



# KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM POLAND'S LOCAL ELECTIONS

**Ruling bloc expands control over key cities while rival PiS secures largest overall share of votes**

**9 April 2024**

## **SUMMARY**

In the first electoral contest since Poland's parliamentary elections last October, the local elections held on 7<sup>th</sup> April have been hailed as a victory by both the senior ruling Civic Coalition of Prime Minister Donald Tusk and the lead opposition Law and Justice party (PiS) of Jarosław Kaczyński.

Although the lead opposition PiS secured the largest share of overall votes (34.3% against KO's 30.6%), Tusk's party – despite failing to overtake PiS as the largest party – emerged victorious from the majority of regional elections. KO won in nine of Poland's sixteen regions and so is on track to form coalition majorities in 11 of the 16 regional assemblies. KO candidate and incumbent Warsaw Mayor Rafał Trzaskowski also secured re-election with a convincing result in the Polish capital, while other largest cities will remain under opposition control. Looking ahead, Trzaskowski is seen as a possible contender for the next Presidential elections in mid-2025.

Critics argue that, during the early months of the third Tusk Government, politics has overshadowed policy, given the new government's extensive focus on sweeping away the remnants of the PiS era. Heading into the parliamentary term, policy initiatives are likely to receive more attention, but this will most likely come only after the EU parliamentary elections. While Aretera expects Poland's ideologically and structurally diverse ruling coalition to remain united by their staunch opposition to PiS, political stability may be impacted by the aftermath of both the local and EU elections, potentially along ideological rifts between the junior coalition Lewica and the rest of the ruling bloc.



**Below, Aretera provides further insight into the key takeaways from Poland's local elections, as well as its political and policy implications.**

## POST-ELECTION LANDSCAPE

On 7<sup>th</sup> April, Polish voters went to the polls to elect metropolitan and local mayors, as well as local and regional representatives. The elections marked the first electoral contest since the national-conservative Law and Justice party (PiS) fell out of power last October, after Donald Tusk's Civic Coalition (KO) formed a coalition government with the centrist-agrarian Third Way alliance and the left-wing Lewica four months ago.

With 100% of the votes counted and at a turnout of 52%, PiS secured the largest share of overall votes (34.3% versus KO's 30.6%). However, the senior coalition party KO emerged victorious from the majority of regional elections, winning in nine of Poland's sixteen regions and so being on track to form coalition majorities in eleven regional assemblies. KO emerged as the largest group in the assemblies of the Kujawy-Pomerania, Lower Silesia, Lubusz, Opole, Pomerania, Silesia, Warmia-Masuria, Wielkopolska and West Pomerania regions, while PiS secured the first result in seven regions, including Łódź, Lublin, Małopolska, Masovia, Subcarpathia, Podlaskie and Świętokrzyskie.

As widely expected, KO candidate and incumbent Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski has secured re-election with a convincing result in the Polish capital, securing 57.4% against his PiS rival's 20.3% and further increasing his majority. KO-linked candidates also secured the mayoral seat in other key cities, including Łódź and Gdańsk, while other larger cities such as Kraków, Poznań and Wrocław are headed for run-off votes.

## ELECTION RESULTS BREAKDOWN

Election Results Breakdown & Municipalities' Distribution				
Party/Alliance	Votes (%)	Number of Local Representatives	Number of Regional First-Place Results	Affiliation
<b>Law and Justice (PiS)</b>	34.3	239	7	Opposition
<b>Civic Coalition (KO)</b>	30.6	210	9	Government
<b>Third Way</b>	14.3	80	0	Government
<b>Confederation</b>	7.2	6	0	Opposition
<b>Lewica</b>	6.3	8	0	Government

(Source: National Electoral Commission of Poland. Turnout: 52%)

## BOTH SIDES CLAIM VICTORY

Both the senior coalition KO and the lead opposition party PiS are claiming victory in the elections. PiS can credibly claim that it has re-affirmed its position as the country's most popular political formation, after recent domestic polls suggested that its support had dropped below 30%. Defying these polls, PiS has managed to rally and sustain its core vote, ensuring the largest share of overall votes. In view of several PiS mayoral and local council candidates who ran as independents, actual popular support for the party may stand at a somewhat higher level, while PiS can also take credit for preserving its strong rural support, despite recent attempts from the KO to attract countryside voters along agricultural issues.

Although the KO failed to overtake PiS as the largest party, it has not only expanded its vote share in the Polish capital but also the number of regions where it has the highest share of votes. Furthermore, the senior ruling party is on course to control an even higher share (11 of the 16) regional assemblies. As for the remaining ruling parties, the second-largest coalition partner Third Way lost some votes compared to last year's parliamentary elections, however its lower result was somewhat predictable, given their lack of candidates in several cities.

From a national perspective, a key takeaway is that KO still needs Third Way's support in all regional assemblies to secure majorities, again making them the kingmakers of the election. Encouraged by its electoral performance, Third Way has announced that it will run alone in the upcoming EU parliamentary elections and not in an alliance with the KO. For the junior coalition partner Lewica, the results are arguably weak although unsurprising, since the bloc has always been politically weak in local elections. At the same time, they have maintained their traditional support in cities, as expected.

## ELECTION RESULTS IN KEY CITIES

Local Mayoral Election Results				
City	Winner	Party	Votes (%)	Affiliation
Warsaw	Rafal Trzaskowski	Civic Coalition (KO)	57.4	Government
Kraków*	Aleksander Miszalski	Civic Coalition (KO)	37.2	Government
Wrocław*	Jacek Sutryk	Independent (Lewica)	34.3	Government
Łódź	Hanna Zdanowska	Civic Coalition (KO)	59.3	Government
Poznań*	Jacek Jaśkowiak	Civic Coalition (KO)	43.4	Government

(Source: National Electoral Commission of Poland. Kraków, Wrocław and Poznań are heading for run-off votes.)

## SHORT-TERM POLITICAL & POLICY IMPACT

Critics argue that the early months of the third Tusk Government<sup>1</sup> have been a period in which politics has overshadowed policy, with the new government focused on investigating alleged wrongdoings of PiS-era officials and sweeping away the remnants of the PiS era. Heading into the parliamentary term, policy initiatives are likely to receive more attention, but this will most likely come after the EU parliamentary elections. Given the clear political benefits of doing so, the government may yet choose to double down on investigating the former, PiS-led government.

With the local elections now over, the issue of securing Poland's post-pandemic EU recovery funds, worth nearly €60 billion in grants and preferential loans, will likely receive even more significance. The government is intent on demonstrating that – unlike PiS – it can efficiently represent Polish interests in Brussels. Following PiS' failure on this front (due to its conflict with the EU along the rule of law and other issues), the Tusk Cabinet secured the first tranche of Poland's recovery funds (€6.3 billion) in February, with the government now working to secure additional recovery funding for August/September.

<sup>1</sup> See [here](#) for Aretera's overview of the Tusk Government's first 100 days from March 2024

In recent months, Poland has been struck by several waves of farmers' protests organized against cheap Ukrainian grain imports and the agricultural obligations of the European Green Deal. Heading into the EU election campaign, agriculture will likely be among the top political (and policy) issues, given the KO's failure to swing the rural vote. This may prompt a KO pivot towards a more conservative direction, at least until the EU elections. Accordingly, the Tusk Cabinet may prioritise negotiations with farmers' groups as its previous agreement with agricultural organizations failed to appease a significant proportion of the protesters.

## LOOKING AHEAD

While Aretera expects Poland's ideologically and structurally diverse ruling coalition to remain united by their staunch opposition to PiS, political stability may be impacted by the aftermath of the local and EU elections. Prior to the local elections, the KO – in a bid to overtake PiS as the largest party on their own – notably rejected a joint run with the left-wing Lewica for regional assemblies, causing problems for a bloc that generally struggles in securing municipal and regional representation.

Other contentious issues within the ruling coalition may include addressing ideological challenges such as reversing Poland's near-total abortion ban, which is becoming an increasingly visible point of disagreement between the more conservative Third Way and Lewica. While the issue has so far taken a backseat, strong ideological differences could come to the fore.

Another important takeaway from the local elections is the convincing victory of re-elected Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski, increasingly seen as the next KO candidate for President in mid-2025. Trzaskowski, who ran for President in 2020 but lost against the PiS-allied incumbent Andrzej Duda, is a key political figure to watch going forward.

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