



POLISH PARTIES GEAR UP FOR HIGH-STAKES PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Parties confirm candidates in anticipation of a tight presidential race in mid-2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Poland's two main political formations – Prime Minister Donald Tusk's senior ruling Civic Coalition (KO) and the lead opposition Law and Justice party (PiS) – have confirmed their candidates for the upcoming presidential elections in mid-2025.

Following a primary election among KO members, Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski has defeated Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski by securing an overwhelming 74.5%. The lead opposition PiS was quick to react by announcing their own candidate: Karol Nawrocki, a state institute historian and a political newcomer. Additional candidates in the race so far include Szymon Hołownia, the speaker of the lower house, Sławomir Mentzen, the leader of the right-wing opposition and economic libertarian Confederation, as well as Marek Jakubiak, a former PiS-linked MP.

The upcoming presidential election comes more than a year after three electoral coalitions (the Tusk-led KO, the centrist-liberal Third Way and the left-wing Lewica) scored a combined victory against the PiS-led United Right alliance. Accordingly, the electoral contest holds huge significance as the President – in addition to representing Poland abroad and holding the right to initiate legislation – has extensive veto powers in the country's legislature. Poland's outgoing President Duda – as a key PiS ally – has vetoed several pieces of legislation endorsed by the incumbent ruling coalition, including a proposed judicial reform, which remains a central part of the Tusk Government's agenda for the current legislative term.

A PiS victory in the presidential elections could extend the protracted battles between parliament and the presidential office, with Nawrocki likely to extensively exercise his presidential veto powers if elected as head of state. Conversely, a KO win could ensure a smoother legislative process until the end of the current parliamentary term. Accordingly, the future of several policy proposals depends on the outcome of this crucial electoral contest.



Below, we provide a detailed overview of Poland's upcoming presidential elections.

SENIOR PARTIES ROLL OUT PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

Following a historic parliamentary election in October 2023 which resulted in a change of government after eight years, Poland is gearing up for a much-anticipated presidential election in mid-2025 as Andrzej Duda, the incumbent head of state, will step down after serving two consecutive terms as President. The upcoming election holds huge significance as the President – in addition to representing Poland abroad and holding the right to initiate legislation – has extensive veto powers to be used against proposals adopted in the country's legislature.

On 23rd November, Prime Minister Donald Tusk's senior ruling Civic Coalition (KO) officially nominated Warsaw Mayor Rafał Trzaskowski to be KO's candidate. Trzaskowski's nomination comes after primaries organized within the KO membership, in which the Warsaw Mayor defeated Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski, who will remain in government. 74.6% of an estimated 22,000 KO members supported Trzaskowski against 25.3% for Sikorski. Trzaskowski is expected to announce his presidential campaign manifesto in early January, while Sikorski was quick to fully endorse his primary opponent.

This comes as Poland's lead opposition party, the national-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party, announced on 24th November that Karol Nawrocki, a state institute historian and a political newcomer, will take on the KO candidate in the race for the Presidency. Officially, Nawrocki will run as an independent but with support from the opposition PiS.

COMPETING ELECTORAL STRATEGIES

The senior ruling KO, which governs in a coalition with the centrist-liberal Third Way alliance and the left-wing Lewica, decided to open the selection procedure of presidential candidates by organizing US-style primary elections and has thus managed to largely dominate the public discourse about the prospective candidates.

In turn, the lead opposition PiS was forced to react by quickly announcing their own candidate. Local observers argue the party deliberately picked a largely unknown figure who will not be hurt by his political legacy. PiS also chose to support a (nominally) independent figure in a bid to attract younger (and generally PiS-sceptic) voters. This tactic has been employed by PiS in several previous national elections.

Trzaskowski previously ran for President in 2020 but narrowly lost against the incumbent Duda in the second round. His defeat, however, did not significantly impact his political future: he was re-elected Mayor of Warsaw with overwhelming support in April's local elections and his popularity, combined with his appeal to the electorate in general, has led to a second presidential bid.

Nawrocki is currently serving as the head of Poland's National Institute of Remembrance (IPN) and has confirmed that he will not step down from his role because of the presidential election campaign. This will potentially lead to legal proceedings as the head of the IPN has to be politically independent by law.

OTHER CANDIDATES

In addition to Trzaskowski and Nawrocki, further presidential candidates include Szymon Holownia, the leader of the junior coalition Third Way alliance and the speaker of the Polish lower house (Marshall of the Sejm), Sławomir Mentzen, the leader of the right-wing opposition and economic libertarian Confederation, as well as Marek Jakubiak, a former PiS-linked MP.

Recent polls suggest that Trzaskowski is comfortably ahead in the polls with nearly 50%, with Nawrocki in a distant second place with 27%. If no candidate is able to garner more than half of the popular vote in the first round, a second round will be held between the two frontrunners. With an estimated six months to go, the presidential election is widely expected to be much closer than current polls suggest.

LOOKING AHEAD


Poland's parliamentary parties are gearing up for the presidential elections more than a year after the coalition (KO, Third Way and Lewica) scored a combined victory against the PiS-led United Right alliance. Following years of rivalry at the polls, KO slightly overtook the national-conservative PiS in June's EU elections in terms of popular support, securing 37.1% against 36.2% for PiS. Recent polls suggest that Tusk's party remains (slightly) more popular, by 2-3% on average.

Looking at the upcoming presidential election, the first year of Tusk's third Cabinet¹ has been overshadowed by its efforts to reverse PiS-era policies over alleged democratic backsliding. This continues to create protracted political battles between the government and the opposition, with critics arguing that policy work has taken a back seat and the senior ruling KO is yet to follow up on most of its pre-election promises. President Duda – as a key PiS ally – has vetoed several pieces of legislation endorsed by the incumbent ruling coalition, including a proposed judicial reform, which remains a central part of the Tusk Government's agenda for the current legislative term.

A PiS victory in the presidential elections could foresee protracted battles between parliament and the presidential office, with Nawrocki likely to extensively exercise his presidential veto powers if elected as head of state, while a KO win could ensure a smoother legislative process until the end of the current parliamentary term. Accordingly, the future of several policy proposals depends on the outcome of this crucial electoral contest.

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¹ See [here](#) for our overview of the first year of the third Tusk Cabinet from November 2024