- Presidential Investment Fund
 Creating a PLN2bn/year fund to
 support disadvantaged towns and
 regions, with money disbursed after
 consultations with local
 communities.
- Deregulation Introducing a '1-for-2' rule, whereby each new regulation means removing two old ones, no new

Karol Nawrocki

- Welfare More Money in Polish Pockets
 Lowering electricity prices by 33%, supporting 'cheap coal energy', introducing annual pension indexation by at least PLN150/month and always above the rate of inflation
- A Normal State Poles' Issues
 Always Top of the List
 Polish citizens with priority in access to public services, withdrawal from the European Green Deal, stopping the promotion of progressive 'ideologies' in schools, holding a referendum on how to repair the judicial system
- A Secure Poland in Tested Alliances
 Withdrawing from the EU Pact on
 Migration and Asylum, increasing
 defence spending to 5% of GDP,
 increasing the size of the army to
 300,000 troops, introducing a new
 system of civil defence
- Development for Poland's Future
 Realising strategic projects (Central
 Communication Port, nuclear
 energy, ports, investment areas),
 local investments in each town,
 support for Polish farmers,
 upholding local currency, support for
 first-home buyers, establishing a
 PLN5bn/year fund to finance
 investment in groundbreaking
 technologies
- Low, Simple and Pro-Family Taxes

 a Tax Contract

 Blocking any attempts to increase taxes, lowering the VAT rate to 22%, introducing a personal income tax waver for families with 2 or more children, making entrepreneurs





regulations in implementing EU law, presumption of innocence of the taxpayer, digitalisation and greater transparency of the law

eligible for pro-family tax breaks, increasing the second income tax threshold to PLN140,000/year, scrapping the 'Belka tax' (capital gains tax) for income of up to PLN140,000/year, adding a ban on introducing a cadastral tax or inheritance tax to the Constitution

Mentzen's Policy Declaration

Below is the eight-point policy declaration given by Confederation's Sławomir Mentzen to each of the candidates. Nawrocki asked his interlocutor to add to the list his refusal to ratify the European Green Deal and the EU's trade deal with Mercosur, before signing the whole document. Trzaskowski tried to negotiate most of the proposals and deemed some of them pointless. At the end, he refused to sign the document.

	Rafał Trzaskowski	Karol Nawrocki
I will not sign any bill that would raise existing taxes, fees, or introduce new fiscal burdens.	√	√
I will not sign any bill limiting the use of cash and I will uphold the Polish zloty.	\checkmark	✓
I will not sign any bill limiting the freedom to express views which are not in breach of the Polish Constitution.	X	✓
I will not allow for the deployment of Polish troops to the Ukrainian territory.	✓	✓
I will not sign a bill ratifying Ukraine's accession to NATO.	X	✓
I will not sign any bill limiting Poles' access to weapons.	\checkmark	✓
I will not agree to the delegation of any further competencies of the authorities of the Republic of Poland to the organs of the European Union.	X	✓
I will not sign the ratification of any new EU treaties weakening Poland's role, e.g. through the weakening of the weight of its vote or removing the veto power.	X	✓





Scenario Analysis

Trzaskowski wins - 51% probability

Trzaskowski's victory would remove a key obstacle to the implementation of the governing coalition's agenda. This would have several separate but interrelated consequences. Firstly, it would increase pressure on the coalition to increase legislative output, by disarming reference to a potential presidential veto as an argument justifying lack of action. Secondly, it would increase coordination between the 'Big Palace' and 'Small Palace'², increasing the government's room for manoeuvre. Thirdly, it would create an incentive for the coalition to make good on its promises to bring the 2015-2023 PiS administration officials to account, as they could no longer fall back on presidential pardon. In summary, a win for Trzaskowski would translate into a consolidation of power by the current governing coalition with all its consequences, extending the process started by the 2023 parliamentary election.

As a deputy leader of the Civic Coalition, Trzaskowski could be expected to be broadly supportive of most of the current government's policies, despite his repeated claims that he would not automatically sign all legislation. This should result in some progress in reversing the controversial reforms implemented by the previous administration (most importantly in the judiciary) and holding its officials to account, approving some critical reforms promised by the Tusk government, or finalising pending ambassadorial nominations held up by President Andrzej Duda. Trzaskowski's win would also empower Prime Minister Tusk and his party vis-à-vis their allies, after the candidates fielded by junior coalition parties achieved underwhelming results.

Looking further afield, if elected, Trzaskowski would stay in office beyond the current parliamentary term, which ends in 2027. As a result, should the Civic Coalition fail to take the helm of a workable parliamentary coalition after the next election, he would find himself facing a potentially hostile successor government. If current opinion polls are anything to go by, a rival administration could theoretically be formed by Law and Justice and Confederation. If this is the case, Trzaskowski would spend the second half of his presidency having to reckon with a politically opposed government, which could lead to a repeat of the existing state of political paralysis – but in reverse.

Nawrocki wins - 49% probability

Nawrocki's victory would extend cohabitation between hostile centres of executive power, with a potential for escalation in these tensions. The continuation of a political deadlock would be facilitated by both mechanical constraints and motivational factors, i.e. both the use or threat to use significant veto powers accorded to the President, and the reduction of an incentive for the governing coalition to produce contentious legislation. There seems to be general consensus that there is a risk that Nawrocki could escalate the ongoing crisis in relations between the 'Big Palace' and 'Small Palace' into a heated conflict, testing the unwritten limits of presidential prerogatives. This amounts to a risk of further internal political destabilisation at a time of heightened geopolitical risk abroad.

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² Colloquial names for the Presidential Palace and the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, respectively.





Nawrocki's victory would complicate the medium-term policy outlook on several important fronts. Domestically, he would likely obstruct the government's initiatives. This would not only delay the potential resolution of the ongoing constitutional crisis (regardless of its form and the likely controversies around it) but would also prevent the realisation of the governing coalition's key campaign pledges. On the other hand, Nawrocki would exercise closer scrutiny of the government's actions, helping balance its power. Politically, his signalling of general ideological alignment with Confederation suggests that his presidency could help bring the far-right party and Law and Justice closer together. In foreign affairs, his victory would likely lead to incoherent messaging, making it more difficult to interact with foreign partners, particularly key EU stakeholders and Ukraine.

Otherwise, the details of a hypothesised Nawrocki presidency are difficult to predict, due to his lack of experience in politics and the relatively limited constructive powers associated with the office of the President. Outside of the expected confrontational relationship with the liberal, pro-EU government of Donald Tusk, there is much uncertainty around the contributions that Nawrocki could make as a head of state.

Opinion Polling Chartpack

Figure 2. POLITICO Poll of Polls – Poland presidential election voting intentions. Source: POLITICO. Retrieved on the 28th of May 2025.

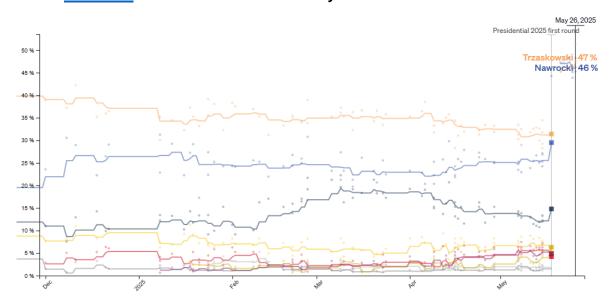






Figure 3. Implied probabilities of victory by remaining presidential candidates based on betting market pricing. Source: Polymarket. Retrieved on the 28th of May 2025.

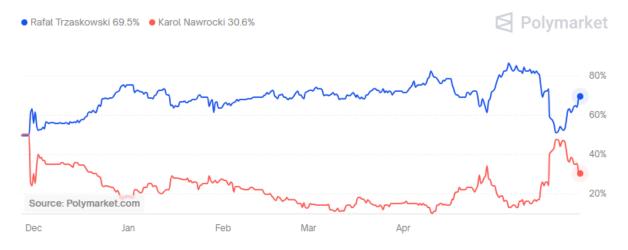
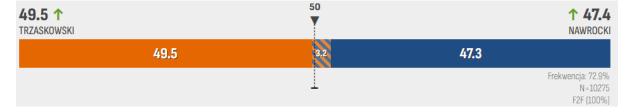


Figure 4. Odds of the victory of each remaining presidential candidate given by selected Polish bookmakers. Sources: Fortuna/STS/SuperBet/Betfan. Retrieved on the 28th of May 2025.

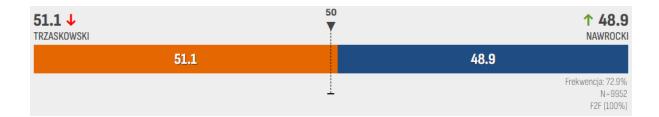
Bookmaker	Trzaskowski Win	Nawrocki Win
Fortuna	1.80	2.00
STS	1.80	2.00
SuperBet	1.80	2.00
Betfan	1.75	2.00

Figure 5. Presidential run-off prediction based on ewybory's 'street survey' using face-to-face interviews. The top chart shows the distribution of support including undecided voters (striped region in the middle). The bottom chart shows the distribution of support excluding undecided voters. Source: ewybory.eu. Retrieved on the 28th of May 2025, last update at 22:30CEST.









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