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## For more years of “Law and Justice”?

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### Parliamentary election scenarios for the PiS, Poland’s governing party

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Since the Russia invasion in Europe in violation of international law, Poland, Germany’s large neighbour, has become an important “front-line state” on the border of Belarus and Ukraine. In the autumn of 2023, it will elect a new parliament. The “Law and Justice” party, led by Chairman Jarosław Kaczyński, appears confident. The national conservative power expects to form a government for the third time in a row (the first was in 2015) and secure its system of power. What core issues dominate the political discourse, and what ideas guide the PiS? This analysis examines the party’s chances and sketches various election scenarios – including one that involves an entirely new coalition on the Vistula.

### A bit more than six months until the election

In late autumn of this year, on a Sunday between 15 October and 5 November, Poland will elect a new Sejm, or lower house of the bicameral legislature. It is uncertain whether these elections will bring about a change of government. Current polls show the perpetuation of a decisive trend: “**Law and Justice**” (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, or PiS) will receive the most votes and be the strongest force after the elections.

But it is very unlikely that the national conservative PiS (currently with a 34.0% approval)<sup>1</sup> – and its current coalition partners, the **United Right** (“Zjednoczona Prawica”, ZP), **United Poland** (“Solidarna Polska”, SP) under Minister of Justice Zbigniew Ziobro, and **The Republicans** (“Partia Republikańska”, PR) under Chairman Adam Bielan – will be able to gain the absolute majority that would enable them to continue the government in its current composition.

The alternative is the liberal, left, and moderately conservative opposition, consisting of the **Civic Coalition** (“Koalicja Obywatelska”, KO, currently at 26.8%), the **New Left** (“Nowa Lewica”, 8.3%), **Poland 2050** (“Polska 2050”, 8.3%), and the Polish coalition grouped around the **Polish People’s Party** (“Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe”, PSL; 5.0%), which have a reasonable chance of replacing the current government.<sup>2</sup> But the continuing discussion, sometimes conducted openly and in a hostile manner, about whether the formation of a single “Anti-PiS” coalition, uniting the candidate lists of all these various partners under the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ewybory.eu/sondaze-europa/polska/>

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see David Gregosz, Daniel Lemmen, Piotr Womela: “The Polish opposition ahead of the 2023 parliamentary elections: Is political change on the horizon?”, KAS Länderbericht of 1/2/2023, available online at: <https://www.kas.de/documents/252038/22168750/The+Polish+opposition+ahead+of+the+2023+parliamentary+elections%3B+How+likely+are+political+changes+in+Warsaw.pdf/a7111cc7-c6b4-0c1e-a0ab-0004931f17a0?version=1.1&t=1675859851256>.

leadership of the Civic Platform (“Platforma Obywatelska”, PO) and its chairman, Donald Tusk, is, or even must be,<sup>3</sup> the right way to ensure electoral success and a change of government, is currently a massive drag on the probability of success.

Another opposition party that will almost certainly be represented in the coming Sejm but can by no means be counted among the cosmopolitan end of the Polish party spectrum is considered by many commentators to be a potential new partner, something of a kingmaker for the PiS: the heterogeneous **“Confederation Liberty and Independence”** (“Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość”, or Konfederacja for short). This broad amalgamation of economic liberals, conservatives, nationals, Eurosceptics, libertarians, and even monarchists is among the most popular small parties, reaching third place at 8.6%. But the parliamentary elections are still more than six months away, so that a sober consideration shows that the party, not least because of the great volatility in party popularity in Poland, remains primarily a major unknown factor.

### The PiS’s starting position is not ideal

The fact that the PiS is established and actually has a realistic shot at its third consecutive legislative period in power (the first began in 2015), is new and, to many observers, relatively surprising. “Law and Justice”, the dominating power within the united right, remained well ahead of all other Polish parties in voter favourability throughout 2022. But until a few weeks ago, the party had been unable to get itself on the political offensive. Its lead over the PO, the most powerful opposition party, continuously shrank until December of 2022, down to about three per cent.

The cause seems to be the amateurish implementation of a tax and social policy reform known as “Nowy Ład” (“Polish order”) that plunged the party into a serious crisis. This comprehensive socio-economic programme entirely along the lines of “Law and Justice” ideas was to be a symbol of hope for state reconstruction following the pandemic.<sup>4</sup> The tax portion of the programme came into force on 1/1/2022, creating chaos and causing additional burdens even for the party’s own voters, many of them socially needy. This precipitated the resignation of Minister of Finance Tadeusz Kościński, who was summarily assigned blame for the problems. “Polish order” then disappeared completely from the PiS’s political media campaigns, even though its implementation continued.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 caused a jump in the popularity of “Law and Justice” (from 30.6% in January to 35.1% in April, when the PO had 25.4%). The war in the neighbouring country, the call for external security for Poland and more forceful defence measures, and a welcome for Ukrainian refugees pushed other issues to the background, and Poles rallied around their government. But the “banner effect” by itself was unable to sustain popularity and began to dwindle.

Instead, the government found itself cornered by dramatically rising inflation (16.6% in December 2022<sup>5</sup>) and questions about “Law and Justice” energy security. The PiS was forced into a reactive stance and a policy of protective measures against rising prices and the effects of the war. This policy was accepted only gradually.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.politykainsight.pl/polityka/scenapolityczna/2206266,1,sondaz-promujacy-jedna-liste-podzielil-opozycje.read>

<sup>4</sup> For more about the PiS’s “Polski Ład” social policy concept, see: David Gregosz, Thomas Behrens, “Polens Regierung plant Post-Covid-Ära”, KAS Länderbericht of 6/5/2021, available online at: <https://www.kas.de/de/web/polen/laenderberichte/detail/-/content/polens-regierung-plant-post-covid-aera>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nbp.pl/home.aspx?f=/statystyka/bazowa/bazowa.htm>.

The PiS met discord in its own ranks with an internal party structural reform that now enables party headquarters to keep its forces in line in all party districts (94 instead of the previous 41), which is especially important for the large voting potential of rural and structurally weak regions.

And PiS party chairman Jarosław Kaczyński responded the growing pressure on the country's treasury with a new tactic: "flexibility" in the face of demands from Brussels. This allowed the government to negotiate an agreement with Brussels over the course of the year in the confrontation with the EU Commission about maintaining minimum rule-of-law standards (with the help of "milestones"). The success of this change of course remains to be seen. Efforts to free up financial investment resources of 35.4 billion euros from Brussels, urgently needed by the Warsaw government in the face of the enormous load of heightened defence spending and an economy suffering from inflation, as part of the implementation of the Polish reconstruction plan led to the concrete measure of a change to Poland's highest court ("Sąd Najwyższy", or SN) passed by the Sejm on 8 February 2023. Since President Andrzej Duda surprised the PiS by refusing to sign the law, instead forwarding it "preventively" for review to a constitutional tribunal ("Trybunał Konstytucyjny", TK), it has still not come into force.<sup>6</sup> According to the Morawiecki government, the law fulfils the EU Commission requirements and contains the decisive concessions in the controversial justice reform; everyone now awaits the TK decision and the decision as to whether EU funds will be released before the parliamentary elections.

Given all these problems, the polls of the last three months surprisingly show that the PiS has gained two percentage points since the beginning of the year (32.0% in December of 2022, 34.0% in March of 2023), while all opposition parties (except for the "Confederation" – more on that later) have lost significant ground – most of all the PO, from 28.9% to 26.8%. Why is the government outperforming expectations is this way?

## **The Polish pope, coherent campaign appearances, and a strong Poland in a new, different Europe**

The PiS is a master of presenting Poland compellingly as a threatened homeland that must be protected against external influences, criticism, and interference. The current controversy about Pope John Paul II, whom PiS is trying to use to gain political momentum in an election year, is characteristic.

The debate was triggered by the "Franciszkańska 3" report, which was broadcast on 6 March by TVN 24, a private broadcaster.<sup>7</sup> It included evidence that Karol Wojtyła, who later became Pope John Pope John Paul II, knew during his time as Archbishop of Kraków of priests who had been accused of paedophilia, had given them mild punishments (moving them to different parishes), and covered up cases that could have been damaging to the Catholic Church. The accusations have produced deep divisions in Poland's political scene – but not, as polls show<sup>8</sup>, in the broad public or the PiS, which continues to hold fast to the positive image of John Paul II, who for decades has been a recognized figure of national

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.rp.pl/sady-i-trybunaly/art37939481-prezydent-andrzej-duda-podjal-decyzje-ws-ustawy-o-sadzie-najwyzszym>; there are suspicions that President Duda, even though he is from the PiS camp, felt left out by the government after his own negotiation efforts in the first half of 2022 were not supported.

<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the recently published book "Maxima Culpa" by Dutch journalist Ekke Overbeek has added to the controversy.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rp.pl/kosciol/art38156971-nowe-publikacje-o-karolu-wojtyle-wplynely-na-ocene-autorytetu-papieza-polacy-odpowiedzieli-w-sondazu>

identification, hope, and freedom. Thus “Law and Justice” capitalized on the opportunity of reacting across all political channels.

PiS politicians call the report an attack comparable to Communist denunciations, and the party spokesman claimed that they were broadcast to report on a “paedophile affair”<sup>9</sup> in the PO. Prime Minister Morawiecki called the reporting an attempt to provoke a civilizational war. Marshal of the Sejm Elżbieta Witek (also of the PiS) said in a televised speech that the affair reminded her of the worst years of Communist propaganda. The government summoned the US ambassador to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and declared in a communiqué that the actions of TVN 24 (although the broadcaster, which was partially funded with US help, was not explicitly mentioned), have “potential effects [that] are identical to the goals of hybrid war”. The climax was the passing of a resolution in parliament by the PiS on 9 March to “defend the good name of Saint John Paul II” against a “disgraceful media campaign against the great Polish Pope”.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to this unified, thoroughly choreographed “Law and Justice” position, the cosmopolitan opposition parties fell into open disagreement. The moderately conservative PSL wanted to honour John Paul II in its own draft resolution without directly addressing the accusations, but PiS quickly adopted parts of it into its own draft. Poland 2050 stressed the Pope’s accomplishments while emphasizing that the paedophiles’ victims must be given priority and demanding that church archives be disclosed and a commission of historians appointed. The PO boycotted the resolution and admitted unofficially that the issue of John Paul II’s responsibility was dividing its voters. And The Left even suggested banishing the Pope from public spaces and emphasized John Paul II’s responsibility for the injustice suffered by the victims of paedophile priests.<sup>11</sup>

The communicative force of Jarosław Kaczyński’s party is demonstrated by the fact that just last year, a poll showed that 99% of PiS voters viewed the Polish Pope as an important moral authority: PiS politicians are prepared to clearly and consistently use any radical rhetoric or symbols to defend specific content (here the legacy of John Paul II, the Polish Pope) that stands in very high regard in Poland and forms the traditional identity of the Polish nation. This issue of the Polish Pope is thus likely to surface again in the coming months on public media and in speeches by politicians and the government.<sup>12</sup>

The campaign already provides a sense of the PiS’s fundamental ability to mobilize its voters. It does not officially start in Poland until the president announces the specific date for the elections, but it has in actuality been going on for months.

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<sup>9</sup> At issue was the son of a PO member of parliament who recently committed suicide after TVP, the state-owned broadcaster, made public the fact that he had been abused by an activist close to the PO.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.politykainsight.pl/polityka/scenapolityczna/2204648,1,jak-oskarzenia-wobec-jana-pawla-ii-dziela-scene-polityczna.read>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> This has already happened in the context of commemorating 2 April, the 18th anniversary of the Polish Pope’s death. Similar commemorations are planned for 16 October, the anniversary of John Paul II’s election as Pope, shortly before the parliamentary elections.

“Law and Justice” is extending its lead over the opposition because, in all their appearances, party representatives, in addition to whatever the current situation requires, focus consistently on the three most important core issues. In times of war, these issues are

- the incumbent government’s ability to guarantee Poland’s security,
- the social support of the party’s target groups among the voting public, and
- the conservation of the Polish nation by the PiS as a decisive reference of self-identity in a Europe made up of native countries.

This agrees with the results of an independent Ibris study presented in September on the periphery of the Economic Forum in Karpacz (an event that was de facto a PiS party rally to fire up its activists and members for the campaign).

Asked about the core competencies of each party, the results of the representative poll about the PiS put the issue of “Poland’s external security” at 52.1%, 17% ahead of the second-place consideration, while the KO received more than 50% for both “foreign policy” and “solution of Poland’s conflict with the EU” (52.8% and 50.1%, respectively).

An examination of the results of perceived competencies of PiS and PO in a direct comparison shows the following: “Law and Justice” was perceived to have much greater solution competencies than the KO, especially with respect to “strengthening the Polish army” (43.8% to 22.3%), “the country’s external security” (37.9% to 26.1%), “Ukrainian refugees” (42.3% to 16.0%), “the retirees’ situation” (44.8% to 15.0%), “the financial situation of the Polish people” (35.9% to 22.6%), and “higher wages in Poland” (32.4% to 16.7%), while the KO had much greater perceived competencies than the PiS in only “solving Poland’s conflict with the EU” (38.4% to 18.4%) and an advantage in “education system” (24.7% to 20.6%), “inflation” (24.8% to 19.5%), “preparation for climate change” (22.3% to 17.6%), “environmental protection” (25.5% to 21.4%), and “energy transformation” (25.9% to 23.3%). Many results were roughly equal, including “development of the Polish economy” (27.8% to 26.7% for the KO), “health system” (18.4% to 17.3% for the PiS), “war in Ukraine” (27.7% to 26.0% for the KO), and availability of “living space in Poland” (13.0% to 11.6% for the KO).

Given these results, it is understandable that the PiS presents itself as the guarantor of Polish national security. The facts support this. At the end of January, Prime Minister Morawiecki announced his intention to raise the country’s defence spending to 4% of GDP, which may be the highest percentage designated for the military of any NATO country. Poland’s defence spending is currently at 2.42% of GDP (16.3 billion euros in absolute terms), which is third highest in the alliance, behind Greece (3.76%) and the US (3.47%). Since the beginning of Russian aggression in Ukraine, Poland has considered itself a “front-line state”. In 2022, it ordered 250 Abrams main battle tanks from the US and concluded a deal worth billions with South Korea for the delivery of 400 main battle tanks and 212 self-propelled howitzers; its armed forces currently number 164,000 and are to rise over the next few years to 250,000.<sup>13</sup> Since the war in Ukraine shows no signs of ending, the PiS has a permanent campaign issue that plays to its strengths.

Combined with the social benefits that “Law and Justice” and the Civic Platform are constantly promising, this is a well-calculated, promising campaign. For instance, the PiS is proposing low-interest housing loans and considering upgrading the “500+” programme<sup>14</sup>, a child allowance supplement introduced with great fanfare in 2015 whose real value has

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/internationales/zwei-prozent-ziel-verdoppeln-polen-kundigt-hohere-verteidigungsausgaben-an-9266097.html>

<sup>14</sup> A possible decision to increase the funds for “500+” and another social pledge is to be announced at the PiS party convention, which will be held at the end of June or beginning of July 2023, shortly before the elections.

declined greatly with inflation. The PO is constantly attempting to surpass these promises. But in fact it is only the PiS that can win this contest. Former PiS Prime Minister Beata Szydło<sup>15</sup> and her colleagues at PiS headquarters never tire of reminding audiences, the years of PO and PSL governments were not characterized by excessive generosity. The PiS, on the other hand, she says, returned dignity to the Polish family with the “500+” programme, introduced free medications for those 75 and older, and, unlike the PO, lowered the retirement age. This core message is doubtless directed at the primary “Law and Justice” target group: those over 50 (27%), those with low income (up to 3,000 PLN net: 24%), residents of small towns (up to 20,000: 23%; between 20,000 and 100,000: 26%), those with simple vocational training (30%), and men (24%). Since the PiS is known in Poland for having kept its social promises, some observers say, it need not promise more than the Civic Platform – reminding voters of its favours to low-income citizens from rural, structurally weak areas far from the booming cities is sufficient.

This new promise receives effective ideological support from the party slogan, introduced by Kaczyński on 10 March<sup>16</sup>: “Poland is the future”. The chairman said that the party platform would be the result of “a thousand conversations” with citizens, that the country is different and better than it was eight years ago, and that the mechanism of exploiting a large part of society might not be entirely eliminated, but has been radically restricted. The PiS, he says, will continue in this direction.

What he means is that the achievements of the last two legislative periods can be conserved only if his party retains power. This unites the PiS in solidarity and dedication, powered by the idea that it is defending Poland’s identity – physically against the Russians, against whom President Lech Kaczynski warned at the Maidan in 2008, and against the EU, which the PiS says is a threat to sovereign Polish culture.

What drives Kaczyński and his supporters is the desire to change Europe so that the power of the government in Warsaw is not restricted. For instance, Prime Minister Morawiecki recently emphasized in his keynote speech entitled “Europe finds itself at a historic turning point. Will European values endure in the face of the Russian invasion?” that nation states “cannot be replaced”. Europe cannot assume a global leadership role with centralist policies, but only with a balance of power in Europe and EU expansion towards the Western Balkans and Ukraine.

Accordingly, the PiS understanding of justice reform appears to be that the rights of an elected government must not be infringed upon, since otherwise democracy comes to harm: those holding democratically legitimated power do not have powers sufficiently sweeping to secure the state. The media’s power to assume a veto player role against the government should be eliminated, and important positions in government institutions and government-owned companies should be filled by those loyal to the party in order to protect against outside influences.

Much of this – control over the state-owned TVP television broadcaster and the dysfunctional nature of the courts and their “neo-judges” – has been implemented in Poland in the past few years, so PiS has even better prospects of success for the elections at the end of 2023.

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<sup>15</sup>[I am one of you \(pis.org.pl\)](https://www.pis.org.pl); [Beata Szydło in Sandomierz. “We have faults, but voting for us pays.” \(dorzeczy.pl\)](https://www.dorzeczy.pl)

<sup>16</sup> [Jarosław Kaczyński’s speech on 10 March. What did the PiS chairman talk about? - rp.pl](https://www.rp.pl)

## The “Confederation” – a possible partner?

The situation of “Law and Justice” improved significantly only when the “Confederation” surprisingly became a potential partner/majority provider.

The advantage of this party, which differentiates itself substantially from others on the Polish party spectrum with its heterogeneity, for the PiS is that despite its relatively good reception, its personnel is, on the one hand, radical, but on the other not very consolidated. The coalition shows that the PiS is interested in surrounding itself with weaker but right-leaning partners in order to soften the hard image of its own policy.

The current success of the “Confederation” is strongly tied to the two co-chairmen: Krzysztof Bosak of the National Movement (RN) has long been known as a far-right-oriented economic liberal who built his political career on offices in the anti-pluralistic All-Polish Youth; the nationalistic, clerically-oriented League of Polish Families (LPR); and the far-right National Movement. Sławomir Mentzen is relatively new to politics, and this novelty arouses increases public interest. He is a trained economist and tax expert with impeccable entrepreneurial success (including as head of accounting firms and owner of a tax consultancy). He became the new chairman for the New Hope party (NN) in 2022 after Janusz Korwin-Mikke resigned. He is financially independent and demonstrates great talent in media and rhetoric: on Twitter, he has more than 300,000 followers, and on TikTok more than 700,000 – four times as many as the next-best-networked Polish politician. These two leaders, combined with the new strategy of removing unpredictable figures such as Korwin-Mikke and the far-right, pro-Russian Grzegorz Braun from the front bench, have made the party much more attractive.

“Confederation” substance puts the party in a political niche at the border between market-oriented and anti-system voters whose attraction is estimated to top out at between 15 and 30 per cent of voters. In previous campaigns, Janusz Palikot and Ryszard Petru addressed their message to these target groups, but enjoyed no sustained success.

Now it is the turn of Bosak and Mentzen. They attract voters who prefer a free market and are convinced that the PiS and PO – a duo of which many Polish voters have had enough<sup>17</sup> – will violate their fiscal responsibility in their eagerness to top each other in offering social benefits. The “Confederation” is also beginning to draw voters who are disillusioned with the political mainstream and are looking for something new away from Poland 2050, which hopes to reach an agreement with the PSL. The same is true of disappointed PiS voters in rural regions whose main criticism is the government’s agricultural policy – Ukrainian grain shipments reaching Poland were not sufficiently regulated, leading to a dramatic fall in prices in Poland. Here, the niche “Confederation”, some of whose adherents are pro-Russian, can afford to openly assume anti-Ukrainian positions. And finally, Mentzen, unlike the PiS and PO, is especially good at attracting young people, taking up social debates, and thus activating an additional voting group for the “Confederation” via social media.<sup>18</sup>

## Possible post-election scenarios

### ▸ Scenario 1

If “Law and Justice” were to unexpectedly harness the power of a united right to attract enough votes, it would continue the current coalition. The quarrels between the PiS and those in the SP loyal to Ziobro will not lead to a split in the united right. A certain indicator

<sup>17</sup> For instance, just under 75% of eligible “Confederation” voters between 18 and 39 are of this opinion.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.politykainsight.pl/polityka/skrajnaprawica/2206082,1.dlaczego-konfederacja-rosnie-w-sondazach.read>; <https://www.rp.pl/plus-minus/art38237481-boguslaw-chrabota-co-sie-kryje-w-duszach-bosaka-i-mentzena>

of this seems to be the situation in December of 2022 when the PiS supported Minister of Justice Ziobro during a vote of no-confidence by the opposition. The current split in the TK, in which judges are supporting either the government and find the change to the court constitutional or Ziobro and are trying to table any vote on the matter should have no consequences for the coalition. Neither the PiS nor the SP is happy with the EU's current disposition or balance of power, and this is a unifying issue. But even PiS supporters do not expect the potential electorate for "Law and Justice" in the elections just over six months from now to exceed about 39%, which will probably not be enough. So Scenario 1 is very unlikely to become reality.

#### › Scenario 2

If the PiS wins the elections, but cannot govern with the united right alone, and "Confederation" numbers are sufficient, a coalition with the "Confederation" – or, realistically, with a part of it following a split in the unstable party in the aftermath of the elections – currently appears conceivable. Bosak is not explicitly ruling out such a coalition at the moment, but says only that his party will not help Morawiecki to remain in power or Tusk to return to power. But his statement of interest in Ministries in which the "Confederation" can implement its platform indicates a fundamental willingness to join a coalition. He says that the "Confederation" platform is based on three pillars: economic freedom, common sense in assuming obligations to the country, and a rational foreign policy based on national interest. He goes on to emphasize that his party's goal continues to be stopping "harmful prescriptions" imposed by the EU. Robert Winnicki, chairman of the National Movement (RN) and thus an influential member of the "Confederation", confirms that governing is something his group is thinking about. Thus the coalition variant is conceivable, although that would mean that Mateusz Morawiecki would no longer be prime minister (in 2025, the PiS could make him a presidential candidate and successor of Andrzej Duda, who is leaving); the spot could be filled by the much more Eurosceptic Beata Szydło, currently an MP. Scenario 2 currently seems fairly likely.

#### › Scenario 3

If the PiS were to win the elections but be unable to form a government with parties of the united right alone, and the "Confederation" were to be unwilling to form a coalition out of consideration for its members who are critical of the system and the government even though it had the numbers to do so, a minority government could be formed. The power-mad PiS could countenance this option, and the "Confederation" would save face and preserve its image. There would certainly be plenty of issue-related points of reference in the coming legislative period. The bottom line here is that Scenario 2 and the associated splitting of the "Confederation" is more likely, but with a certain level of solidarity within the "Confederation", Scenario 3 becomes a real possibility.

#### › Scenario 4

If, as in Scenario 3, the PiS were to win the elections but be unable to govern with the united right alone, the "Confederation" be unavailable as a coalition partner, and the PiS require only a few seats for a majority, "Law and Justice" could, in the course of exploratory talks or out of the public eye, win individual MPs over to its side (possibly buying them off). PiS MPs currently still assume that the governing party's coalition options will not be too obviously limited to the "Confederation". There are unofficial discussions of breaking off MPs from the opposition.

#### › Scenario 5

Another possibility is that the validity of the elections could be called into question, as happened in the US under President Trump. This possibility should not be ruled out given that the PiS recently reformed election law decidedly in its favour. Part of this scenario continues to be the question of whether the review of the elections by the SN will be by the "neo-judges", de facto political appointees, and thus be co-opted as part of the manipulation. For the moment, Scenario 5 is speculation.



**› Scenario 6**

If the PiS were to have no options for forming a government, it would be forced into opposition. But it would likely still have the most MPs in the future Sejm. Offering this massive block and the associated voters prospects for the future and addressing its concerns with substance remains a constant challenge for both the politicians of the current democratic opposition in Poland who would form the new government and for politicians in Germany and the West. In such a scenario, it should be remembered that President Duda will remain in office until 2025, and parts of the justice system, the media, and state-owned companies and important institutions will remain dominated by forces close to the PiS. The starting situation for a government led by the PO would be extremely challenging given these veto players and the socio-economic environment.

**Conclusion**

No matter which of these scenarios actually occurs, the tremendous polarisation in Poland will continue and make political and civil dialogue more crucial than ever. The special views of the PiS and its supporters on questions of democracy, social differences, the rule of law, and the further development of the European Union should be taken more seriously. The strong support for national and social promises has deep roots: On the one hand, the current generation of Poles have become entirely disillusioned with respect to the promise of a prosperous future. On the other, the war has already given rise to a new, strong self-confidence in Poland. It is therefore important to give much more consideration to Poland and the entire East-Central European region and regain lost trust in joint democracy and the establishment of new European security in this part of the Union.

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