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Key Indicators

Population	M	36.6	HDI	0.906	GDP p.c., PPP \$	50378
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	-0.4	HDI rank of 193	35	Gini Index	28.5
Life expectancy	years	78.5	UN Education Index	0.904	Poverty ³	% 0.2
Urban population	%	60.3	Gender inequality ²	0.081	Aid per capita \$	-

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2025. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

Executive Summary

During the review period, Poland underwent significant political change. Although the previous Law and Justice (PiS) government sought to maintain its national-conservative agenda and confrontational stance toward the European Union, the October 15, 2023, parliamentary elections brought a shift in power. The coalition now in office plans to revise most of these policies, except those related to social welfare.

The months leading up to the vote were marked by massive protests and institutional strain. Civil society groups – especially women’s rights organizations – staged large demonstrations, while PiS advanced further measures that curtailed the rule of law. One measure was an electoral law reform that PiS pushed through in January 2023. This law increased the number of polling stations in small towns, where most PiS supporters live, and aimed to reduce opportunities for Poles living abroad to participate in the elections. In May 2023, parliament passed the so-called Lex Tusk, under which a commission would examine whether politicians with ties to Moscow were eligible to run for office. PiS argued that Donald Tusk had not cut ties to Moscow quickly enough and might be a Russian agent. While issues such as reproductive rights and democratic values played a strong role in the elections, high inflation, mismanagement of public funds, disputes with the European Union and the subsequent freezing of much-needed funds also led many Poles to turn away from the previous government.

The election generated record participation, with turnout reaching 74.4%. PiS secured the largest share of votes (35.4%) but failed to assemble a governing majority, even after President Andrzej Duda asked former Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki to attempt to form a cabinet. In December 2023, parliament instead elected Tusk, the leader of Civic Platform (PO), who formed a coalition with Third Way (Polish People’s Party/PSL and Polska 2050) and the New Left (Nowa Lewica) – an alliance the three had pledged before the vote.

Since taking office, the Tusk government has sought to restore democracy in Poland, a difficult task. The Supreme Court, Constitutional Tribunal and lower courts remain stacked with judges appointed through controversial procedures under PiS. President Duda's veto power poses another major constraint, as the ruling coalition lacks the three-fifths majority needed to override it. The government has overhauled public media but has not yet advanced its judicial reform agenda. Nonetheless, its commitments were enough to convince the European Commission to release long-delayed support: a combined €137 billion from the Next Generation EU recovery fund and the Cohesion Fund as of spring 2024.

In terms of economic and social policy, the Tusk government continues the approach of its predecessors. It has kept PiS-era increases to child benefits and both the 13th and 14th monthly pensions, while raising teachers' salaries. Other promised reforms – including liberalizing abortion – remain pending. A bill to legalize same-sex partnerships has been introduced and is now under consultation with civil society groups. Finally, reforms to school curricula have been implemented, along with a revision of the fiscal system for local and regional governments – a long-standing demand of mayors to improve infrastructure and basic services.

Progress has been slower in expanding renewable energy or implementing tax reform. At the same time, the government must comply with the European Union's Excessive Deficit Procedure after budget expansion, and address the continued repercussions of Russia's war against Ukraine – from supporting refugees to countering disinformation and other hybrid threats. These issues are central to Poland's presidency of the European Council, which began in January 2025. As a consequence of its mixed record on reforms so far, the government is not faring well in polls in early January 2025, although it won the local and European Parliament elections in 2024.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

The year 1989 marked a significant turning point in Poland's transition from communism to democracy. During roundtable negotiations, the communist leadership and the Solidarity-led opposition came together to initiate political and economic reforms. In June that year, a semi-free parliamentary election was held, with 35% of seats freely contested, which Solidarity won. Capitalizing on this momentum, Solidarity activist Tadeusz Mazowiecki formed a coalition government dedicated to further democratic change. Subsequently, constitutional amendments were introduced, including a new electoral law and the removal of the Communist Party's dominant role. As a result, the Polish People's Republic was renamed the Republic of Poland. The dissolution of both political factions led to the emergence of numerous political parties in the early 1990s. In December 1990, the first direct presidential election took place, resulting in the victory of Lech Wałęsa, Solidarity's leader. Democratization was accompanied by an economic transformation from a centralized command economy to a market economy. This transformation was initiated by then-Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz. His form of "shock therapy" led to a decrease in the country's high foreign debt, budget deficit and inflation, fostering economic growth.

Democratic consolidation finally began to take hold after 1997, with a reorganized party landscape and an improved socioeconomic situation. Poland began accession negotiations with the European Union in 1998 and made intense efforts in the following years to implement the *acquis communautaire* in Polish law. Despite general support for EU accession, some critical voices demanded greater consideration of Poland's national interests and small farms. The accession treaty was signed in April 2003, and in the subsequent referendum, 77.45% of participants voted in favor of EU membership. Poland joined the European Union on May 1, 2004. Over the years, support for EU membership has remained stable at 70% to 80%. Poland benefits from EU structural and cohesion funds, and several Polish politicians, such as Jerzy Buzek and Donald Tusk, have held prominent EU positions.

Since the early 2000s, Poland's party system has been reshaped. Cleavages no longer separate the former communists and the heirs of the Solidarity movement. Instead, the latter camp has split into two currents that dominate political debates today. The nationalist-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) continues to compete with the liberal-conservative Civic Platform (PO). Both parties have led governments since 2005, forming coalitions with smaller leftist or rightist parties as well as the conservative Polish People's Party (PSL). PiS won the elections in 2015 and again in 2019, while President Andrzej Duda (PiS) received a second five-year mandate in July 2020. PiS and its two smaller political allies followed the Hungarian example with a redistributive economic policy, contested liberalism, pluralism and abortion rights, and curtailed mechanisms to ensure checks and balances – especially in the judiciary, the media and the cultural sphere. This led to protests in the country and caused various legal and financial responses from the European Union. The 2023 parliamentary elections, marked by a record turnout of 74.4%, resulted in a change of government and a coalition dedicated to reestablishing democratic norms. However, Poland remains significantly affected by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Transformation Status

I. Political Transformation

1 | Stateness

There is no challenge to the state's monopoly on the use of force. Public order and security are fully guaranteed throughout Poland's territory.

Amid Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, there have been many incidents in which Russia has violated Polish territory or airspace – for example, in December 2023 and in March and August 2024 – with missiles and drones that actually targeted Ukraine. In addition, Polish authorities have reported an increasing number of cyberattacks. In September 2024, authorities arrested a group of saboteurs who allegedly operated on behalf of Belarus and Russia.

All citizens accept the nation-state as fully legitimate. Debate among political parties and, to some extent, within the public concerns the concept of the nation-state in relation to European integration. While the 2023 elections brought an EU-friendly government back into office, the Law and Justice (PiS) party, now in opposition, and other nationalist forces continue to question Poland's role in the European Union. They favor a "Europe of fatherlands" and oppose deeper integration.

The acquisition of citizenship is not contested, and holding or retaining dual citizenship is legally accepted. As a result, the rules and procedures for becoming a Polish citizen are not politicized, while migration to Poland, especially from outside Europe, remains contentious.

In 2024, Poland revised its Blue Card legislation to admit more highly qualified immigrants, but the country generally does not face high levels of immigration. However, immigration from Slavic countries has increased since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. There are now an estimated 1 million to 1.5 million Ukrainian refugees in Poland, in addition to those who had already arrived for work. Depending on how the war develops, some may apply for citizenship. Another consequence of the conflict is that Russia and Belarus have sent more migrants from non-European countries to Poland's eastern borders. Responses to this practice, however, are not directly tied to debates about migration and citizenship.

Question
Score

Monopoly on the
use of force

10



1

State identity

10



1

According to the constitution, Poland is a secular state. Nevertheless, Poland remains highly religious, with about 88.8% of the population identifying as Catholic, according to 2024 CBOS survey data. The Catholic Church has long viewed itself as a supporter of Poland's struggle for independence from the late 18th to the early 20th century and in resistance to Nazi and communist rule. Today, creeping secularization is underway, and religious commitment is declining, especially among younger and more educated people. Across all age groups, the share of nonbelievers rose from 8% in 2019 to 14% in 2024, and more people – 48% in 2024 – say they practice religion irregularly or not at all, while only 39% attend regularly.

Many respondents who no longer practice religion said they have lost interest or no longer feel the need to do so. Others have grown more critical of the Catholic Church because of child sex abuse scandals and its interference in politics when PiS was in government. Calls to reinstate a more liberal abortion law motivated many women to vote for the then opposition in the 2023 election, but these reforms have not advanced so far. Some left-leaning politicians renewed debate over whether the Concordat between the Holy See and the Polish state provides sufficient separation of church and state. Additional discussions emerged over religious education in schools and the Church's role in marriages. However, the government has no intention of changing these arrangements.

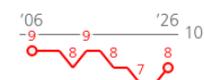
In March 2024, Poland's culture minister said the government considers the country a secular state and will stop providing subsidies for religious publications. Annual grants for other magazines and journals that contribute to a diverse public debate will continue, as this remains common practice in Poland.

Poland's administration has a differentiated structure, and local self-government is well developed. The allocation of tasks and funds among national, regional and local administrations became a point of dispute during and after the pandemic. For political reasons – since many cities and regional administrations were led by opposition politicians – the previous PiS government reduced their financial resources while increasing their responsibilities. This has led to protests by mayors and, among other actions, the creation of the Pact of Free Cities in 2019. Cities are struggling financially and structurally because they are hosting Ukrainian refugees and need to adapt to climate change.

Since the parliamentary elections in fall 2023, these practices have been reversed. Moreover, a major reform was introduced in September 2024. It allocates PLN 24.8 billion (€5.8 billion) to local budgets in 2025, along with an additional PLN 345 billion (€80.8 billion) over the following 10 years. This reform shifts the distribution of taxes from the national to local levels and aims to increase the latter's autonomy. Funds targeting education, development and ecological projects will also be provided.

No interference of religious dogmas

8



1

Basic administration

10



1

In addition to these political issues relating to basic administration, Poland continues to face challenges with sanitation and drinking water services, as well as wastewater management. According to the World Bank's WDI 2024 data for 2022, clean water access rates remain low by the EU standards at 90.4% (at least basic access) and 88.9% (safely managed), respectively. To help improve service provision, the Supreme Audit Office joined an investigation with several neighboring countries in 2022. It presented the key challenges and recommended next steps in November 2024.

2 | Political Participation

Elections have been held freely since 1990. However, several elections, particularly in 2019, 2020 and 2023, failed to meet democratic standards and were unfair due to the right-wing populist Law and Justice (PiS) government's control of the public media, as well as its tolerance of hate speech and defamation.

In the 2023 parliamentary elections, as PiS sought to retain power, it took several steps that further undermined electoral fairness. First, it fulfilled various promises and provided benefits to its electorate, including an increase in the family subsidy, a 14th pension and even retroactive reductions in electricity and gas prices.

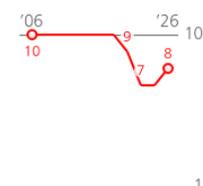
Second, the PiS government spent substantial public funds to sponsor local events that in practice served only party interests. Third, PiS introduced several legal changes that appeared harmless but were intended to secure its victory: increasing the number of voting commissions in small-population districts, where additional polling stations would benefit PiS; changing operating procedures for election commissions to make voting by Polish expatriates more difficult; and calling a referendum on four highly speculative questions unrelated to legislative proposals. These measures allowed PiS to discredit the then opposition and to access additional funds, as spending limits for election campaigns do not apply to referendums. Not participating in the referendum on election day was difficult for voters because it required declining the forms when receiving their ballot, thereby undermining the secrecy of the vote.

The referendum asked whether voters would approve: 1) selling state assets to foreign entities, 2) raising the retirement age to 67, 3) opening the border with Belarus and 4) admitting "illegal migrants" under the European Union's relocation scheme. The referendum failed because only 40.9% of voters participated. Among those who did, 94% to 97% rejected the questions – that is, they voted in line with PiS's intentions.

Regarding campaign finances, the State Election Commission partially rejected PiS's financial report in August 2024 and reduced its subsidy by about PLN 10 million (€2.3 million). PiS in turn asked the Supreme Court to review the decision, and the case remains pending. The local elections in April 2024 and the European Parliament

Free and fair elections

8



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elections in June 2024 confirmed support for the governing coalition and the declining trend for PiS. In the local elections, PiS remained the strongest single party, but in the European Parliament elections it was also overtaken by KO. No procedural irregularities or campaign violations were reported in either vote.

Democratically elected representatives have the effective power to govern. The military, business elites and other groups do not hold veto power. The Catholic Church also has no formal political power, but priests make political recommendations during services and have a close relationship with PiS, which was in power until December 2023. Now in opposition, PiS still refers to the religious doctrine of the Catholic Church in debates about abortion or same-sex marriage. Until PiS lost office in the most recent parliamentary elections, the greater concern was an overly powerful government acting against the rule of law, rather than the threat of veto power.

Since the October 2023 elections, President Andrzej Duda – though formally no longer a PiS member – has remained aligned with the party and is now governing in cohabitation with the current government.

He vetoes most efforts by the current coalition government to reform the weakened judiciary, along with other initiatives aimed at restoring democratic principles. He also has pledged to veto progressive reforms, including the liberalization of abortion and recognition of same-sex partnerships.

Since the 2023 national elections, freedom of association and assembly has again been unrestricted and constitutionally guaranteed. The right to form and join associations is fully respected. Until the change in government in late 2023, politically motivated discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community occurred, especially during election campaigns. Women's organizing and feminist activism also faced obstacles. OSCE observers recorded numerous verbal assaults during the 2023 elections, and in some cases reported unfair evaluations of requests for permits to assemble.

Freedom of expression is guaranteed by Poland's constitution (Article 54 of the 1997 constitution), but many shortcomings persisted until the 2023 elections. The previous PiS government significantly restricted media freedom, bringing public television and radio and the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiTV) almost entirely under its control.

In addition to the promotion of partisan, pro-government discourse and hate speech in public media, the government's grip on the judiciary and its increasing tendency to criminalize defamation began to affect private media as well.

Thus, the incoming government's first move was to reorganize public media. The ministers of culture and justice took initial actions in December 2023 and dismissed the directors and senior managers of public TV, radio and the Polish Press Agency.

Effective power to govern

9



1

Association / assembly rights

9



1

Freedom of expression

9



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This led to an interruption of broadcasting, a temporary occupation of the TV station by PiS allies and several months of uncertainty over the legality of these changes. When President Andrzej Duda vetoed the budget for public media during this period, Minister of Culture Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz placed public media organizations into liquidation. This step allowed the ministry to finance them directly. Subsequently, propagandistic journalists either resigned or were dismissed, while former staff returned alongside new colleagues.

The National Media Council, which PiS introduced in 2016 as an additional body to the National Radio and Television Council (KRRiTV), was expected to be abolished, but no steps have been taken so far. Experts are calling for further reforms, and the current minister of culture, Hanna Wróblewska – who replaced Sienkiewicz after his election to the European Parliament in spring 2024 – is working on a package of bills designed to make public media more independent of political influence.

These changes are reflected in the World Press Freedom Index. After a sharp decline since 2015 that saw Poland fall to No. 57 in 2023, its ranking improved to No. 47 in 2024.

3 | Rule of Law

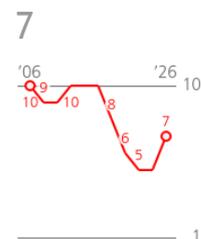
Formally, the 1997 constitution guarantees a clear separation of powers, with mutual checks and balances. Governments are accountable to the Sejm, and members of parliament have the right to monitor and supervise the executive.

From 2015 to 2023, checks and balances between the government and the opposition were largely ineffective, and institutional accountability was limited. PiS and its smaller partners used their parliamentary majority to ignore opposition rights and circumvent parliamentary procedures. The second chamber, the Senate, had been controlled by the then-opposition since 2019, but the Sejm could overrule its suspensive veto with a three-fifths majority.

In the October 2023 elections, which brought a change in government, the Civic Coalition and its allies increased their share in both the Sejm and the Senate, forming a majority coalition government. However, they still do not hold the three-fifths majority required to override presidential vetoes.

The presidents of the Constitutional Tribunal and the Supreme Court remain close allies of the formerly ruling PiS party. Because court procedures were also changed in PiS's favor, restoring a well-functioning separation of powers has not yet been possible, although the minister of justice has prepared plans to move in this direction.

Separation of powers



After taking power in 2015, the previous PiS government undermined the independence of the judiciary. The Constitutional Tribunal lost its autonomy in 2016; ordinary courts and the National Council of the Judiciary were subject to politically motivated reforms. In addition, the Supreme Court saw a PiS-allied president appointed in 2020. Until the 2023 elections, only a few lower courts still operated impartially. The Polish judicial associations Iustitia and Themis employed various means to restore independence and defend their fellow judges against government constraints on court procedures. Among other measures, they contributed to European Commission decisions to launch five infringement procedures at the CJEU examining rule-of-law violations, all of which the PiS government lost.

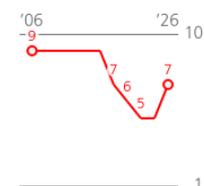
Since taking office in December 2023, the current government has sought to free these processes from political interference by introducing reforms to how judges are trained, appointed and promoted, and how cases are assigned to them. However, President Duda vetoes these efforts or sends them to the Constitutional Tribunal, which also resists them (a PiS-friendly majority will remain in the Tribunal until 2028), so the reforms are difficult and often blocked. Only the state president can appoint Supreme Court judges, so he continues to use this mechanism to appoint judges of his choice.

This means the rule of law in Poland continues to suffer from laws enacted in violation of constitutional provisions, and enforcing those laws has reinforced an unlawful legal situation.

Justice Minister Adam Bodnar introduced a comprehensive action plan in February 2024 to restore the rule of law, using a two-track approach: first, measures that do not require legislation; and second, a package of legal changes to be implemented once there is a change in the presidency. The first category includes personnel changes within ordinary courts, court administration and the state prosecutor's office; ending disciplinary actions against judges who upheld European law; and certain administrative reforms. In December 2023, the Sejm also called for implementation of numerous judgments from the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), the European Court of Human Rights and Polish courts, which invalidated previous unlawful rulings. Poland rejoined the Office of the European Public Prosecutor and pledged to comply with European law again. These changes, along with the planned legislative reform package, formed the basis for the European Commission to unfreeze PLN 600 billion (€137 billion) from the Recovery and Cohesion Policy fund and to discontinue the Article 7 procedure in May 2024.

Independent
judiciary

7



Corrupt officeholders are subject to prosecution under Polish law. Politicians who misuse their public mandate or office can be brought before the State Tribunal. Since November 2001, members of parliament have been required to publish their income on the parliament's website. They also must disclose any benefits they or their spouses receive in a public register of interests maintained by the speakers of the Sejm and Senate.

In practice, however, the previous PiS government engaged in political clientelism, misused state budgets and institutions, and was involved in the “visa affair,” in which about 366,000 work visas were irregularly issued at the request of PiS members. It also used Pegasus spyware to surveil political opponents and undermined checks and balances. The Central Anti-Corruption Bureau (CBA) was closely aligned with the government and lacked independence. The Supreme Audit Office (NIK) and the ombudsman, Marcin Wiącek, appointed in July 2021, remained semi-independent institutions and attempted to follow up on certain cases.

As a result of these practices, the coalition agreement of the current governing parties includes several measures aimed at restoring more effective corruption prevention and prosecution. A bill to this effect was introduced in May 2024. One measure calls for dissolving the CBA and distributing its responsibilities among a new anti-corruption office, the police and the domestic intelligence agency. Another focuses on the prosecution of corrupt officeholders.

Civil rights are codified in the constitution and had, in the past, been respected by all state institutions. However, the previous PiS government not only failed to address violations of civil rights but also engaged in actions that demonstrated a disregard for these rights. Discrimination based on gender, race, religion and political preference occurred, and individuals' privacy was not always protected.

Such practices have become less frequent since December 2023. Discrimination against women and against people based on their sexual orientation has decreased under the new government, which has prepared a bill to amend the penal code so that hate speech targeting a person's sexual orientation, gender, age or disability will be covered under hate-crime laws. At the same time, human rights organizations have criticized the current government for pushbacks at the border with Belarus and other measures that have violated the civil rights of migrants and asylum-seekers attempting to enter Poland.

Prosecution of office abuse

8



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Civil rights

9



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4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

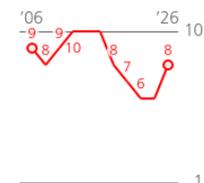
Since December 2023, most democratic institutions have resumed their functions, and political decisions are being made through legitimate procedures by the appropriate authorities. However, the shortcomings in democratic and legal practices created by the previous government have not all been addressed because of President Andrzej Duda's veto power. He has opposed judicial reforms, particularly regarding the Constitutional Tribunal and the Supreme Court, where "neo-judges" appointed through irregular procedures by the previous PiS government still dominate, as they do in some ordinary courts. This lack of reform continues to limit accountability mechanisms. Since December 2023, legislative procedures have changed. The tactic often used by PiS – introducing significant bills as fast-track legislation to circumvent the opposition and push them through without substantial debate – is no longer in use. The current government is also working to depoliticize public administration and the civil service. One measure aims to provide regional and local governments, which had received insufficient funding under PiS when their mayors belonged to the opposition, with adequate financial resources again.

Most relevant political actors accept democratic institutions and consider them legitimate, even if they hold different views on how democracy should be organized and managed. During the PiS government from 2015 to 2023, there were serious doubts that political actors in power adhered to these principles, given the legal changes they introduced to impede judicial and media independence and restrict the rights of the political opposition. The government also limited journalists' access to parliament and promoted biased reporting about judges and opposition politicians in pro-government media. Because PiS often showed disrespect for democratic institutions, it appeared to favor illiberalism over pluralistic democracy, and this tendency did not change after fall 2023. By contrast, the parties currently forming the government are once again acting in accordance with the constitution.

Most interest groups and associations respect democratic institutions. Many legal experts also support a constitutional system of checks and balances that protects civil rights and political liberties. In 2024, for the first time, a CBOS survey found that trust in the Constitutional Tribunal was the lowest among major political and public institutions, at 21% – even lower than trust in political parties, at 25%. This negative assessment reflects the changes imposed by PiS since 2015, which left most judges and institutional structures aligned with PiS political positions rather than serving as impartial guardians of the constitution.

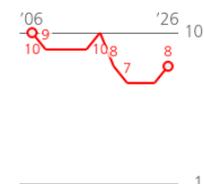
Performance of democratic institutions

8



Commitment to democratic institutions

8



5 | Political and Social Integration

The polarization of the party system remains a defining characteristic, with the main divide running between the national-conservative PiS (Law and Justice) and the more liberal PO (Civic Platform) or KO (Civic Coalition, its electoral alliance). This divide is reflected in relatively stable sociodemographic (education and age) and geographic (urban-rural and east-west) characteristics of their respective electorates in several elections. Other parties represent a range of interests on the left (Lewica), the center-right (Third Way) and the far-right (Confederation).

Especially during the years of the PiS government, polarization between the parties increased because of PiS's and Konfederacja's use of hate speech, disinformation and false allegations that stirred up divisions over cultural issues (gender, religion) as well as the politicization of public media.

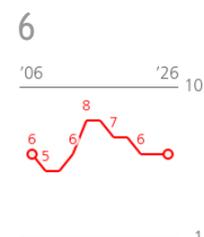
In the October 2023 elections, PiS received 35.4% of the vote; KO (Civic Platform, Modern, Polish Initiative and the Greens) 30.7%; Third Way (an alliance between Polska 2050 and the Polish People's Party, PSL) 14.4%; the New Left (a coalition of several leftist parties) 8.6%; and the far-right Confederation 7.2% (State Electoral Commission 2023). President Andrzej Duda, formerly aligned with PiS, initially asked PiS to form a government, but the attempt was unsuccessful. As a result, the main opposition parties – the Civic Coalition, Third Way and the New Left – which had already agreed to form a coalition during the campaign, took office.

Party membership remains low, at around 1%, suggesting that parties function primarily as vehicles for political careers rather than as organizations deeply engaged with society. Voter turnout had traditionally been low but increased in the 2023 elections, reaching a historic high of 74.4%.

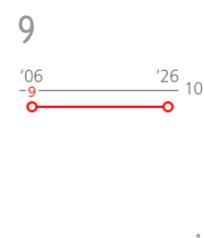
Poland has a large number of interest groups, including business associations, trade unions and social movements. Environmental groups are less prominent, but summer catastrophes in the Oder River – in 2022 and again in 2024 – in which tons of fish died due to salty mine waters from Polish companies brought increased attention to Greenpeace Polska. Most non-governmental organizations are relatively small, but a few focus on, and are capable of, developing policy proposals and also collaborate well with their European umbrella organizations.

The Catholic Church, which is still the most influential interest group in Poland despite ongoing secularization, pursues relatively narrow interests and is largely preoccupied with stabilizing its declining influence. Yet the Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture, a pro-life, religious think tank that prepared several bills and legal complaints for the previous government, remains a very active and influential lobbying organization, celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2023.

Party system



Interest groups



Since 2016, women's organizations and feminist activism have experienced a significant resurgence in opposition to an abortion ban and restrictions on women's rights. Among them, the Polish Women's Strike (Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet) has emerged as the leading organization advocating for women's rights (including reproductive rights) and minority rights and has been a vocal critic of PiS illiberalism.

The legal associations Iustitia and Themis have become active and prominent defenders of the rule of law. Farmers' associations began to protest in March 2024 against the European Green Deal and the tariff-free wheat coming from Ukraine. In the run-up to the April local elections, PiS supported these demonstrations, and Konfederacja backed them, as it is generally opposed to supporting Ukraine.

Trade unions, especially Solidarity, also backed these protests and aligned with PiS. According to the OECD and the ILO, trade union density is only 13%, but Solidarity and another large trade union, OPZZ, are quite successful at mobilizing their members for protests.

Support for democratic norms and procedures is consistently high among the Polish public, typically ranging from 60% to 70%. In 2024, 72% of respondents agreed that democracy is the best of all political systems. In the same survey by the Polish Center for Public Opinion (CBOS), 66% of respondents said it would make a difference for people like them if the political system were not democratic – one of the highest percentages since 1992.

However, specific support for democracy is lower. According to the survey, 46% of Poles are satisfied with how democracy works in their country, down from 2023, when the elections inspired a sense of agency and activism. Another 44% say they are dissatisfied.

Unsurprisingly, 2024 data show that satisfaction with democracy depends heavily on party affiliation and which party is in government. In 2022, 83% of PiS supporters were satisfied with democracy; now only 23% express satisfaction. Among Civic Coalition (KO) supporters, the share increased from 12% in 2022 to 72%, and among New Left (Lewica) supporters from 18% to 74%. Meanwhile, 55% of Polska 2050 supporters say democracy is working well.

There are many autonomous groups, associations and organizations; charitable institutions such as the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity, the Polish Red Cross and Caritas are generally well trusted. The level of civic participation in Poland continues to increase, and many Poles devote their free time to voluntary social activities, mainly with family and friends.

According to a 2023 survey by the Institute of Public Affairs, 11% of Poles are active in an NGO, 26% are active in their local communities and more than 30% support online fundraisers or petitions. Four percent of Poles are members of a political party, and 10% indicated they would reach out to politicians. Many people are also active

Approval of democracy

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Social capital

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in self-help organizations for refugees from Ukraine. Two-thirds of respondents indicated in 2022 that at least one person from their household would help Ukrainian refugees.

Trust levels fluctuate year to year, but the data consistently indicate that people are wary of strangers. Trust in other people peaked at 40% in 2020, then dropped to 30% in 2022 and rose slightly to 34% in 2024. A 2024 CBOS survey found that trust correlates with political preferences; supporters of right-wing parties exhibit less trust than supporters of center or left-wing parties. Institutional trust is higher for security-related organizations, such as the army and police, than for political institutions or the media.

II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

Absolute poverty in Poland has decreased not only because of the previous PiS government's welfare policies and increased spending. Positive developments in the labor market, improved access to education and measures by earlier – pre-2015 – governments to reduce temporary contracts and bring contract workers into the social security system have also helped mitigate social disparities. Poland now ranks among the better-performing half of EU member states on social exclusion.

The Gini coefficient of 28.8 (2023) indicates a relatively high level of equality, with 16.3% of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion, according to Eurostat 2023 – a slight improvement compared with 2021. The Human Development Index (0.876 in 2023) also remained stable. Poland's Gender Inequality Index (0.105 in 2023) shows modest improvements for women, particularly in the maternal mortality ratio (2 deaths per 100,000 live births) and in parliamentary representation. Although women now hold 29.6% of seats – a record high – this remains below the European average of 33%, and only 19% of senators are women.

Despite these improvements, unemployed young people, single mothers and people with disabilities remain disproportionately at risk of poverty. Family benefits introduced by PiS – such as the 500+ child allowance – raised household incomes, but relative poverty (people living on less than 50% of average household expenditure) persists. The relative poverty rate remained stable at 12% in 2023, compared with 2021, while the risk of poverty among children declined to 16.9% in 2023 (from 17.2% in 2018). According to Statistics Poland, however, the share of people living in extreme poverty increased to 5.2% in 2023, up from 4.2% in 2021.

Question
Score

Socioeconomic
barriers

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Economic indicators		2021	2022	2023	2024
GDP	\$ M	689170.2	695607.5	812451.1	914696.4
GDP growth	%	6.9	5.3	0.2	2.9
Inflation (CPI)	%	5.1	14.4	11.5	3.8
Unemployment	%	3.3	2.8	2.7	2.5
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	5.4	6.0	4.2	2.3
Export growth	%	12.3	7.4	3.7	2.0
Import growth	%	16.3	6.8	-1.5	4.2
Current account balance	\$ M	-8970.0	-15822.0	14535.0	-341.0
Public debt	% of GDP	53.0	48.8	49.5	55.3
External debt	\$ M	-	-	-	-
Total debt service	\$ M	-	-	-	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-2.3	-3.0	-4.5	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	19.0	17.1	18.0	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	18.5	18.1	18.9	20.8
Public education spending	% of GDP	4.6	4.3	-	-
Public health spending	% of GDP	4.6	4.7	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	1.4	1.5	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	2.2	2.2	3.8	-

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

Market competition is clearly defined and enforced at both the macroeconomic and microeconomic levels. Prices are fully liberalized, and the currency is fully convertible. The state fully guarantees market competition. All market participants, whether domestic or foreign, have equal opportunities.

Yet the informal sector has shrunk and accounts for 9.8% of all employment, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO). In agriculture, about 50% of workers are engaged in informal arrangements. The Polish Institute of Economic Forecasts and Analyses estimated that in 2024 about 18.5% of GDP was generated in the shadow economy, which is slightly less than in previous years.

Experts argue that the higher minimum wage and funds from the European Union have improved conditions for small businesses, making formal and official contracts more attractive.

Measures have been introduced to streamline the process of setting up a business, reduce bureaucracy and costs, ease tax-related issues and resolve insolvency. Online processes to speed the procedure are now available. Regarding foreign investment, two dominant concerns in recent years have been uncertainty about legal enforcement resulting from changes in the judiciary and the complexity of a frequently changing tax system. The current government is working to address these issues, but judicial reform will take time.

Market intervention became easier during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection (UOKiK) was granted additional powers, including the ability to block investments in companies of key national importance. UOKiK generally protects market access and consumer interests actively and independently.

Comprehensive competition laws to prevent monopolistic practices are enforced in Poland. The Office of Competition and Consumer Protection (UOKiK), the main anti-monopoly authority, functions well and intervenes in cases involving market concentration or dominance. In addition to enforcing competition laws, it is consulted during the legislative process. Poland remains in full compliance with EU requirements. Anyone who suffers a loss due to unlawful practices may file a complaint, including consumers as well as counterparties or competitors of enterprises that have violated competition law. Claims are heard by regional courts, regardless of value. Consumer rights were further strengthened by the Electronic Communications Act adopted in November 2024, which regulates the telecom market and provides greater protection for customers. The new law aligns with the European Electronic Communications Code and replaces the Telecommunications Act of 2004.

Market organization

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Competition policy

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Foreign trade has been liberalized with uniformly low tariffs since Poland joined the WTO in 1995 and the European Union in 2004. In 2023, most trade was conducted with EU member states (74.6% of exports and 67.5% of imports), with Germany as the most important trading partner (27.9% of exports and 19.9% of imports in 2023). According to the Polish Statistical Office, China accounted for the second-highest share of imports at 13.9%. Poland has recently diversified its exports toward new, more dynamic markets. As a result, it has reduced its current account deficit, and in 2023 its trade balance was positive. Trade relations with Russia and Ukraine are now marginal, totaling 3.2%, and neither country ranks among the top 10 trading partners. Machinery and transport equipment represent the largest share of both exports (38.2%) and imports (35.1%), followed by manufactured goods (16.7% and 15%).

Poland's banking system is solid and complies with international standards. It has contributed positively to Poland's economic development thanks to the central bank's conservative, risk-averse investment policies. The banking sector has remained profitable, well capitalized and liquid, and has become one of Europe's top performers. According to World Bank data, the share of non-performing loans has decreased further, reaching 2.43% in 2022. The bank capital-to-assets ratio has increased in recent years to 6.8% in 2021, slightly above Germany's 5.9%.

The banking system is organized according to international standards, with functional supervision, minimum capital requirements and market discipline. Poland is the single largest banking market in Central and Eastern Europe, and its roughly €670 billion in assets (or 95.7% of GDP) account for about one-third of the region's assets. In 2024, it comprised 29 commercial banks (most of them still under foreign ownership despite actions by the previous PiS government to repolonize the banking sector) and 492 cooperative banks, according to the Polish Financial Oversight Commission.

The stability of the banking sector was hampered to some extent by a policy that introduced a mortgage payment holiday in 2022 and 2023 to counter rising inflation. The current government continued the program in 2024 but made it more targeted to reduce costs.

8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

The National Bank of Poland (NBP) is an independent body as guaranteed by Article 227 of the 1997 constitution. Its current president, Adam Glapiński, appointed in June 2016 and re-elected in May 2022 to a second term, was an economic adviser to the late President Lech Kaczyński. He is therefore quite close to the previous PiS government. However, his management and the fiscal and monetary measures imposed seem to have worked well.

Poland's monetary policy seeks to maintain stability through a floating exchange rate against the euro. However, volatility has remained relatively low for several years, as has the real effective exchange rate; with 2005 set at 100, it stood at 117.6 in January

Liberalization of foreign trade

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Banking system

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Monetary stability

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2025. Poland does not participate in the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM II), which is designed to limit exchange rate fluctuations between the euro and other EU currencies and is a prerequisite for adopting the euro. Controlling inflation has long been a core objective of Poland's economic and monetary policy. Nevertheless, inflation rose sharply from 2.2% in 2019 to 13.2% in 2022, driven largely by rising energy prices following Russia's threat of and subsequent full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The previous government responded with temporary VAT cuts on food and fuel. Inflation eased again in 2024, falling to 3.8%, but it is expected to increase by 1 percentage point in 2025 due to the unfreezing of energy prices, according to the EU forecast. As of fall 2024, Poland had not met any of the criteria for adopting the euro, including those related to price stability, public finances, exchange rates and the convergence of long-term interest rates. The Tusk government does not have eurozone accession – or the constitutional amendments required to change the National Bank's provisions – on its agenda.

The government's fiscal and debt policies generally promote macroeconomic stability, but spending has increased on social welfare (pensions and health care), salaries of public sector employees, energy and defense (projected to reach 4.7% of GDP in 2025), as well as support for the approximately 1.7 million Ukrainians who sought refuge in Poland. The general government deficit rose from -0.7% in 2019 to -5.1% in 2023 as a result of these expenditures. The general government debt-to-GDP ratio has increased steadily from 45.7% in 2019 to 54.6% in 2024 and is expected to rise further, according to the EU forecast.

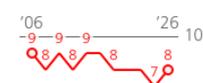
In July 2024, the EU launched an excessive deficit procedure because the general government deficit exceeded 3%, although public debt remained below the 60% threshold. The EU recommended restoring a sound fiscal position by 2028, and in October 2024, the Polish government presented a plan focused on increasing revenues through improved tax collection, supported by Poland's continued strong economic growth.

9 | Private Property

Property rights and the regulation of property acquisition are well defined in terms of acquisition, benefits, use and sale. Since Poland's accession to the European Union, foreigners from EU member states and European Economic Area (EEA) countries have been allowed to purchase land and real estate. Obstacles include the still-problematic functioning of the judicial system. Measures to “repolonize” Polish banks and media enterprises under the previous PiS government did not directly constrain the property rights of EU nationals but created a less open business climate. This has changed with the current government, and property rights are fully respected again.

Fiscal stability

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Property rights

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Institutionally, private companies are viewed as the primary engines of economic production, and they enjoy appropriate legal safeguards in principle. The private sector has increased to around 75% of employment and 70% of GDP and faces only moderate bureaucratic obstacles. However, it still takes considerable time to set up a company – on average, 37 days – the longest in the OECD. While many private companies survived the COVID-19 pandemic, due in part to several protective shields set up by the previous government, fast-changing, low-quality legislation and a public administration whose effectiveness is below the EU average have caused problems for domestic businesses, a 2023 European Commission study found. It also noted a comparatively lower share of private investment (19.1% of GDP compared to the EU average of 25.8%) for Poland.

The Tusk government has pledged to support smaller enterprises by simplifying the tax code and has promised to re-evaluate the status of state-controlled enterprises. Its attempts to reintroduce the rule of law and an independent judiciary increase confidence and legal security for private companies.

10 | Welfare Regime

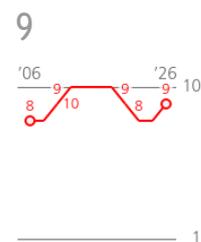
Poland has a public, contribution-based welfare regime that the previous PiS government expanded. Additional payments increased household incomes and helped reduce absolute poverty. Social inequality has also been decreasing. However, the increase in state benefits for certain groups of the population was not accompanied by structural reforms or investments in better infrastructure for nurseries, schools or institutions for the elderly. In particular, the provision of long-term and residential care for the elderly is among the lowest in the European Union.

Prior to the 2023 elections, the PiS government expanded some social benefits. The party's flagship Family 500+ Program, a benefit paid for each newborn child, was increased to PLN 800 shortly before the last elections and was kept by the incoming government, as was the 14th pension, which was supposed to be paid on top of a 13th pension.

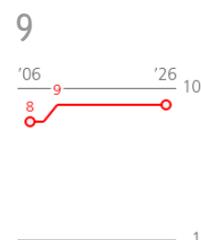
However, unemployment benefits were not increased in the same way and remained unchanged, whereas an increase in the minimum wage benefited people with lower incomes. In January 2025, the minimum wage rose to PLN 30.50 per hour (or €7.30) before taxes, or about €1,114.64 per month, which was about €90 more than in July 2024. Unemployment is the lowest in the European Union – at 2.8% in 2023 and 2.9% in 2024 – and labor shortages are becoming a problem instead.

The health care system remains inefficient and still needs further reforms. Health insurance covers 98% of the population but provides only a limited range of services. Additional out-of-pocket payments account for 23% of health care spending (the EU average is 16%). Poland has the lowest patient-doctor ratio in the European Union, a

Private enterprise



Social safety nets



growing shortage of health care professionals and uneven access to health care across the country. The PiS government increased health care spending to 6.4% of GDP by 2024, but it remained well below the EU average of 10.9%. Prime Minister Tusk promised further increases, but by early 2025 no legislation had passed. Health care workers initiated a citizens' bill in May 2023 for better pay and recognition of qualifications, but neither the former nor the current government had considered the draft, so they began protesting in fall 2024. Health security is a priority of the Polish EU Council presidency, but more domestic efforts are needed.

Support for Ukrainians who fled their country after Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 was initially generous but became more limited because of financial considerations. For example, since January 2025, the child benefit, which was raised from PLN 500 to PLN 800, has been paid only to parents who live, work and pay taxes in Poland.

Poland's strong economic performance and low unemployment are reducing disparities in equal opportunity. Increases in family allowances, child support and the minimum wage have improved family finances. Childcare institutions that enable women to balance work and family life still need to be expanded. In May 2024, the parliament passed a government bill to increase financial support for parents. The new law offers parents three types of benefits for children ages 12 to 35 months, including support for paying a nanny or for childcare.

Discrimination against women in the labor market is an ongoing issue, despite some improvements and equal access to education. The female-to-male enrollment ratio is 1 for primary and secondary education, but women constitute the majority of university students, with an enrollment ratio of 1.4, according to World Development Indicators 2024. However, this does not ensure equal employment levels for men and women. In 2023, women accounted for 45.6% of the labor force, a figure that has risen only marginally over the years. The labor force participation rate among women (51.6%) remains low compared with men (66.9%), and the gender employment gap compared with other EU member states has not decreased.

Nevertheless, the European Institute for Gender Equality, which publishes the Gender Equality Index and annual country assessments, indicates improvements for women in Poland, including the maternal mortality rate and representation in parliament. Poland's score rose to 63.4 out of 100 points, ranking it 18th in the European Union (compared with 23rd in 2022). Despite an increase in women members of parliament – 29%, up two percentage points from the 2019 election result – women remain under-represented in politics. Although legislative gender quotas are used for Sejm elections (35% of candidates on party lists should be women), some political parties do not promote gender equality in politics and do not actively support women's enhanced political representation and participation.

Equal opportunity

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Anti-discrimination policy did not feature prominently on the agenda of the previous PiS government. The Tusk government moved to implement the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR's) judgment to legalize same-sex partnerships. In the fall of 2024, it presented a bill to that effect. Although a majority of the population supports it and some Church members have said they have no objections, no final vote in parliament has taken place yet.

Poland grants Ukrainian refugees who entered the country after February 24, 2022 legal residence, the right to work, access to health care and financial support for a certain period. These benefits do not extend to citizens of third countries, and NGOs reported that African or Arab students arriving from Ukraine were not treated in a similarly welcoming way.

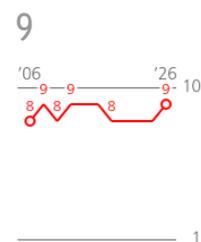
11 | Economic Performance

The performance of the Polish economy has generally been good. Growth rates varied slightly after the strong rebound from the pandemic-related decline (-2.2% in 2020). Growth was 5.3% in 2022 and is projected at 3.2% for 2024, according to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Transition Report. GDP per capita continues to rise and was \$49,464 in 2023, with a growth rate of 0.5%. This development is relatively sustainable insofar as it rests on solid domestic consumption, high consumer confidence and relatively low unemployment (down from 3.1% in 2021 to 2.9% in 2024), as well as improved tax collection. However, inflation surged from 2.1% in 2019 to 14.4% in 2022, then to 11.5% in 2024. In addition, the war in Ukraine has created new challenges for Poland. These include social spending for Ukrainian refugees, defense expenditures, uncertainty about economic development due to security threats and the need to redirect energy production and import routes.

In terms of productivity, Poland has caught up with more developed EU member states, although it is still at 63% of the EU average. The diversified export structure of the manufacturing sector helps balance developments in trading partner countries. With the ongoing reforms of the judiciary, legal security is likely to improve again in Poland, which is beneficial for foreign investment. However, Poland's close economic ties with Germany, whose economy was struggling in 2024, have created some challenges.

The rate of foreign investment in 2023 was 3.9% of GDP, still below previous years' levels. Yet Poland is seeing rising outward FDI flows, a trend that has strengthened in recent years. This is due to generational changes in Polish companies and greater capacity to engage in international markets.

Output strength



12 | Sustainability

Poland has enshrined the principle of sustainable development in Article 5 of its constitution and has broadly adopted EU environmental standards. However, previous governments always prioritized economic growth over environmental protection and were especially concerned about the domestic coal industry. This still creates several problems. First, it has led to a dispute with the neighboring Czechia as Poland continued to mine coal near the border in Turow despite complaints about environmental problems. The Czech government sued Poland before the CJEU, which led to a daily penalty of €500,000 in September 2021 for failing to halt mining operations. After an interim agreement between the two governments in 2022, environmental indicators began to improve. Yet NGOs continue to bring cases in Polish courts. Coal – which has declined in importance but still remains the primary source of electricity (57%) – also contributes to low air quality, as demonstrated by the European Air Quality Index. In addition, Greenpeace Polska found that the ecological disaster in the Oder River in 2022 – which recurred on a smaller scale the following summer – stemmed from pollution linked to mining, a cause the PiS government had always denied.

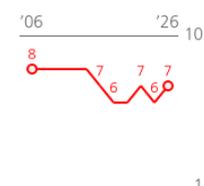
Russia's war against Ukraine accelerated an energy shift, and Poland joined projects such as the Baltic Pipe and a new gas pipeline from Slovakia. Governments also expanded investments in renewable energy, introducing subsidies for private consumers and companies. As a result, the share of wind and solar power increased, and overall renewable energy rose from 16.9% in 2021 to 28.8% in 2024.

Another planned path to reduce CO₂ emissions – initiated by the former PiS government and continued by the Tusk government – is the development of a nuclear power plant. The project is being pursued with an American partner, and the government plans to spend more than PLN 60 billion (€14 billion) on it by 2030, an amount covering only about 30% of the total costs. The remainder is expected to come from foreign borrowing. The government is currently updating the 2021 National Energy and Climate Plan to meet EU standards and consulting with experts and NGOs.

Poland's school system provides generally sound education and training. However, the latest PISA results show a decline in performance. After improving to above the OECD average in 2018, the 2022 survey showed a drop, and the share of students not meeting the minimum level increased to 23%. Some experts attribute this to long school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic and controversial educational reforms that eliminated a wide range of secondary school types. At the same time, according to 2022 data in the U.N. Education Index, Poland ranked near the top with a score of 0.882.

Environmental policy

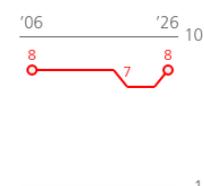
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Education policy / R&D

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Teachers' strikes occur frequently due to low salaries and poor working conditions. There was also dissatisfaction with curriculum content and workload under the PiS government. Since taking office, the Tusk government has increased teachers' salaries by 30% in early 2024. In January 2025, it announced that state-funded religious education in schools will be reduced to one hour per week, despite protests from the Catholic Church. The education minister argued that this change will allow more flexibility in the curriculum starting in September 2025. Debates over curriculum reforms continue between liberal and conservative parties – both in government and in opposition – including on topics such as health education and history. Government expenditures on education accounted for 4.6% of GDP in 2023, according to the Central Statistical Office, while spending on research and development totaled 1.56% of GDP. A recurring criticism is that Poland should do more to support innovation and strengthen STEM fields. Despite gradual increases, Poland's innovation performance remains at 60.5% of the EU average. Since the previous PiS government increased political control over universities, the current government plans reforms to re-democratize higher education and strengthen students' rights. It is also drafting changes to the National Centre for Research and Development and the Polish Academy of Sciences to improve their independent operations. R&D expenditures are rising – now at 1.46% of GDP – but remain below the EU average of 2.24%.

Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

Structural constraints on governance remain relatively low, but challenges persist. Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine and its hybrid attacks on Poland continue. As a result, Poland continues to host more than one million registered Ukrainian refugees and an even higher estimated number of unregistered refugees. They must be accommodated and integrated into state structures such as the school system, labor market and social security.

Another facet of Russia's attempts to challenge Poland and its European partners is the situation on the border with Belarus. Both Russia and Belarus sent numerous migrants whom they had "invited" and encouraged to attempt illegal border crossings in 2021 and 2022 and again in 2024, though in lower numbers. In response, the PiS government declared a state of emergency September 2021 – July 2022 in an area along the border with Belarus and erected a 5.5-meter-high wall along 186 kilometers of the border, almost half its total length in 2022. Both measures have been criticized by many observers and the United Nations for insufficient attention to the humanitarian dimension of the crisis, again in 2024.

Considering the general domestic socioeconomic conditions, Poland faces no constraints. A high level of economic development, a well-educated workforce, low unemployment and well-developed infrastructure create favorable conditions. Regional imbalances persist but have been mitigated by EU structural funds, now arriving in greater amounts to Poland after the current government began engaging to resolve the rule-of-law conflict with the European Union. Domestic reforms in the judicial and media systems must continue to fully secure the rule of law and increase trust in institutions. Higher salaries for public service staff and teachers are intended to improve job satisfaction and ease personnel shortfalls, which are becoming a problem for the country.

Traditions of civil society are very strong in Poland. The emergence of civil society dates to the late 1970s, with events surrounding the recognition of the Solidarity trade union by the communists and the union's unique activities during the period from 1980 to 1981 and afterward. Groups linked to the Catholic Church also served as forums for critical discussions that promoted democratic values during communism. The democratic transition provided impetus for the development and rapid growth of civil society organizations over the last 30 years in Poland. Today, there are more than 9,000 nonprofit organizations in Poland, according to the portal ngo.pl, which

Structural
constraints

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'06 _____ '26 10



Civil society
traditions

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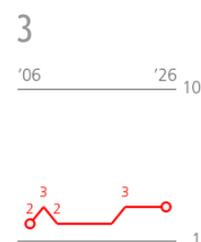


lists an overall number of 138,000 social organizations of different kinds. About 50% of them are fully operational. They are spread across the country, including villages and smaller cities. During the 2023 elections, NGOs were very influential in public mobilization for a change in government, protection of the rule of law and the judiciary, and the right to abortion. These activities contributed to high voter turnout.

Following these experiences, the general level of trust in society increased from 19% in 2022 to 24% in 2024. Trust in strangers also rose from 30% to 34%. However, over the long term these figures did not change significantly, as there were years with similar or slightly higher levels of trust. Those surveyed trust charity organizations, the military and the police more than political institutions.

Violent incidents based on social, ethnic or religious differences are rare in Poland due to its ethnic and religious homogeneity. However, political cleavages exist. Although about 88% of Poles are Catholic, about half oppose the Church's public interference. The main divide is between supporters of the Civic Coalition – in government since late 2023 – and Law and Justice (PiS), the main opposition party. Civil society organizations and interest associations often call for demonstrations, sometimes aligning with or opposing political party topics. Society remains polarized, with a hostile climate and hate speech from right-wing and far-right groups persisting. Hate speech against LGBTQ+ people was prominent in PiS's public discourse during previous elections. Demonstrations against the abortion ban and other issues, such as support for refugees at the Belarus border, were met with excessive police response and violence. Human rights organizations have criticized the current government regarding the border situation.

Conflict intensity



II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

The change in government in 2023 brought a shift in priorities. While the PiS government emphasized state intervention in economic and social policies; executive control of the media, the judiciary and civil society; and a vision of national sovereignty within the European Union, the Tusk government's priorities differ fundamentally, especially on those latter points, with a focus on restoring democratic practices and regaining trust from European partners.

Available tools for planning and organizing policy measures, such as regulatory impact assessments, strategic planning units and consultation with stakeholders and experts, have been reactivated, as have social dialogue and evidence-based policymaking. Yet the government must at times adjust its priorities in response to

Question

Score

Prioritization



domestic and international constraints, including the president's veto power and the war in Ukraine. NGOs have also complained that their views on proposed legislation are not always adequately considered.

The outgoing PiS government prioritized reforms to secure its power and occasionally bent rules to expand social security provisions, benefiting many. The new government, starting with a coalition agreement and a clear policy plan developed during the electoral campaign, focuses on effective implementation and reforms that broadly serve the population and democracy. These include promoting the energy transition with a focus on renewables, restoring legal certainty, ensuring a fair bureaucracy and maintaining social welfare policies.

Given rising expenditures stemming from the impacts of the war in Ukraine and from transition costs in other policy areas, the financial aspect of implementation is becoming a significant issue. Poland is under the European Union's Excessive Deficit Procedure. The European Commission's 2024 decision to unfreeze funds that had been withheld because of the Rule of Law procedure has been very helpful to the government's capacity to implement its political aims. However, further domestic reforms are still necessary.

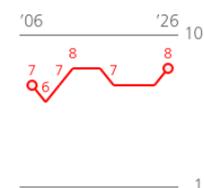
Actual and anticipated vetoes by President Duda also affect the government's ability to implement policy changes. Although the coalition holds a majority in both chambers of parliament, it lacks the three-fifths majority needed to override a presidential veto. Reaching compromises in this context is nearly impossible, so some proposed bills are being held until after the presidential elections in May 2025.

Institutional mechanisms for policy learning through regulatory impact assessments are once again being used in Poland. Previous governments developed these tools and sought to professionalize staff in the chancellery, ministries, parliament and public administration, but the PiS government largely stopped using them after taking office in 2015.

Parliamentary and committee deliberations – including hearings with experts and interest groups – now function properly again, and policy experts provide advice based on their qualifications. As a result, the government is again able to replace ineffective policies with innovative ones. Policy learning and thorough consultations have regained importance for lawmakers. However, some non-state actors continue to complain that they lack adequate access to the government.

Implementation

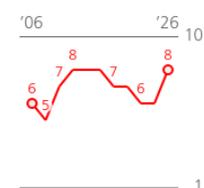
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Policy learning

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15 | Resource Efficiency

The government is legally obligated to make efficient use of available human, financial and organizational resources. The constitution also requires the government to maintain a sound state budget and improve local administration. Current increases in social spending on families and pensioners, combined with a shrinking workforce, have already increased state budget expenditures. The government deficit increased to 5.1% of GDP, and Poland is under the European Union's Excessive Deficit Procedure. Because the economy continues to grow, the government promised the European Union that it would raise more revenue to consolidate the state budget again.

The Supreme Audit Office (NIK) remains a well-functioning institution that oversees expenditures and ensures the efficient use of public funds. As a result, NIK's director has faced politically motivated pressure in the past.

The current Tusk government has begun reforms in public administration to restore a professionally trained and impartial workforce.

Burden-sharing between national, regional and local levels has improved with the availability of new funds and the restoration of self-administration. Large cities and other local entities can now pursue environmentally friendly reforms to public transportation and local infrastructure that were not possible under the PiS government.

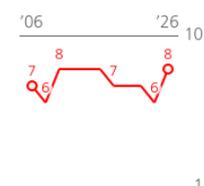
Structurally, policy coordination requires the Chancellery of the Prime Minister to monitor the government's legislative work and issue opinions on documents to be submitted to the Council of Ministers. A standing committee coordinates work within the chancellery and prepares for cabinet meetings, while cabinet committees coordinate diverse policy areas.

During the PiS government's tenure, policy coordination was more informal and the role of cabinet committees was limited. PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński acted as the main decision-maker, so coordination was hierarchical and existing structures were less important than following orders from the party leadership. At the same time, friction occurred, for example, with Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro, and task assignment was not always clear.

These practices changed in late 2023 when a new coalition government was formed. Policy coordination with government institutions is now more coherent and transparent. Because the government is a multiparty coalition, well-coordinated decision-making is necessary. Policy coordination includes interest associations and branches of government other than the core executive. Only coordination with the office of the state president remains conflict-laden, and the government did not initiate certain policy reforms, such as the abortion law or judicial reforms, because of expected resistance from the state president.

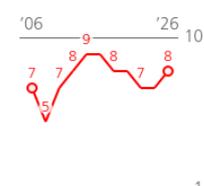
Efficient use of assets

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Policy coordination

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Legal integrity mechanisms have only been partially implemented, and political corruption has been a major issue in Poland in recent years. The PiS government claimed it would contain corruption and therefore expanded the tasks of the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau (CBA). However, the bureau did not operate independently or actively combat corruption. In addition, PiS politicians engaged in corrupt practices and used the CBA to accuse and discredit other politicians. As a result, the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) repeatedly noted shortcomings and found that these measures did not sufficiently confront public officeholders. In addition, only one of GRECO's 21 recommendations from its last visit was addressed. GRECO again listed shortcomings among the police and border guards and demanded a more ambitious approach and integrity policies for persons exercising top executive functions. PiS's grip on the media and judiciary, along with opaque administrative procedures, increased clientelism and the politically motivated, one-sided distribution of money and positions. The Supreme Audit Office (NIK) was the only institution that tried to monitor public procurement procedures.

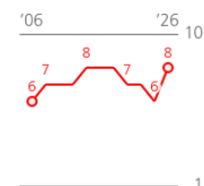
Because of these developments, one of the major priorities after KO and its partners came to power in 2023 was to combat clientelism. In July 2024, Minister of Justice Adam Bodnar announced a list of 20 priorities his administration would tackle. One main element is the government's April 2024 announcement to abolish the CBA and transfer authority to combat corruption to the police – with a new specialized unit – and to the domestic intelligence service. Another task is to improve the system for income tax declarations. There are 20 different templates for these declarations in Poland, which makes it difficult to oversee proper procedures and to strengthen the financial administration's capacity. Experts demand that political accountability of these authorities be further increased and that their heads no longer be appointed by the prime minister. NGOs argued they had been involved in legislative discussions only at a late stage.

Another measure against corrupt politicians is a bill passed in January 2025 that allows lawmakers who face pretrial detention to be barred from continuing their duties and receiving parliamentary benefits and payments. This relates to the case of a PiS member of parliament who fled to Hungary after receiving an arrest warrant. While the government considers this a means to combat political misbehavior, the opposition considers it political revenge.

The state provides funding to political parties to compensate them for campaigning and political work if a party receives more than 3% of the vote or an electoral coalition more than 6%. The National Election Commission then reviews the parties' reports on how they spend their budgets. After the 2023 election, the Commission did not accept PiS's report and denied payment of roughly €17 million in state subsidies for three years due to several irregularities. PiS appealed to the Supreme Court, which ruled that the Commission was wrong and asked the Commission to make the payment, but also referred to the Court's contested legitimacy, as most judges were picked by PiS. The finance minister, who is responsible for making the payment, is still in discussion with the Election Commission on how to handle the situation.

Anti-corruption policy

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16 | Consensus-Building

All major political actors agree on the primacy of democracy, but parties have different ideas about the preferred form of democracy, such as the level of self-administration, checks and balances and the degree of integration with the European Union. While the Civic Coalition (KO), Lewica, Polska 2050 and PSL favor a decentralized mode of governance, the opposition PiS and its allies in Solidarna Polska and Konfederacja support a highly centralized mode of governance and strive to concentrate political power in the national core executive.

All major political actors agree on the primacy of the market economy, but parties differ over the state's role. Liberal parties such as KO and Polska 2050 advocate minimal state involvement in the economy. In contrast, PiS supports more intensive economic governance, a demand-oriented economic policy and a paternalistic welfare state.

Relevant political actors follow democratic norms and procedures, and the Tusk government is pushing for reforms to bring the country back onto a democratic path. Anti-democratic actors are influential as well. The PiS party, now in opposition but still doing well in opinion polls, pursues political goals that are anti-democratic insofar as they would continue to undermine the independence of the judiciary and public media. The extreme right, the Confederation of Liberty and Independence (Konfederacja, KWiNN), has been represented in parliament since 2019 and also polls fairly well, at 13% to 14%. The National Rebirth of Poland Party and the National Movement, which organize demonstrations on Polish Independence Day (November 11), do not refrain from violence during the parades. The parties now in government see themselves as defenders of democratic values, but they cannot fully constrain actors who are less supportive of democracy.

Several cleavages have divided Polish society for several years, and the previous government consciously reinforced them. They concern issues such as abortion; the influence of the Catholic Church; environmental protection and measures against climate change; EU integration; and separation of powers and political pluralism. They manifested in political rhetoric, including hate speech and defamation, and in institutional changes – especially reduced freedom of opinion, changes in the media system, and curtailment of the rule of law. The incumbent government coalition now aims to overcome these cleavage-based conflicts that its predecessors stirred. Turnout in the 2023 elections – 74.4% – was the result of polarized mobilization and, at the same time, showed that a majority of voters opted for less confrontational politics.

Despite efforts and initial success in reforming public media to reduce conflict, Polish politics remains polarized. The state president frequently uses veto power, hindering reform attempts, particularly those aimed at reintroducing an independent judiciary. Women's abortion rights remain unresolved due to opposition from the state

Consensus on goals

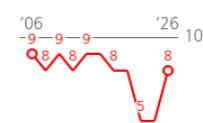
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Anti-democratic actors

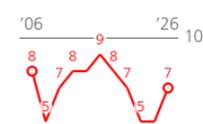
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Cleavage / conflict management

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president and the Constitutional Tribunal. The Women's Strike has become a powerful non-governmental organization. If the government fails to resolve this conflict, it may escalate again.

By law, the government is required to consult all parties affected by proposed legislation. Online consultations with ministries have been introduced, as has the option to follow a bill through the lawmaking process online.

The PiS government did not encourage civil society participation in policymaking and rarely consulted with trade unions, employers' associations or other experts. Members of the Social Dialogue Council (RDS), an institutionalized consultation platform for trade unions and employers' associations, have not always collaborated successfully. In October 2020, the trade union NSZZ Solidarność resigned in protest, and employers' associations criticized the lack of genuine dialogue. The PiS government not only disregarded civil society but also used the registry of foreign-funded NGOs to control them, while loyal conservative NGOs received public funding from the National Freedom Institute – Center for Civil Society Development.

This approach to civil society changed in late 2023 when the new coalition government took office. Trade unions, however, did not align with the new parties in government. In spring 2024, prior to the European Parliament elections, they organized massive protests with farmers against the European Union's New Green Deal, which were supported by the PiS party. The NSZZ Solidarność trade union, in particular, opposes the phasing out of coal, blaming the Tusk government for the rise in energy prices. NGOs advocating for more progressive political change criticize the government for not doing enough and for not listening to them sufficiently.

Rules for dealing with Poland's communist past are in force. The Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), established in 1998, obtained the archives of the communist police and has made the files of the secret services accessible to affected persons since 2000. Public interest in these files has always been comparatively low. Officials must declare whether they collaborated with the communist secret police or intelligence services. If they admit to such activities, they are not punished.

When the PiS party was in power, the government used the IPN to fulfill its own agenda regarding national values, not for reconciliation but to defame its political competitors and to justify eliminating judicial independence. PiS also significantly expanded the IPN's budget.

Other examples of politicizing history include actions by the PiS culture minister to promote a distinct nationalist narrative of Polish history in museums, particularly the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk and the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, as well as the former education minister's revisionist approach to school textbooks. The Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) has developed video games, apps and other tools to promote a nationalistic and often

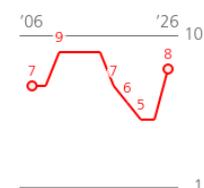
Public consultation

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Reconciliation

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militaristic image of Polish history. It has also initiated investigations into alleged killings of priests and opposition figures by communist forces prior to the 1989 transition.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the IPN has renewed its efforts to dismantle monuments and other symbols of the Soviet army across Poland. While there are bilateral treaties that require Poland to maintain war cemeteries and graves, the public monuments have always been contested. The IPN – now backed by the Tusk government – has called on Ukraine to exhume Polish victims of the Volhynia massacres, in which about 100,000 Poles were killed by Ukrainian nationalists during World War II. After negotiations between the ministries of culture, a decision was reached to start this process in January 2025.

In November 2024, PiS selected IPN director Karol Nawrocki, who is not a party member, as its candidate for the May 2025 presidential election. Nawrocki presents himself as someone with a working-class background who became a historian and is not a career politician.

While the director of the Museum of the Second World War has announced plans to reorganize the exhibition for a more differentiated presentation of the past, the politics of history remains a complicated issue, and the current government is taking a cautious approach in this regard.

17 | International Cooperation

Regarding international assistance, Poland holds an intermediate position. On the one hand, as a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Poland provides development assistance. On the other hand, Poland still receives funding for its own development projects.

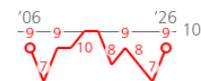
For several years, the World Bank and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) have provided a loan of \$795 million, or about €736 million, for two projects, which continued from 2024 onward with a new loan of €250 million. The projects support clean air in Poland through improved heating sources and flood management along the Odra and Vistula rivers. The PiS government welcomed this assistance and hosted many Ukrainian refugees.

Despite persistent corruption, Poland has had relatively few problems with EU funds. However, past politicians often used these funds to promote their political agendas rather than address urgent societal issues.

After the current government presented a thorough plan in February 2024 to bring Poland back on track in its rule-of-law dispute with the European Commission, it received the first tranche of more than €6 billion from the COVID-19 recovery fund, Next Generation EU. The money funds Poland's green energy transition, transport

Effective use of support

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infrastructure and health care reforms. In all, Poland will receive €137 billion through 2027, including €59.8 billion from the Next Generation EU fund (a mix of loans and grants) and €76.5 billion from the Cohesion Fund – the largest share in the European Union.

In November 2024, Poland, along with Germany and four other member states, pushed for reform of the Cohesion Policy to more closely tie it to incentives for domestic structural reforms and to maintain the role of regions.

Poland complies with most international agreements (including the ICC and most ILO conventions), engages in international cooperation and provides development assistance. The previous government was very reluctant to comply with international climate change agreements. Although it signed the Paris Accords, it was not committed to implementing them and sought opt-outs from EU climate targets. A shift toward pursuing an energy transition is now visible. The current Polish government faces farmers' protests against the European Union's Green Deal, emphasizes national interests in EU meetings and could do more to meet its international obligations. However, it is more engaged than the PiS government in meeting these standards.

The Tusk government has also regained trust at the European level and is again considered a reliable partner. On EU sanctions against Russia, weapons deliveries and increased defense spending, it even demands more action from its fellow Europeans. The willingness to comply with EU rule-of-law demands led to the closure of the Article 7 procedure in spring 2024 and the receipt of EU funds that had previously been halted. Poland has therefore become a reliable partner again.

Since the change in government in December 2023, Poland's relations with neighboring states, especially Germany, and the European Union have improved. The deterioration caused by Poland's rule-of-law infringements created severe problems, leading to the withholding of EU funds. However, on migration policy and the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), Poland is still not always eager to accept EU compromises. According to a CBOS survey from spring 2024, Polish society has always been very supportive of EU membership, with support over 80% since accession to the European Union. Therefore, the idea of a "Polexit" – which some PiS politicians voiced in the past – has never found fertile ground among the population.

Regarding relations with Germany, the PiS government requested up to \$1.3 trillion in reparations as compensation for German crimes during World War II. Prime Minister Tusk ended the push for reparations but continued to call for compensation. The German assessment is that a settlement has already been reached and there are no grounds for further demands.

Credibility

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Regional cooperation

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Because of the war in Ukraine and the political situation in Belarus, relations with other neighboring countries have also changed. Poland has been strongly supportive of the societal protests against the government in Belarus and of those who fled Belarus and Ukraine, and it demands more military support for Ukraine and higher defense spending by EU and NATO members. From January 2025 onward, Poland holds the EU Council presidency for the second time since it became an EU member state. It focuses primarily on defense and security, and it aims to strengthen the European Union's relations with NATO, the United States and the United Kingdom. In line with efforts to make Europe more secure, the presidency also prepares for talks on the next Multiannual Financial Framework and on EU enlargement. Relations with Germany and France in the Weimar Triangle have been reactivated, though they sometimes face setbacks.

Strategic Outlook

Poland's strengths lie in its robust, diversified economy, stable domestic consumption and sound banking system. The country's proximity to other European markets, a well-educated workforce and wages that remain comparatively lower than in Western Europe continue to attract foreign investors. These advantages proved valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic and again after Russia's war against Ukraine began to affect European economies. The unfreezing of EU funds – following the Tusk government's alignment with CJEU rulings and its plan to reform the judiciary – was also a major achievement. However, Poland now needs to exit the European Union's Excessive Deficit Procedure. The deficit breach was confirmed in July 2024, and Poland must present corrective measures to the European Commission by April 2025.

With the Tusk government in office, Poland's democratic backsliding has halted. Yet it has become clear that restoring the rule of law will not be quick or simple. Several promised reforms have not yet been implemented, and delays have already cost the government some political support. While the government has made progress and has often pointed to the president's veto as the main obstacle, this argument risks wearing thin. Some measures can be implemented without full legislative change, and the government needs strategies in case Civic Platform's candidate Rafał Trzaskowski does not win the presidential election in May 2025. Going forward, what matters is not only policy content but also innovative policymaking procedures that would allow the government to deliver its agenda even if cooperation with a president from a different political camp remains necessary.

In terms of policy priorities, the government should continue strengthening the R&D sector, stimulating innovation and expanding renewable energy. These measures would support foreign investment and improve collaboration between research institutions and industry. Similar efforts are needed in education, as highlighted by the latest PISA results. Poland also faces a demographic shift driven by low fertility rates and rising unit labor costs, which could erode its competitive edge. Labor shortages in several sectors may require revisiting the country's restrictive approach to migration. The health sector remains an additional challenge: doctor-patient relations are poor, and access to health care needs to improve.

Beyond these domestic pressures, the ongoing war in neighboring Ukraine – and the unpredictable policy choices of the new U.S. President Donald Trump – cast a long shadow over nearly every aspect of policymaking. The social, economic, energy and security implications are substantial, even as Europe has so far maintained cohesion and secured its energy supply. Poland's EU Council presidency will provide another opportunity to demonstrate leadership, but given political shifts in neighboring Germany and EU-critical governments in Slovakia and Hungary, this will be a demanding task.