



## In Focus

### Presidential Elections in Poland

On Sunday 24 May 2015, presidential elections were held in Poland. On Sunday evening the incumbent, Bronislaw Komorowski, who is associated with the Civic Platform party, [conceded defeat](#) to Andrzej Duda of the opposition Law and Justice party. [Official results](#) revealed that Mr Duda won 51.5 percent of votes, while Mr Komorowski received 48.5 percent.

As noted by the [Economist](#), the Polish presidency is largely a ceremonial role, but the election result raises the prospect that the governing centrist Civic Platform party will lose power to Law and Justice in parliamentary elections, which are due in the autumn. This could have an impact on Poland's relationship with the European Union given that, while Civic Platform has been largely pro-EU, the Law and Justice party is "[more sceptical of the EU's agenda](#)".

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#### Background

Since the collapse of communism in 1989, Poland has experienced significant economic growth. The trade union Solidarity, [which came to power in 1989](#), instituted market-oriented reforms which were continued by subsequent governments. According to Mitchell Orenstein writing in [Foreign Affairs](#), over the past two decades the Polish economy has grown at over four percent per year—the fastest rate in Europe—and is now the sixth largest in the European Union. Poland joined the European Union in 2004, which Orenstein argues has been a significant factor behind Poland's rapid economic growth. Indeed, he notes that the EU has invested nearly 40 billion euros in Poland since 2004, as well as helping to liberalise markets.

Civic Platform has been in power [since 2007](#), taking over from a coalition composed of Law and Justice, the Self-Defence Party and the League of Polish Families, formed in 2006. This followed a Law and Justice minority government that was elected in 2005. The [Financial Times](#) describes Civic Platform's policies since 2007 as centrist and pro-European, with the party having built strong ties with Germany and projected Poland as an "enthusiastic, willing and outspoken member in the EU". However, the [Guardian](#) reports that the party has recently faced "a string of corruption scandals".

Initially, [it was predicted](#) that the presidential elections would result in a victory for the incumbent, Bronislaw Komorowski. The Law and Justice party's candidate, Andrzej Duda, is a 42 year old lawyer who was "[virtually unknown](#)" before his candidacy was announced. The [Guardian](#) reports that in their campaign Law and Justice presented themselves as representing the interests of people who have not benefited from Poland's economic growth, and promised to more robustly defend Poland's interests abroad. Mr Duda also advocated new taxes on foreign-owned banks and supermarkets, and returning banks to Polish control.

## The Elections

The first round of voting, which was held on 10 May, was [narrowly won by Mr Duda](#). A run-off was held on [24 May](#), in which Mr Duda won 51.5 percent of votes, while Mr Komorowski received 48.5 percent. Mr Komorowski conceded defeat on the evening of 24 May, telling voters that he respected their choice and [wishing Mr Duda a successful presidency](#). The [Financial Times](#) reports that Mr Duda is expected to take office in early August.

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## Comment

The [Economist](#) suggests that the election result was largely a consequence of Mr Komorowski's "lacklustre" campaign as well as "widespread disillusionment" with Mr Komorowski and the ruling Civic Platform party. However, the magazine also warns against a return to the policies of Law and Justice's term in office of 2005-07, which it believes was characterised by "domestic and international paranoia, particularly towards Germany". Further, the [Economist](#) highlights concerns that if Law and Justice were to form a government after parliamentary elections in the autumn, their more nationalist approach could damage Poland's international standing.

The [Guardian](#) writes that while the rise of the Eurosceptic Law and Justice party might ostensibly appear to be good news for the UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, he has not, in fact, gained an ally in his negotiations with Brussels. This is because, the paper argues, that Mr Duda and Law and Justice have positioned themselves as a patriotic party, determined to defend the interests of Polish people, and therefore they will resist any attempts to restrict the rights of the approximately 800,000 Polish people currently living in the UK. Further, the [Guardian](#) reports that Law and Justice have already faced criticism for aligning with the Conservatives in the European Parliament. The [Guardian](#) also observes that it is doubtful that Mr Cameron will be able to cement an agreement with the Civic Platform Prime Minister, Ewa Kopacz, before parliamentary elections in the autumn because the Polish presidency holds enough power that Ms Kopacz would find it "very difficult" to sign up to any agreement without the President's consent.

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## Further Information (available from the Palace Library)

- Jerzy Lukowski, *A Concise History of Poland*, 2006
  - Richard J Krickus, [Iron Troikas : the New Threat from the East](#), 2006
  - Council of Europe, *Evaluation of Fifteen Years of Constitutional Practice in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2005
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