

2025

Presidential Election in Poland

A Comparative Analysis of Candidates' Programmes: Rule of Law, Democracy, and European Engagement



DEMOCRACY
REPORTING
INTERNATIONAL



re:constitution Exchange and Analysis on Democracy
and the Rule of Law in Europe

STIFTUNG
MERCATOR

This study has been prepared by Dr Maria Skóra, re:constitution Fellow, Policy Fellow at Das Progressive Zentrum and Research Fellow at Institut für Europäische Politik, with contributions from Jakub Jaraczewski, Research Coordinator at Democracy Reporting International.

May 2025

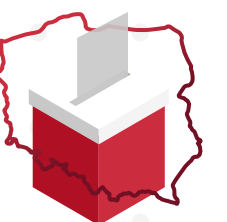
Executive Summary

In May 2025, Poland is facing a presidential election, which will likely decide the country's future. After eight years of reforms implemented by the previous United Right coalition, the process of restoring the rule of law and some other democratic institutions, such as the media, is far from complete. One reason for the limited success of democratic restoration is the turbulent cohabitation of the new government with the President. Therefore, the upcoming presidential election will be critical for the success or failure of this process.

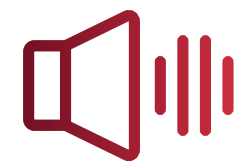
The research looked at the attitudes and opinions of selected presidential candidates towards the rule

of law and democracy. The analysis is based on presidential manifestos and other official communications of the selected six presidential candidates. The choice was based on the highest average support in available opinion polls: 1. Rafał Trzaskowski (KO); 2. Karol Nawrocki (PiS); 3. Sławomir Mentzen (Konfederacja), 4. Szymon Hołownia (Polska 2050); 5. Magdalena Biejat (Lewica); and 6. Adrian Zandberg (Razem).

This selection covers the full political spectrum, ranging from the new/far-right through centrist parties to the competing left-wing formations, and represents major parties present in the Polish Parliament.



Key findings



Tone of the campaign

The presidential campaign revolved mainly around the economy, security, and defence. Official manifestos covered, to a different extent, the rule of law repair, democratic institutions and processes, the media, anti-corruption, and Poland's international engagement. Issues referring to the functioning of the state and civil liberties were often normatively and even ideologically tainted.



Rule of law

There was a visible rift between Karol Nawrocki, the candidate supported by the previous governing party, and the rest of the candidates regarding their opinions about the rule of law repair and the public media. While he saw the actions of the current government as the main source of chaos in the judiciary and constitutional crisis, others were critical of the reforms adopted after 2015.



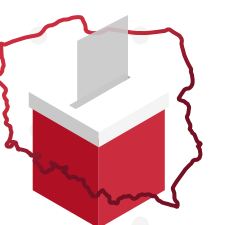
Democratic procedures and institutions

Candidates presented diverse visions of the future presidency: synchronised cooperation (Trzaskowski); non-partisan consensus seeking (Hołownia); constructive cohabitation (Biejat, Zandberg); anti-system/anti-establishment style (Mentzen); and open conflict (Nawrocki).



The media

In particular, the candidates of parties other than PiS and KO stressed the necessity to free the public media from the permanent political influence and pro-government bias, regardless of who is in power. All candidates except Karol Nawrocki criticised the rapid politicisation of the public media after 2015.





Transparency and corruption

Corruption was not a first-tier topic in the campaign, but all candidates demanded to curb state capture, nepotism, and patronage in staffing state-owned enterprises, as well as fight the instrumentalising of public assets for immediate political gains. Adrian Zandberg was also particularly vocal on regulating party financing and campaign fundraising.



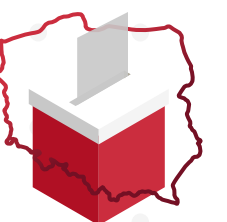
International engagement

The opinions on Poland's international engagement varied significantly: from the most pro-European attitude advocating for more integration (Hołownia), through a more proactive role of Poland in the EU (Trzaskowski and Biejat), to Eurosceptic agenda rejecting key EU policies (Nawrocki and Mentzen) or calling for more regional alliances (Zandberg). Due to a tense geopolitical situation, some candidates were also strongly endorsing international defence structures, like NATO (Trzaskowski, Hołownia, Biejat, and Nawrocki) as opposed to more isolationist and disengagement views (Mentzen).



Ideological values

Some manifestos were visibly ideological. A progressive, left-wing orientation manifested especially in promoting equality, freedom, and tolerance (Biejat and Zandberg), as opposed to prioritising national and Christian values and openly hostile attitudes to immigrants (Nawrocki and Mentzen). Economic and social nativism was to a different extent detectible in candidates on the right spectrum of the political scene (Trzaskowski, Nawrocki, and Mentzen). Only Hołownia avoided ideological statements, presenting himself as the candidate of the apolitical middle.



I. Introduction

In May 2025, Poland is facing a presidential election, which will likely decide the country's future. After eight years of reforms implemented by the previous United Right coalition, Poland is still undergoing the process of restoring the rule of law and some other democratic institutions, such as the media, with mixed results. One reason for the limited success of this attempted democratic front-sliding is a fierce political competition and the resistance of elements of the previous government within the system. In particular, the cohabitation of the new government with the President has been particularly turbulent and conflictual. The upcoming presidential election will be critical for the success or failure of this process.

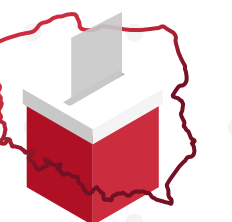
Hence, the main objective of this report is to identify the attitudes towards the rule of law and democratic institutions of chosen presidential candidates representing a broad spectrum of political ideologies towards the initiated process. The goal is to anticipate the possible course of presidential actions, depending on different election outcomes.

Background

During a little more than a year and a half, parliamentary, regional, European, and presidential elections took place consecutively, leading to a state of permanent campaigning which left a long-lasting impact on the Polish society. On the one hand, it resulted in growing polarisation between the two main competitors - Civic Coalition (KO) and Law and Justice (PiS), to a lesser extend in the ideological dimension (policy positions) and visibly in the [affective aspect](#) (emotions and opinions), slowly pushing these two segments of electorate into pernicious polarisation ([division into mutually distrustful political camps in which political identity becomes a social identity](#)). On the other hand, popular fatigue with the stagnating political scene opened a window of opportunity for new political actors to emerge, like the centre-right Polska 2050 and the far-right *Konfederacja*.

This year's presidential vote is the final milestone in the election marathon continuing since 2023. While

the 2023 parliamentary election resulted in a change of government, the 2025 presidential election will decide about the reversibility versus sustainability of the new political course. The change of government also initiated the process of undoing eight years of reforms undertaken by the previous United Right coalition that severely affected the judiciary and other democratic institutions. In the period between 2015 and 2023, the [World Justice Project](#) reported particular backdrops in Poland in areas such as *Constraints on government powers* (from 0.77 to 0.53), *Open government* (from 0.72 to 0.58), and *Fundamental rights* (from 0.76 to 0.61). Freedom House indicated major setbacks during the PiS time in government regarding the transparency of government and independence of the judiciary, as well as identified other breaches of civil liberties: media freedom, academic freedom, and freedom of assembly. Over time, the [Global Freedom Score](#) for Poland went down from 89/100 in 2017 to 80/100 in 2024, and the [Democracy Percentage](#) regressed from 80% in 2015 to 57% in 2024. Poland's rank was reduced from "consolidated" to a "semi-consolidated democracy".



Presidential elections

The Polish political system is characterised as a parliamentary one with a specific role of a directly-elected President as the Head of State and the Prime Minister as the Head of Government jointly exercising the executive power. However, the competences of the President only allow him to actively influence policy-making in a limited way. Simultaneously, the in-built checks and balances give him the possibility to successfully confront the parliamentary majority by vetoing legislation or referring bills passed by the Parliament to the Constitutional Tribunal for review.

Hence, winning the presidential office will be fateful for the rule of law repair and beyond: overcoming constitutional crisis, reforming the judiciary, and remedying problems with other pillars of the democratic system, like the media.

The first round of the presidential election is scheduled for Sunday, 18th May 2025. Should it not deliver

a clear winner who received more than 50% of the votes, it will likely be followed by a second round two weeks later, featuring the two candidates with the highest initial results.

Choice of candidates

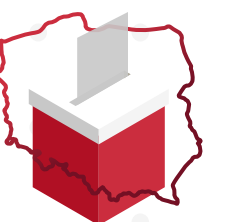
In the end, [13 candidates](#) managed to register for the ballot. However, only a few of them demonstrate enough popular and partisan support that, with varying probability, could translate into realistic competition for the office of the President.

In this report, we will compare selected candidates based on the highest average support in [available opinion polls](#): 1. Rafał Trzaskowski, supported by KO; 2. Karol Nawrocki, supported by PiS; 3. Sławomir Mentzen, supported by Konfederacja, 4. Szymon Hołownia, supported by Polska 2050; 5. Magdalena Biejat, supported by Lewica; and 6. Adrian Zandberg, supported by Razem.

These six candidates not only cover the full political spectrum, ranging from the far-right through centrist parties to the competing left-wing formations, but also represent key parties present in the Polish Parliament. Importantly, three of six candidates are supported by the governing parties: Civic Coalition (KO) and its coalition partners Polska 2050 and Lewica, which could herald a potentially more cooperative attitude of the future President towards the government. On the contrary, Nawrocki, Mentzen, and Zandberg represent parliamentary opposition; however, with varied attitudes toward government policies.

Thematic focus

Although the presidential campaign revolves mainly around the topics of economy (fiscal policy and investments) and security and defence, at the centre of this report lies the future of the rule of law repair in Poland. However, to reflect the complexity of the process, the analysis will also look at other pillars of the democratic



system as well as the quality of governance and integration into intergovernmental structures.

The rule of law repair refers to tackling the situation of the Constitutional Tribunal, the Supreme Court, the National Council of the Judiciary, and the status of so-called neo-judges appointed in a defective procedure in 2018 and after.

Pillars of the democratic system will be analysed by references to the amendments of democratic institutions and processes, for example, limiting or extending their competences or proposed constitutional amendments. Here, the critical situation of the media in Poland will also be covered, due to the prolonged status of crisis of public broadcasters TVP and Polskie Radio, competence chaos between media regulators (the National Council of

Radio Broadcasting and Television vs the Council of National Media) and the attempted attacks on independent private broadcasters.

The quality of governance will be measured by envisaged measures against corruption.

Finally, Poland's integration in intergovernmental organisations will be analysed from the perspective of its engagement and cooperation with the EU and other bodies, such as the OSCE or the Council of Europe.

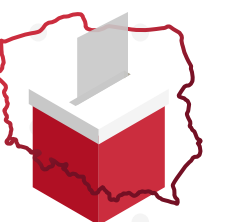
Methodology and sources

This report is based on content analysis of the official communication of the six chosen presidential candidates. Their attitudes toward the rule of law repair and

other democratic institutions will be decoded along the five thematic dimensions presented above.

Sources used are official manifestos and public statements, provided in press conferences, interviews, and communication via official social media channels of selected presidential candidates. Helpful are also fact-checking services (like demagog.pl) and election quizzes offering to compare individual voter preferences with official answers to salient policy issues submitted by candidates (like Latarnik wyborczy).

Although not all presidential candidates are officially supported by political parties, we sometimes expand the choice of sources beyond the presidential campaign and direct communication of the candidates only, citing also official communication of the political parties and original statements of the candidates from the past.



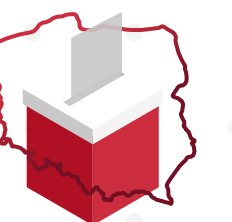
II. Comparative analysis of candidates

The key policy positions of each major candidate are compared below, along the five identified thematic pillars, and adding additional information on topics relevant from the point of view of the scope of the report, however, not included elsewhere.

Official manifestos covered, to a different extent, the rule of law repair, democratic institutions and processes, the media, anticorruption, and Poland's international engagement. The less popular the candidates, the more extensive their programmes are in an attempt to

effectively appeal to the general public. Often, issues referring to the functioning of the state and civil liberties were normatively and even ideologically tainted.

Overall, none of the programmes comprehensively covered the thematic spectrum of interest for this report. Hence, to learn more about the candidate's position on issues relevant for this report, it was necessary to resort to his/her public statements, interviews, and other available materials. The source of information is always provided.



Rafał Trzaskowski

About the candidate: Rafał Trzaskowski has served as the Mayor of Warsaw since 2018, the current term being his second in office. This is the second time he has run for President. In 2020, as the candidate supported by KO, the major opposition party, his campaign was centred around the rule of law. As the former MEP and State Secretary in the Foreign Ministry responsible for European Affairs, [he had been very vocal](#) during the fiercest phase of the clash between the European Commission and the PiS-led Polish government, which led to freezing selected EU funds for Poland. As the mayor of Warsaw, he also hosted the [meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council](#) as part of the 2025 Polish Presidency. He also enjoys the official support of Prime Minister Donald Tusk and [Adam Bodnar](#), the Minister of Justice and the main architect of the rule of law repair in Poland.

Official programme: [The official presidential manifesto](#) presents six main campaign issues. Yet, unlike in his previous campaign, there are no direct mentions of the rule of law, democracy, and the media in the official

programme, focusing instead on the economy, security, and chosen social policy issues. There are indirect references to strengthening the position of Poland in the EU and endorsing consultations and public town halls on public investments. On civil liberties and human rights, abortion law and regional identities are mentioned, as well as restricting some social rights to some categories of immigrants.

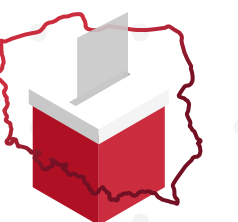
Specific positions

I. Rule of law

There is no direct mention of the rule of law in the manifesto. However, long before the 2025 presidential campaign, Trzaskowski expressed opinions stressing the importance of an independent judiciary and the urge to repair the rule of law in Poland. In a [television interview](#), he expressed his willingness to seek a compromise in line with the Constitution to overcome the stalemate in the judiciary, but without much further

details. It is to be expected that he would act in cooperation with the new Justice Minister in his attempts to normalise the status of the so-called “neo-judges”, appointed in a defective procedure.

Regarding other elements of the judicial system, since 2015, Trzaskowski has been critical of the Constitutional Tribunal in its current setup. For example, he opposed the [2020 ruling on abortion rights](#) as “disgraceful” and [criticised the choice of Bogdan Świączkowski](#), the former State Prosecutor under Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro, for the President of the Constitutional Court as continued polarisation and partisanship of the Tribunal. On the Supreme Court, while Trzaskowski expressed [his trust in the sound judgment](#) regarding the validation of election results, he also supported the “incidental law”, responding to the crisis in the Supreme Court caused by the defective appointment of some of its judges. This amendment calls for the 15 most senior judges in the Supreme Court from the Supreme Court's Criminal, Civil, and Labor Chambers to rule on the validity of the elections.



In one of the interviews, Trzaskowski revealed that, next to the government provisions, he prepared several compromise solutions on the judiciary and the status of the so-called “neo-judges. As President, he would fight to ensure the clarity and certainty of rulings, also reconciling different opinions on the current status of the judiciary, in search of a supra-partisan consensus.

II. Democratic institutions and processes

There is no specific reference to democratic institutions and processes in the official manifesto. Yet, in interviews and during televised debates, Trzaskowski often criticised the situation when the President represented the governing party. However, although supported by and a member of the currently governing PO, he vowed to remain non-partisan and independent in case of presidential victory. He also committed to following merit-based criteria in evaluating current staffing of public institutions, like the National Radio and Television Council, or Ambassadors to third countries.

III. Media freedom

Since his campaign in 2020, Rafał Trzaskowski has been critical of the quality of the public media and sceptical about how they fulfilled their mission to provide citizens with neutral access to information. In 2020, he called public TV partisan, spreading party propaganda, hate, and persecuting individuals (political opponents). In 2023, he gave a speech in the Sejm called “Words are consequential”, pleading to liquidate the info channel of the public broadcaster and abolish the radio and television license fee. On the contrary, in 2025, the candidate did not directly thematise the media in his campaign, manifesto, or official communication.

Relevant for the status of the public media today was the controversy during the first presidential debate in Końskie, directly involving Trzaskowski’s campaign. It was unclear who the organisers were: the public broadcaster TVP or the campaign of Rafał Trzaskowski. Initially scheduled for only two leading candidates, the programme gave other candidates little time to prepare and join.

This event sparked outrage about the continued risk of utilising public broadcasters for partisan goals, with his opponents accusing the public media of partisan bias and illegitimate support for one candidate.

IV. Anticorruption

As the mayor of Warsaw, in 2019, Rafał Trzaskowski introduced the urban anticorruption package, with guidelines and a code of ethical conduct. After the electoral defeat of Law and Justice, he advocated for liquidating the Central Anti-corruption Office, due to its politicisation, and shifting its competences to the Police. In the 2025 campaign, Trzaskowski did not refer to anti-corruption policies. The manifesto merely proposes to launch a Presidential Investment Fund, which would include local public consultations as a basis for investment decisions, to ensure transparency in decision-making, together with residents.

Relevant for the report is the fact that Rafał Trzaskowski and Karol Nawrocki received the most private



[donations](#) for their campaigns. Trzaskowski's campaign was particularly supported by the representatives of business and some PO politicians.

V. Engagement with the EU and other intergovernmental bodies

Between 2009–2013, Trzaskowski was an MEP for the European People's Party, the largest and oldest group in the European Parliament, presenting a clear pro-European stance. In his previous statements, Trzaskowski often expressed [his understanding and support for EU actions](#) aimed at curbing rule of law breaches in Poland.

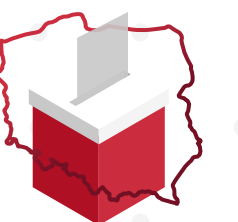
However, the 2025 manifesto does not mention other international engagements of Poland beyond the EU, and does not refer to the EU in the rule of law or democracy context. [The strong position of Poland in the EU](#) should materialise mainly through research and development, boosting economic growth. Another

mention of the EU refers to the direct application of EU law without additional national regulations as part of the deregulation plan.

VI. Miscellaneous: values and ideological orientation

The manifesto also superficially mentions [issues related to civil liberties](#). It foresees the protection and promotion of regional identity and vows to liberalise the controversial abortion law. As the mayor of Warsaw, Trzaskowski also signed [the LGBTQ+ Charter](#) in 2019 and supported Pride parades in the city. However, in the first televised candidates' debate in 2025, Trzaskowski did not want [to keep the rainbow flag](#) given to him by one of the opponents.

At the same time, the manifesto reveals nativist sentiments, invoking limits to social rights of immigrants regarding access to child benefits, however, mentioning only one nationality in particular (Ukraine).



Karol Nawrocki

About the candidate: Karol Nawrocki is the only presidential candidate acting as a “non-partisan and civic” one, not a party member and not holding any political or elected positions. He was the director of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk and currently serves as the head of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). Next to extending voter reach and mobilising different political circles, the choice of this strategy might have also been a manoeuvre to circumvent the [withheld public subsidy for the PiS party](#). In Poland, political parties are partly supported by the state budget. Despite detected irregularities in the PiS party's expenditures during the 2023 parliamentary elections, the State Election Commission (PKW) finally approved their financial report. Yet, the payout was delayed, potentially affecting the campaigning potential of the candidate. Hence, as damage control, Nawrocki is not formally affiliated but merely supported by a political party.

Official programme: [The official presidential manifesto](#) is built on five thematic pillars focusing on the

economy and security, however, also assuming more normative approaches to redistribution, civil liberties, and Poland's international engagement, underpinned with patriotic and national tones. The manifesto directly refers to the “chaos in the courts”; otherwise, there are no direct references to democracy, the media, or anticorruption measures. On the contrary, there are direct references to some EU policies and spending on defence as a NATO member.

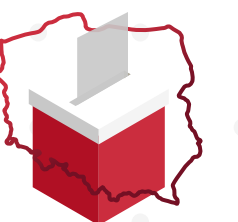
Specific positions

I. Rule of law

The candidate placed the issue of repairing the rule of law high in his campaign, presenting a very negative opinion on the state of the judiciary post-2023, undermining the legality and legitimacy of measures undertaken since the change of government. In the chapter called [“A normal state”](#), the manifesto refers to the “chaos in the courts”, calling to achieve a

non-partisan consensus to provide access to “fair/just, objective and apolitical courts”. It also hinted at obstructions in access to justice, demanding improved court performance through stabilization, digitalisation, and acceleration.

[During the official campaign launch](#), Nawrocki claimed perpetual violations of Article 7 of the Constitution on the principle of the rule of law by the current government. In his view, “the rule of law must return, because the Polish justice system lies on the ground”. [He sees](#) the rulings of the Constitutional Tribunal and the Supreme Court as legitimate. He called the nomination procedure of the new State Prosecutor “shocking” and suggested “depoliticising the Prosecutor's Office” to be written into the Polish Constitution. The candidate also suggested introducing a mixed system of election to the National Council of the Judiciary. Failing to remedy the current malaise of the court system should result in a referendum, however, the program does not specify on what topic exactly.



II. Democratic institutions and processes

There are no direct references to democratic institutions and processes in the official manifesto. Yet, at a rally in Łódź, [Karol Nawrocki warned against the next President being a member of one of the ruling parties](#), a marionette of the government. In his view, this risk would in particular materialise in the victory of his main opponent, Rafał Trzaskowski. Nawrocki, as an independent candidate, portrays himself as a guardian of the independent presidential office.

Regarding the quality of public administration and independence of the state, [at a rally in Krotoszyn](#), Nawrocki accused his political opponents of using public institutions to persecute and intimidate him and his allies. At a rally in Łódź, he warned against [the possible election manipulation](#) orchestrated by his opponents.

III. Media freedom

There were no mentions in the manifesto about media

freedom and plans of the candidate to remedy the complicated status of the public broadcaster. However, in his direct interactions with the media, Karol Nawrocki reveals a negative attitude towards the public broadcaster, [calling it “government TV”](#). At the presidential debate in Końskie, he also [accused the public broadcaster of partisan bias](#) and of inviting only pro-government interlocutors. These public statements give reasons to assume a negative assessment of public media following the inauguration of the Tusk government.

IV. Anticorruption

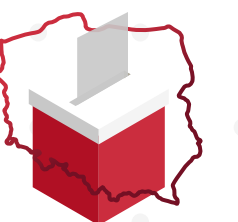
Corruption was neither mentioned in the official manifesto nor addressed by the candidate on other occasions.

Relevant for the report is the fact that Rafał Trzaskowski and Karol Nawrocki [received the most private donations](#) for their campaigns. Nawrocki's campaign was supported by people associated with Law and Justice: senators, party leadership, and top politicians.

V. Engagement with the EU and other intergovernmental bodies

The manifesto mentions the international engagement of Poland in two contexts: NATO (positive) and the EU (negative). It supports the policy of [allocating 5% of GDP to defence expenses](#) and strengthening Poland's role in NATO. On the contrary, the program advises withdrawing from some pivotal policies of the European Union: terminating Poland's participation in [the European Green Deal](#), especially in agriculture, and denouncing [the Migration Pact](#) by introducing domestic safeguards against the influx of illegal migrants. It also [opposes joining the Eurozone](#), justifying this position by avoiding the “wave of overpricing”. It does not advocate for Polesxit but builds on the narrative of national sovereignty against the strict dependence on “European elites”.

During public appearances, Karol Nawrocki criticised the EU even more strongly. [At a rally in Krotoszyn](#), he accused it of putting Poland under radical pressure, against the



original founding principles of European civilisation based on "Roman civilisation, Greek civilisation, (...) civilisation of Christian values". Nawrocki is also critical about the measures taken by the European Union in response to changes in the Polish judiciary and democratic system.

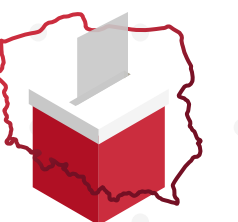
Generally, Nawrocki presents a hostile image of the EU, attempting to curb Polish sovereignty and subordinate the country [to Brussels and Berlin](#), linking the EU with Germany and building on the anti-German resentment so often utilised by the PiS party in the last decade. Instead, he promotes strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations within [the Visegrad Group and the Baltic states](#).

VI. Miscellaneous: values and ideological orientation

The official manifesto takes [a strong ideological stand](#) against world views different from the

conservative orientation of the candidate and the party supporting it. In particular, it refers to such world-view issues as trans rights, adoption rights of same-sex couples, and sex education at schools, resorting to instigating moral panic by framing it around the topic of children's safety.

It also presents a fierce nativist pivot in public policy by restricting social rights of non-Polish citizens in the country, calling for the "principle of priority for Poles in the use of social services, health care, and education". [At the campaign rally in Łódź](#), Nawrocki committed to insisting on respecting Christian values and not accepting illegal migrants treating Polish women and children, calling the West to take responsibility for centuries of colonialism and not impose responsibility for it on other countries.



Sławomir Mentzen

About the candidate: Sławomir Mentzen has been a member of Parliament since 2023 and is the youngest presidential candidate (under 40) representing a rising political force successfully challenging the *status quo* of the political scene in Poland. Petrified since 2005 as a duopoly between two post-*Solidarność* movements: the national-conservative PiS and the liberal-conservative PO, it saw many contestants rising and falling, but only the new-right *Konfederacja* seems to generate enough impetus to break through. Presenting a strong anti-establishment identity and offering radical and controversial socio-economic ideas, *Konfederacja* appeals particularly to younger voters seeking alternatives, expressing fatigue with the old setup.

Official programme: [The official presidential manifesto](#) comprises twenty demands. Overall, the main topics of the programme are economy, sovereignty and security, and freedom. It does not directly mention the media or anticorruption measures. On the contrary, it is quite explicit when referencing the courts, public administration, and EU integration,

however, all these issues are mentioned in a rather pejorative context. It also extensively covers civil liberties and freedoms, revealing libertarian and isolationist sympathies of the candidate.

Specific positions

I. Rule of law

In the chapter called [“Streamlining the judiciary”](#), the manifesto describes delayed access to justice, the politicisation of the court system, and bureaucratic burdens as the main problems of the Polish judiciary. It calls for a constitutional reset in the Constitutional Court and the National Council of the Judiciary, hinting at their instrumentalization by successive governments for political purposes.

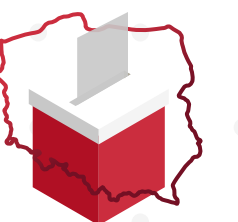
Sławomir Mentzen also released [a separate spot on this topic](#), elevating it in his campaign and distancing himself from previous and incumbent governments, blaming

both equally for the existing chaos. His proposal is to re-elect with a constitutional majority in Parliament the composition of the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Court, and the National Council of the Judiciary. Constitutional reset is presented as part of a broader process of “healing the state” after two decades of PO-PiS duopoly.

II. Democratic institutions and processes

In the chapter called [“Limiting bureaucracy”](#), the manifesto advocates for the elimination of “unnecessary” rules and regulations, state institutions, and offices. The program also juxtaposes public administration as a priori hostile to citizen interests and wasteful to the public budget.

In a [radio interview](#) and [during campaign rallies](#), Mentzen presented his vision of the presidency, heralding [“dusting off the President’s competences” for a “truly active and independent presidency”](#), during which he would submit the most bills and veto the most bills. He also vowed to “quiz all Ministers” every week



during Cabinet Councils. Such a vision of the presidency remains more a political imagination. Such a strong presidency would require a fundamental revision of the Constitution, as in the Polish political system the Council of Ministers is the most powerful institution, not the President. An anti-system President can lead to unnecessary conflicts and crises and paralyse the functioning of the state by [refusing to sign bills into law on purpose](#).

III. Media freedom

The situation of the media in Poland is not explicitly tackled in the official manifesto. In the part referring to [freedom of speech](#), it merely mentions the need to act against “large social networks that apply censorship to views and information they consider harmful”.

However, Sławomir Mentzen was more vocal about the fate of the public media after the first candidate debate, controversially organised jointly by the Trzaskowski campaign and TVP. In [numerous interviews](#), he criticised the partisan instrumentalisation and

politicisation of the public broadcaster during the campaign, accusing both the previous and incumbent governments of using state assets in political competition and to accomplish partisan goals. Similarly to his position on tackling the rule of law crisis, the public media crisis presents an opportunity to rhetorically distance himself from the established parties.

IV. Anticorruption

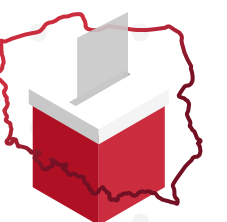
The official manifesto does not reveal any anti-corruption measures proposed by the candidate. Yet, during one of the [TV debates of presidential candidates](#), Sławomir Mentzen strongly opposed the employment of politicians and their families in state-owned companies, condemning nepotism and patronage.

V. Engagement with the EU and other intergovernmental bodies

The first point of the manifesto is called [“Sovereignty”](#), building on the rhetoric of

antagonising Polish national interests against EU membership. It imputes hostile intentions to the European Union, stripping Poland of competencies in internal affairs and limiting its influence over the EU. Hence, neither treaty changes aiming at further integration nor revoking veto power is accepted. Moreover, the manifesto assumes the precedence of the Polish Constitution over EU law, rejects joining the Eurozone, and demands leaving the European Green Deal, and sceptically approaches the idea of a common EU foreign policy.

Although the program speaks of increasing defence potential, it does not mention any international alliances, signalling a potential threat of redirecting financial means to support other armies. Mentzen also presents a disengaged security and defense policy, pleading for a decline in the level of commitment to existing alliances. He also rejects any possible engagement of Poland in active military conflicts, repeatedly calling [the situation in Gaza](#) and [the Russian aggression on Ukraine](#) “not our war”.

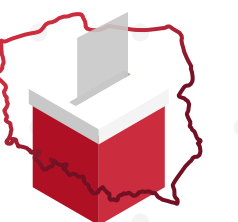


VI. Miscellaneous: values and ideological orientation

The manifesto takes a lot of space for laying out the ideological attitudes of the candidate towards the role of the state, citizens' rights, and world-view issues, presenting a conservative-libertarian vision for Poland, with the largest possible economic liberty and simultaneous rejection of a progressive world-view. It demands radically increasing personal freedoms, in particular the legalisation of poker and marijuana, rationalisation of access to weapons, the right to privacy, or even the "freedom to produce and eat meat".

The manifesto also demands a broad interpretation of freedom of speech, in its unrestricted form characteristic of the United States. It rejects "surveillance on the Internet" and compulsory vaccinations.

While defending the choice of lifestyle and demanding officials not to interfere in raising children and family life, it rejects "leftist" ideology as a "sick ideological experiment on society" but without spelling out its core messages, instead resorting to children's safety as an emotionally loaded argument. Instead, it stresses the importance of "Latin civilisation" as the cornerstone of Polish history and tradition.



Szymon Hołownia

About the candidate: Szymon Hołownia, a former TV celebrity, emerged as a political leader when he ran for the office of the President in 2020 and later launched his own political party, Polska 2050. Allying with the agrarian party PSL, Polska 2050 had a successful debut in the 2023 elections, becoming one of the junior coalition's partners in the current Tusk government. Szymon Hołownia became the Speaker of the Sejm and gained popularity through his style of chairing parliamentary sessions.

Official programme: The official presidential manifesto is scarce, limited to eight points focusing on infrastructural development, energy and housing policy, defence and security, and banning smartphones at schools. There are no mentions of the rule of law, democracy, media, or engagement with intergovernmental organisations. However, there is a direct reference to transparency in state-owned enterprises. Unlike other candidates, the manifesto avoids any ideological or doctrinal associations.

Specific positions

I. Rule of law

The official manifesto does not mention the rule of law repair at all. However, as a Speaker of the Sejm, Szymon Hołownia has been a vocal advocate for healing the Polish judiciary, accusing the previous PiS government of destroying the rule of law. During a press briefing, he described the eight years of PiS rule as “spoiling the state”.

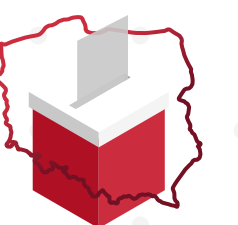
He assured the public that all laws on the repair of the rule of law in Poland, such as on the National Council of the Judiciary or the Constitutional Tribunal, will have a fast track in the Sejm. In this vein, he expressed his readiness to cooperate and coordinate with the Minister of Justice to proceed with the necessary reforms. He also sought dialogue with the President, ready to find a compromise on the exclusion of the Chamber of Extraordinary Control and Public Affairs of

the Supreme Court from the process of validating the election of the President and accepting the appointments of “neo-judges”.

II. Democratic institutions and processes

The official manifesto does not mention much about democratic institutions and processes. However, during campaign rallies, ideas emerged about institutions and public administration. Hołownia presented his vision of the presidency as “building bridges, not divides”. He also advocated for “a President independent of the major political camps”, to avoid “further deepening of divisions and a cyclical shift in power between the same camps”. In his vision of the state administration, the non-partisan and independent President acts as a stabiliser of the system.

Hołownia also proposed changing the administrative division of the country, undoing the reforms from 1997. He advocated for more opportunities for



medium-sized cities, tackling excessive centralisation and disproportionate growth of a few big metropolises. The candidate announced appointing a team of experts to develop proposals for changes in the administrative division, should he win the elections.

Hołownia also promotes meritocracy and independent civil service, where staff do not change every term, opposing the “winner takes it all” approach.

III. Media freedom

There are no mentions of the situation of the public broadcaster or the general challenges ahead of the Polish media in the manifesto. Hołownia also does not address these issues in his rallies or via other forms of communication.

However, back in 2023, his party proposed [a comprehensive reform of the media landscape in Poland](#). It foresaw reforming funding mechanisms for the public media,

removing the radio and television subscription fee in favour of tax write-offs from digital giants operating in Poland, completely abolishing the National Media Council and transforming the National Broadcasting Council, changing the selection and appointment procedure at the managerial level, and merging diverse public broadcaster companies into one enterprise. Last but not least, it also proposed the decentralisation of the local media into 16 independent regional multimedia companies.

One of the related topics raised in the campaign is the threats to the public debate posed by disruptive dynamics of social media and the malign influence of [“Chinese algorithms or Russian trolls”](#). In his capacity as the Speaker of the Sejm, [he warned against spreading disinformation and foreign interference](#) in public debate and electoral processes in Poland.

IV. Anticorruption

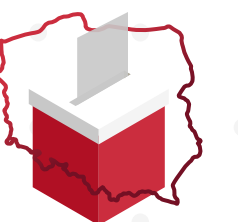
No particular anti-corruption measures are mentioned

in the manifesto, and they also do not come up in other public communications of the candidate. However, relevant for this report is Point 7 of the manifesto, demanding that state-owned companies be repaired. Partisan appointments in managerial positions should be replaced by merit-based professionals.

V. Engagement with the EU and other intergovernmental bodies

Point 5 of the manifesto mentions Poland’s European engagement, however, limited to security structures. In his campaign rallies, Hołownia stressed the need for [Poland to play an active role in European security policy](#) when facing external threats and [a deeper economic integration within the European Union](#) in response to the trade wars initiated by Donald Trump, potentially resulting in aggravating global crises.

Although not part of his campaign, in the run-up to the elections, the parliamentary faction of Hołownia’s



party submitted [a draft amendment to the Law on International Agreements](#) on obstructing the potential procedure for Poland's possible exit from the EU, requiring two nationwide referendums needed to leave the European Union. Szymon Hołownia presented this draft to the media, giving a clear signal as to his staunchly pro-EU stance.

Hołownia comes across as a multilateralist and globalist, demanding that Poland proactively build alliances on the international stage. He stressed the role of bilateral and multilateral partnerships as well as regional cooperation, taking as an example [his signature project for cooperation between the Presidents of the Parliaments](#) of Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. Point 5 of the manifesto sees Poland as "a leader of the Baltic Sea countries".

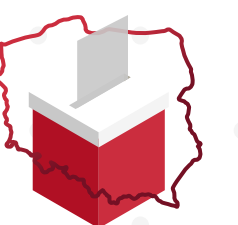
VI. Miscellaneous: values and ideological orientation

At the beginning of his campaign, Szymon Hołownia warned against a greater threat to democracy - [the rising authoritarianism](#). In his view, political conflicts and rows alienate politicians from society, giving rise to hostile ideologies. He sees the biggest threat in the rise of illiberal populists, in Poland represented by *Konfederacja*, but also observed in the international context, for example, with their success in [Hungary, Slovakia, and Germany](#). He [rejected building political mobilisation on fear and exclusion](#), also based on ethnicity.

From the beginning of his political career, Szymon Hołownia described his aim as challenging the PO-PiS duopoly. During the 2025 presidential campaign,

[he also criticises the stagnant political scene in Poland](#), resulting in tribalism and pernicious polarisation between the supporters [of the two main camps: PO and PiS](#). Hołownia promotes a new vision of political culture in Poland. Instead of a militant democracy, he advocates for a ["democracy that tones down, tries to let emotions out rather than accumulate them"](#). [His campaign](#) is based on conciliatory appeals for national unity, in the spirit of democratic parliamentarism and tolerance.

The non-ideological message, neither self-identifying with left-wing, progressive, nor right-wing, or conservative, focuses on building community strength on social cohesion, trust, and the ability to cooperate across divides. He calls for a President who unites society, a "peace President".



Magdalena Biejat

About the candidate: Magdalena Biejat is the presidential candidate of the left-wing alliance of parties that participate in the government coalition. She has been a member of the Sejm for one term (2019-2023) and a senator (from 2023 onwards), currently serving as the Deputy Speaker of the Senate. In 2024, she was Lewica's candidate for the Mayor of Warsaw, winning 12.86% of all votes. In the 2025 presidential campaign, she is one of only two female candidates.

Official programme: [The official presidential manifesto](#) is based on seven programmatic pillars, covering prosperity and development, cooperation and security, freedoms, equality, and the rule of law. It is the only programme referring in greater detail to the repair of the judiciary and Poland's intergovernmental engagements. It also briefly covers the media. On the contrary, it puts great emphasis on civil liberties and human rights, a secular state, and a welfare state guarding the social rights of all citizens.

Specific positions

I. Rule of law

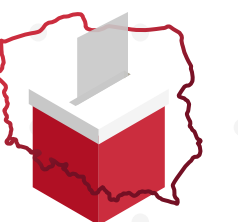
In point 7 on the rule of law, the manifesto demands that the President be the guardian of the Constitution and hence sees the primary tasks of the next presidency to depoliticise and repair the systemic chaos in the judiciary, caused during the eight years of Law and Justice in government. Remedial measures would include the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, and the National Council of the Judiciary. Second, it also points out the necessity to improve access to justice and its timely delivery, slightly touching upon the anti-bureaucratic rhetoric juxtaposing state institutions against citizens.

Biejat was a vocal critic of the actions around the rule of law taken by Law and Justice. For example, in 2023, [she criticised the law on the Supreme Court put forward by PiS](#), suspecting the motion by the governing

party to be a tactical move towards unlocking the frozen EU funds, not a genuine motivation to remedy the rule of law. In 2024, she supported the measures taken by the Minister of Justice approved by the Sejm, [calling for the additional judges of the Constitutional Tribunal to step down](#), adding that it was ["completely failing in its function"](#) and was ["totally politicized"](#). She called voters to mobilise and go to the polls to ["end this impasse"](#), suggesting only a change in the presidential palace can help the rule of law repair.

II. Democratic institutions and processes

The manifesto does not offer direct references to democratic institutions and processes. Yet, [at the 2025 European Congress of Local Governments](#), Magdalena Biejat explained her understanding of a resilient state as not only defining potential, but first and foremost stable institutions (systemic, but also of strategic infrastructural importance, like the railway or postal services) and institutional trust among the general public.



During [a press conference while campaigning in Dąbrowa Górnicza](#), Biejat also presented her vision of a government that takes responsibility for the economic and social well-being of citizens. She opted for developing a welfare state, granting its citizens equal access to social services and merit goods, such as housing.

III. Media freedom

The manifesto mentions that the media should be free from manipulation, but without further details. The media is mentioned in more detail regarding freedom of speech, threatened today by the influence of digital giants and their distorting algorithms. The programme calls to hold Meta and X accountable for spreading fake news and wants to strengthen traditional press publishers against mega-corporations like Google and MSN.

IV. Anticorruption

The manifesto does not mention any measures on

tackling corruption, nor does the candidate speak about this topic. In her [social media statements](#), she was supporting the depoliticisation of state-owned companies, to end political appointments, patronage, and nepotism in this sector.

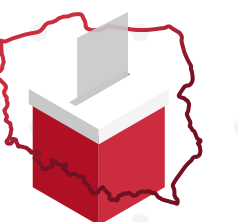
V. Engagement with the EU and other intergovernmental bodies

The manifest spells out the importance of Poland's international alliances and participation in intergovernmental organisations. Cooperation within NATO and Poland's EU membership are seen as the foundation of national security. Hence, Poland must be more vocal at international fora. At the same time, the programme hints at the necessary reforms of the European Union for better governance, however, without any further details. The programme also advocates for a foreign policy based on universal humanistic values: solidarity among nations, human rights, and the pursuit of peace. This also means respecting international law and guaranteeing the right to asylum.

VI. Miscellaneous: values and ideological orientation

The manifesto lays out a comprehensive vision of the Polish state, not shying away from promoting a left-wing liberal world-view. It is based on progressive values, taking equality and freedom from discrimination as founding principles. In particular, both the manifesto and the candidate during many public appearances supported women's rights through [accessible, legal, and safe abortion](#) up to the 12th week of pregnancy, [the rights of same-sex couples](#) through civil unions and marriage equality, equal pay for men and women, and equal access to public services. After one of the televised presidential debates, [she decided to sue one of the candidates](#) who repeatedly used antisemitic parables during the broadcast.

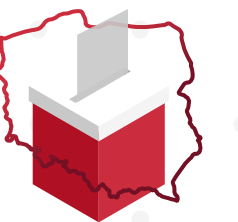
Biejat also tries to build her presidential message around [conciliatory rhetoric, looking for commonalities](#) and opposing divisive narratives, repeating the bottom-line principle of the parliamentary campaign



of Lewica, stating that in their vision of the country,
there is a place for everybody.

At the same time, both in the manifesto and public
statements, the candidate vowed to guard the principle

of a secular state that is neutral toward religion but re-
spects the faith of every citizen. She also committed to
removing religion from schools and abolishing the priv-
ileges of the Catholic Church.



Adrian Zandberg

About the candidate: Adrian Zandberg is a candidate of RAZEM, a left-wing party which was part of the United Left faction but first refused to join the coalition led by Donald Tusk since 2023, and then completely separated from the left-wing alliance. Zandberg has been a member of the Sejm since 2019.

Official programme: The official presidential manifesto consists of eight proposals, ranging from energy policy, healthcare proposals, housing policy, international relations and governance, and civil liberties. The program does not offer direct mentions of the rule of law repair, democratic institutions and processes, or the media, but it extensively covers anti-corruption measures and civil liberties. It also offers brief proposals on international engagement, not necessarily with the EU or NATO structures.

Specific positions

I. Rule of law

Neither the official manifesto nor the candidate himself

is directly referencing the rule of law repair in the campaign. However, RAZEM and Zandberg were vocal opponents of the judicial reforms of the previous government and the politicisation of the Constitutional Tribunal. In 2016, the party was one of the first political forces protesting against the actions of the newly formed PiS government against the Constitutional Tribunal (refusal to publish its rulings).

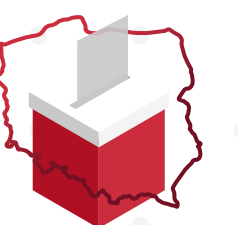
According to the official statement of the party on the rule of law crisis from 2023, the erosion of the rule of law in Poland leads to difficulties in access to justice, a decline in institutional trust, and a deepening crisis in the judiciary. The party offered an 8-point programme for healing the rule of law, among other advocating for: restoring the composition of the National Judicial Council in accordance with the Polish Constitution, abolishing the Chamber of Professional Responsibility at the Supreme Court, separating the Office of the Prosecutor General from that of the Minister of Justice, increasing the salaries of employees of courts and prosecutors' offices, and improving access to justice by administrative and organisational reforms of courts.

II. Democratic institutions and processes

There are no direct mentions of the candidate's views on the functioning of democratic institutions and processes in the manifesto. However, Zandberg prioritises a welfare state over free market philosophy and pleads for a "functioning state", with strong institutions and public policies considering the interests and rights of local communities. He considers it a duty of the government, the Sejm, and the President to reform how the public media operate.

III. Media freedom

The official manifesto does not offer direct references about the situation of the Polish media, and the candidate does not often refer to this topic in his rallies. However, in 2023, Zandberg gave a speech as the plenary session of the Parliament, calling for an independent public media that "belongs to everybody" and is free from partisan influence. In particular, he also called to open the public debate to the voice of the public, such as trade unions, climate movements, and grassroots



organisations. He recognised the long-lasting problem of politicised public broadcasters, reaching back to the times before the PiS government took over.

IV. Anticorruption

The manifesto points out the malpractice of nepotism and patronage in local governments and state-owned companies, as well as using state assets for political gains, making no distinction between diverse political parties in power. It also points out the revolving doors between business and politics and the resulting conflicts of interest, leading to corruption, often encountered in supervisory boards in local government companies. At [a rally in Łowicz](#), he demanded to cut the “pathological link between political parties and the management of state-owned companies” by introducing a clear, transparent competition procedure in Poland.

Finally, it talks about campaign financing by private and corporate donors, which generates false loyalties

towards business or even opens the back door for lobbyists. The manifesto demands ending cronyism, eliminating corruption, and for more transparency in financing political parties, providing all election committees with equal public funding, and setting a maximum contribution to an election committee at 5,000 PLN.

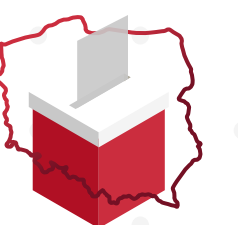
V. Engagement with the EU and other intergovernmental bodies

The manifesto advocates for a proactive approach of Poland in the international arena and taking pre-emptive actions for the country's security and prosperity, especially against the background of the crisis in transatlantic relations, proposing alternative alliances, such as regional cooperation with the Nordic countries in the defence industry. It advocated for Poland to become EU leader, however, in the economic and industrial dimensions. In foreign policy, Poland should consistently stand on the side of international law, especially with regard to war crimes committed against civilians, for example by the Russian President or the Israeli Prime Minister.

VI. Miscellaneous: values and ideological orientation

Zandberg wants to offer an alternative to the stagnant political scene in Poland, willing to mobilise people who are dissatisfied with both the previous and incumbent governments. [He described his programme](#) as “pro-social and freedom-oriented”, distanced from such political categories as “left” or “right”. He calls for cooperation and focus on politics instead of ["successive governments \(...\) butting heads and shouting about who will hold whom accountable"](#).

However, the manifesto spells out a coherent vision of the Polish state associated with the progressive, left-wing policies. It is based on the principles of equality, freedom of choice, respect for minorities, and a secular state. In particular, it advocates for gender equality in private life and work and equal rights for same-sex couples. It also rejects imposing the rules of any religion on its citizens.



III. Conclusions

There is a visible rift between the candidate supported by the previous governing party and the rest of the candidates under analysis regarding the opinions about the rule of law repair and the public media. Karol Nawrocki, unlike others, sees the actions of the current government as the main source of chaos in the judiciary and constitutional crisis. Other candidates are critical of the changes in the judicial system that occurred after 2015 and are determined to remedy the situation to both reclaim constitutional order in the country and improve access to justice for citizens.

Regarding the media, different ideas on how to reform the public broadcasters emerge, however, the majority of candidates agree that the rapid politicisation that occurred after 2015 must be curbed. In particular, candidates from beyond the governing parties (PiS and PO) stress the necessity to free the public media from the permanent political influence, regardless of who is in power.

On democratic institutions, different visions of presidency emerge, from open cooperation (Trzaskowski), non-partisan, consensus seeking (Hołownia), constructive

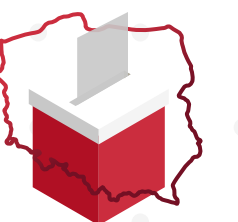
cohabitation (Biejat and Zandberg) to anti-system, conflictual style of presidency (Mentzen and Nawrocki). The candidates supported by the two biggest political camps warned against the continuation of legislative impasse if their opponent wins or the complete state capture if the candidate of the governing party wins.

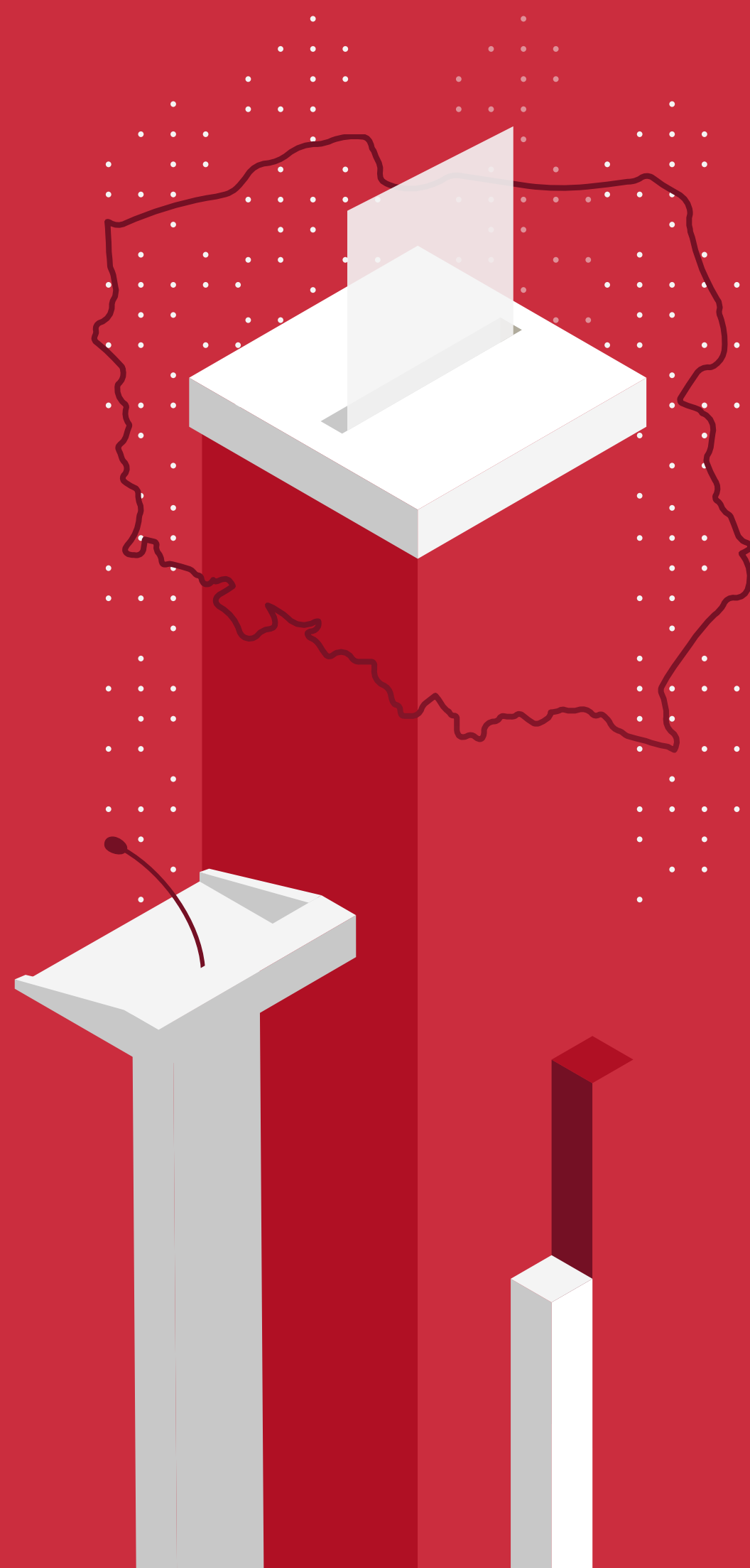
Corruption was not a first-tier topic in the campaign. However, most of the candidates referred to the urgent need to curb state capture and other destructive practices such as nepotism and patronage in staffing state-owned enterprises. All of the candidates analysed agreed that assets should not fall pawn in the political game or be instrumentalized for immediate political gains.

Regarding Poland's role in the international arena and engagement in intergovernmental bodies, the opinions of candidates vary significantly. From the most pro-European attitude advocating for more integration and harmonisation (Hołownia), through a more pro-active role of Poland in the EU (Trzaskowski and Biejat), to a Eurosceptic agenda rejecting key EU policies (Nawrocki and Mentzen), or advocating for also establishing

alternative regional alliances (Zandberg). Due to a tense geopolitical situation and the ongoing armed conflict at Poland's eastern border, some candidates were also speaking in favour of Poland's engagement in international security and defence structures like NATO (Trzaskowski, Hołownia, and Biejat) as opposed to more isolationist and disengagement views (Mentzen).

Last but not least, some manifestos were visibly ideological, especially concerning world-view issues. Progressive, left-wing orientation manifested especially in prioritising equality, freedom, and tolerance (Biejat and Zandberg), as opposed to national values, references to Christianity, and openly hostile attitudes to immigrants (Nawrocki and Mentzen). Economic and social nativism, prioritising the interest of citizens against newcomers, was to a different extent detectable in candidates representing parties in various places on the right spectrum of the political scene (Trzaskowski, Nawrocki and Mentzen). Hołownia avoided ideological statements, presenting himself as the candidate of the apolitical middle. Nawrocki and Trzaskowski perpetuated the ongoing clash between the parties supporting them, feeding into the everlasting PO-PiS competition.





2025

Presidential Election in Poland

A Comparative Analysis of Candidates' Programme:
Rule of Law, Democracy, European engagement

DRI website:
democracy-reporting.org

Re:constitution website:
reconstitution.eu

X:
[@DemocracyR](https://twitter.com/DemocracyR)

LinkedIN:
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Instagram:
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Bluesky:
[@democracyreporting.bsky.social](https://bsky.social/democracyreporting.bsky.social)