

European
Elections monitor

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RESULTS

The opposition forces led by Donald Tusk should be able to form the next government in Poland

The three opposition party coalitions - Donald Tusk's Citizens' Coalition (KO), Third Way (Trzecia Droga) and The Left - won the parliamentary elections in Poland on 15 October.

The Citizens' Coalition is organised around the Civic Platform (PO) of the former Prime Minister (2007-2014) and President of the European Council (2014-2019), Donald Tusk, and three other parties (Modern, The Greens, Z, Polish Initiative, iPL).

The Third Way coalition brings together two centrist parties (Poland 2050, led by Szymon Holownia, and the Polish Coalition, dominated by the People's Party, PSL).

Together with The New Left, these coalitions won 248 of the 460 seats in the Sejm, the lower house of parliament.

The United Right coalition and the Freedom and Independence Confederation should together win 212 seats.

The former is led by Law and Justice (PiS), the conservative party of outgoing Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and headed by Jaroslaw Kaczynski, alongside four other parties and several independents; it took the lead in the parliamentary elections on 15 October.

An ultra-nationalist party led by Slawomir Mentzen, the Freedom and Independence Confederation performed worse than the pre-election opinion polls had forecast.

In the Senate, the upper house of Parliament, the PiS candidates won 34 seats, while candidates of the Senate pact - formed by KO, Third Way, and New Left - won a total of 66 seats.

Poles flocked to vote for what some had described as the most important election since 1989, the year communism fell in Poland. "What is at stake is the future of democracy in Poland and the future of Poland as a democracy and a state governed by the rule of law", said Dorota Dakowska, professor of political science at Sciences Po Aix-en-Provence. Almost three quarters of Poles voted (74.38%), a record number since the return of democracy to the country 34 years ago. This represents +12.6 points compared with the previous parliamentary elections on 13 October 2019. The turnout was particularly high in the west and north-west of Poland, a part of the country that traditionally votes in favour of the Civic Platform. The huge mobilisation of young people and women led to the defeat of the PiS.

Poles also seem to have followed Donald Tusk and the opposition, who had called for a boycott of the referendums organised on the day of the parliamentary elections. Only 40% of them voted on the four questions that were asked[1], an insufficient number for the popular consultations to be validated, for which at least half of registered voters were required to vote.

[1] The questions asked were as follows: - Are you in favour of selling off state assets to foreign entities? - Are you in favour of raising the retirement age to 67 for both men and women? - Are you in favour of removing the barrier between Poland and Belarus? - Are you in favour of admitting thousands of illegal migrants to Poland under the forced relocation mechanism imposed by the European Union?

Parliamentary elections in Poland

15th October 2023

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Results of the parliamentary elections in Poland on 15 October 2023

Diet (Sejm)

Turnout: 74.38%

Political parties	Number of Votes	% of votes won	Number of seats
United Right Coalition	7 640 854	35,38%	194
Citizens' Coalition	6 629 402	30,70%	157
3rd Way Coalition	3 110 670	14,40%	65
New Left Coalition	1 859 018	8,61%	26
Freedom and Independence Confederation	1 547 364	7,16%	18

Source : <https://wybory.gov.pl/sejmsenat2023/pl/sejm/wynik/pl>

Senate

Turnout: 74.31%

Political parties	Number of votes	% votes won	Number of seats
United Right Coalition	7 449 875	34,81%	34
Citizens' Coalition	6 187 295	28,91%	41
3rd Way Coalition	2 462 360	11,50%	11
Freedom and Independence Confederation	1 443 836	6,75%	0
New Left Coalition	1 131 639	5,29%	9
Independents	1 049 919	4,91%	5

Source : <https://sejmsenat2019.pkw.gov.pl/sejmsenat2019/pl/wyniki/senat/pl>

"We won. Poland has won. Democracy has won. We have driven them from power (...) it is the end of this bad period, it is the end of the reign of Law and Justice (...) This day will go down in history as a bright day, the day of Poland's rebirth", said a delighted Donald Tusk when the first results were announced.

The leader of the Civic Platform ran a campaign far removed from the budgetary orthodoxy that had proved fatal for his party in the parliamentary elections of 25 October 2015. He proposed a vote this year to increase the family allowance, a PiS campaign promise for 2024. He also pledged not to raise the retirement age, set at 60 for women and 65 for men. Donald Tusk raised the retirement age to 67 in 2012, a measure for which he is still being criticised.

Above all, the former President of the European Council declared that he would release the funds from the European recovery plan "the day after his election". The judicial reform approved by the PiS led to the European institutions blocking the payment to Warsaw of €35 billion, its share of the recovery plan funds allocated in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. This blockage has lasted for two years. Donald Tusk has also stated that the first measure he would like to see implemented is the legalisation of voluntary termination of pregnancy up to twelve weeks. More generally, the former President of the European Council wants to restore his country's position on the international stage and strengthen cooperation with its European partners.

Lastly, Donald Tusk and his allies won after an extremely violent campaign. Jaroslaw Kaczynski was quick to describe the opposition leader as "the personification of evil in Poland", "pure evil". "The entire PiS election campaign was based on hostility towards Donald Tusk, with negative propaganda hammered home by activists and on public television, which for 8 years has been the party's media arm", said Stanislaw Mocek, a political scientist and rector of Warsaw's Collegium Civitas university.

In PiS speeches, the former President of the European Council was always described as a traitor to the nation for having signed gas agreements with Russia and as "Germany's stooge" because of his good relations with former German Chancellor Angela Merkel (2005-2021).

"The PiS will not form the next government in Poland. The opposition now has a better chance of doing so," said Wojciech Przybylski, political analyst at Visegrad Insight, who does not believe in an alliance between PiS and the Confederation of Freedom and Independence. "It is much easier for the PO to come to an agreement with the Left, the People's Party and Poland 2050 than for the PiS and the Freedom and Independence Confederation to form an alliance," said Wojciech Rafalowski, a sociologist at Warsaw University.

The leader of the far-right party, Slawomir Mentzen, repeated during the election campaign that his party would not take part in any government coalition after the parliamentary elections on 15 October and that it wanted to change things rather than help the old system to continue.

"We must remain hopeful and know that, whether we are in power or in opposition, our project will continue (...) We will not let Poland lose (...) the right to decide its own destiny (...) We will not allow Poland to be betrayed," said Jaroslaw Kaczynski as soon as the first results were in. Many political analysts feared that a third PiS mandate would entrench authoritarianism in Poland. Aleksander Hall, a historian and former member of parliament and minister (without portfolio) in the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki (1989-1990), emphasised

that "the PiS has taken patriotism and conservative values, which are so dear to the hearts of Poles, and confiscated them".

The outgoing government succeeded in building up a middle class, notably by combining social redistribution and conservatism through a vast and generous welfare programme, but to the detriment of long-term investment. "In fact, they have profoundly changed the structure of public spending, with direct payments for numerous categories of the population but public services in a sorry state, especially in education," explains Hanna Cichy, head of economic research at Polityka Insight. "All the policies of this government have been characterised by a short-term vision, based on an electoral logic. PiS's lack of a strategic vision of long-term development augurs particularly damaging economic and social atrophy," said Edwin Bendyk, President of the Stefan Batory Foundation.

The Polish President is Andrzej Duda, closed to PiS, who was re-elected in July 2020 for a 5-year term.

Donald Tusk is 66 years old and a native of Eastern Pomerania (he is a member of the Kashubian community, a Slavic minority in the Gdansk region that was disputed for a long time between Poland and Germany). He has a degree in history from the University of Gdansk, where he was an active *Solidarność* trade union activist in his youth. A member of the Liberal Democratic Congress (KLD) and then the Union of Freedom (UW), he founded the Civic Platform in March 2001 with Andrzej Olechowski and Maciej Plazynski. Elected as a Member of Parliament in 1991, he became Vice-President of the Sejm, the lower house of Parliament, between 2001 and 2005. As a candidate in the presidential election of 23 October 2005, he won 45.53% of the vote and was defeated by Lech Kaczynski (PiS), who secured 54.47% of the vote. Two years later, Donald Tusk became Prime Minister following the parliamentary elections of 21 October 2007, which the PO won with 41.51% of the vote. He retained his post following the parliamentary elections on 9 October 2011.

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On 30 August 2014, he was appointed President of the European Council. He replaced Herman Van Rompuy on 1 December. He was reappointed on 9 March 2017, with 27 votes out of 28, with Poland alone opposing his reappointment. On 20 November 2019, Donald Tusk was elected President of the

European People's Party (EPP), a position he held until June 2022.

Donald Tusk will thus have made a successful political comeback in Poland, putting an end to the eight-year reign of the PiS.

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