

Parliamentary speaker and former health minister Ewa Kopacz was sworn in as prime minister in September 2014, replacing Civic Platform (PO) leader Donald Tusk, Poland's longest-serving prime minister since the fall of communism. Tusk stepped down in order to serve as president of the European Council.

Earlier in the year, Prime Minister Tusk's center-right administration faced calls to resign, and the independence of Poland's central bank was called into question when the weekly magazine *Wprost* published a series of secretly recorded and unflattering conversations held between leading politicians in restaurants. As the "Waitergate" scandal gained momentum, Tusk beat the opposition Law and Justice (PiS) party to the punch by calling for—and winning—a vote of confidence in his government on June 25. PiS called another no-confidence vote on July 11, which Tusk again survived.

Euroskeptic parties won several seats in the European Parliament (EP) in the May 2014 elections, though the majority of votes went to PO and PiS. PO narrowly lost to PiS in local elections in November; technical problems delayed reporting of election results.

The crisis in Ukraine loomed large on Poland's foreign policy agenda throughout 2014, contributing to the country's rising profile in European and transatlantic affairs. Shortly before taking office, Kopacz hinted that Poland would be taking a less argumentative stance on Russia's activities in Ukraine than under the previous administration.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 38 / 40 [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The president is directly elected for up to two five-year terms, and members of the bicameral National Assembly are elected for four-year terms. The president's appointment of the prime minister must be confirmed by the 460-seat Sejm, the National Assembly's lower house, which is elected by proportional representation. While the prime minister is responsible for most government policy, Poland's president also has influence, particularly over defense and foreign policy matters. Sejm speaker Bronisław Komorowski of PO has been president since the 2010 election, which he won by 53 percent of the vote. The 100 Senate (upper house) members can delay and amend legislation but have few other powers.

In the most recent National Assembly elections in 2011, PO won 207 seats in the Sejm, PiS followed with 157, the liberal Palikot Movement captured 40, the Polish People's Party (PSL) took 28, and the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) won 27. A representative of the ethnic German minority held the remaining seat. In the Senate, PO took 63 seats, PiS 31, PSL 2, and the remainder went to independents.

In the November 2014 local elections, PiS won over PO, though not by as wide a margin as predicted by exit polls. PiS challenged the outcome, alleging fraud. Although allegations of vote tampering proved unsubstantiated, an information technology (IT) system failure significantly delayed publishing of the results. There was also a large number of spoiled ballots.

In November, the Supreme Audit Office (NIK) declared that the election commission, the PKW, would not

be ready in time for the 2015 presidential elections, as it had not started preparing for tenders for a new IT system to tabulate votes. Several changes to electoral legislation were introduced in 2014 and will be in effect during 2015 presidential elections. The right to cast ballots by mail in parliamentary and presidential elections, previously limited to citizens living abroad and the disabled, was extended to all registered voters. Another amendment softened the rules for reporting financial statements to the PKW, lessening the impact of minor accounting mistakes.

In February 2014, the PKW ruled that PiS violated electoral law by airing television advertisements before EP elections were officially announced.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Poland's political parties organize and operate freely. PO and the more socially conservative PiS have dominated the political scene since 2005, and PO has been the main governing party since 2007. Relations between the two main parties are increasingly polarized. The approach of the 2014 EP elections saw the formation of new alliances on both ends of the political spectrum. The National Movement (RN), an umbrella organization of far-right and openly nationalistic parties and associations, won no seats in the EP.

In late July, PiS formed an alliance with hitherto rivals Poland Together and the right-wing United Poland party. The alliance registered a joint list of candidates for the November 2014 local elections, which PiS won—albeit by a narrow margin—for the first time since 2005.

Ethnic, religious, and other minority groups enjoy full political rights and electoral opportunities. Their political parties are not subject to the minimum vote threshold of 5 percent to achieve parliamentary representation.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

Anticorruption laws are not always effectively implemented, and corruption within the government remains a problem, particularly in public procurement. In March 2014, the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau (CBA) notified Poland's attorney general of "irregularities" in public procurement procedures for information technology equipment and services at the Ministry of Justice. In April, the BBC reported that British drug company GlaxoSmithKline was undergoing a criminal investigation in Poland for allegedly bribing doctors between 2010 and 2012. Poland was ranked 35 out of 175 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index, climbing three positions since 2013.

In June 2014, the weekly magazine *Wprost* published a series of secretly recorded conversations between high-level politicians that journalist Piotr Nisztor claimed to have received in emails from an anonymous businessman. A July 2013 recording between Central Bank director Marek Belka and Interior Minister Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz revealed Belka allegedly offering to help PO by cutting interest rates ahead of the next elections if Tusk fired Finance Minister Jacek Rostowski, with whom Belka had clashed. The two men also discussed the creation of a law that would allow the Central Bank to buy government debt on secondary markets (a practice known as quantitative easing). Rostowski was, in fact, removed in November 2013, but Tusk has denied that this was related to Belka's request.

The final week leading up to local elections in November 2014 was dominated by allegations that three PiS deputies, including the party's national spokesperson, had made fraudulent expense claims. PiS

immediately expelled the three deputies.

Poland has been more successful in absorbing EU funds than any other country in the region, and is set to be the biggest beneficiary of EU structural funds for 2014–20.

Civil Liberties: 55 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedom of expression and forbids censorship. Libel remains a criminal offense, though a 2009 amendment to the criminal code eased penalties. Poland's print media are diverse and mostly privately owned. The government does not restrict internet access. The dominant state-owned Polish Television and Polish Radio face growing competition from private domestic and foreign outlets. The National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) is currently dominated by the ruling PO and faces regular accusations of bias in its dealings with various ultraconservative media linked to PiS.

On June 18, police and state prosecutors raided *Wprost* headquarters in the wake of the magazine's Waitergate leak in a failed attempt to seize the recordings and force the magazine to reveal its sources. The raid, which was carried out without a prior court order, was criticized as an attack on freedom of speech and of the press. Justice Minister Marek Biernacki said the raid had "raised legitimate concerns about breaches of journalistic confidentiality" and "should have never taken place." The state launched an investigation into two counts of alleged police brutality and breach of duty by the prosecutors.

In October 2014, KRRiT issued a 50,000 zloty (\$15,000) fine against Lux Veritas, the owner of Poland's leading Catholic media outlets, for broadcasting commentary sympathetic to the persons responsible for vandalizing an art installation in 2013.

The state respects freedom of religion. Religious groups are not required to register with the authorities but receive tax benefits if they do. A person may be found guilty of blasphemy, punishable by a fine of 5,000 zloty (\$1,659) or up to two years in prison, even if it was unintentional. Starting January 1, 2014, the religious slaughter of animal meat for kosher and halal food became illegal following a 2012 Constitutional Court ruling; however, the ban was overturned in December on the grounds of religious freedom. In November, a study by the Warsaw University Center for Research on Prejudice documented an 8 percent increase in anti-Semitism from 2009 to 2013.

In June 2014, the director of Poland's largest annual theater festival canceled a planned performance by Argentinian playwright Rodrigo Garcia after police reported they were not equipped to handle large protests planned against the controversial play. Critics of the cancellation argued that the police scare was a form of unofficial censorship by ultraconservative religious groups.

Academic freedom is respected.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedom of association is generally respected in law and in practice. Residents of Poland hold public demonstrations with some regularity. Local authorities can limit demonstrations in their districts, allegedly to maintain public order. In September 2014, the Constitutional Court ruled six provisions of a 2012

amendment to the law on assembly unconstitutional, including a ban on simultaneous demonstrations in the same place that could threaten public order; the legislature has one year to amend the law. As in previous years, the November 2014 Independence Day marches were marred by hooliganism and nationalist violence, prompting police to detain 276 people.

Nongovernmental organizations operate without government interference. Poland has a robust labor movement, though certain groups—including the self-employed, private contractors, and those in essential services—cannot join unions. Complicated legal procedures hinder workers' ability to strike.

F. Rule of Law: 13 / 16

The judiciary is independent, but the courts are notorious for delays in adjudicating cases. Prosecutors' slow action on corruption investigations has prompted concerns that they are subject to political pressure. Pretrial detention periods can be lengthy, and prison conditions are poor by European standards.

In July 2014, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Poland violated the rights of terrorism suspects Abu Zubaydah and Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri by allowing their transfer to a secret detention center run by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Poland between 2002 and 2003, where the two suspects were subjected to "torture and inhuman or degrading treatment." The 2014 ruling marks the first time that a court has officially confirmed the existence and ruled on the activities of the CIA's secret prison network in Europe.

Ethnic minorities generally enjoy generous legal rights and protections. Some groups, particularly the Roma, experience employment and housing discrimination, racially motivated insults, and occasional physical attacks. Members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community continue to face discrimination. In January 2014, a gay student was beaten to death by two men in Szczecin. A February 2014 UN Elimination of Racial Discrimination Committee report urged Poland to take increased steps to combat hate crimes.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 14 / 16

Citizens enjoy freedom of travel and choice of residence, employment, and institution of higher education. Citizens have the right to own property and establish private businesses.

Women hold senior positions in government and the private sector, including 24 percent of the seats in the Sejm. However, Poland's abortion laws are among the strictest in Europe. Under Polish law, abortion is only permissible if a woman's life or health are jeopardized by the continuation of a pregnancy, if the pregnancy is a result of a criminal act such as rape, or if the fetus is seriously malformed. Women who undergo illegal abortions do not face criminal charges, but those who assist in the procedures, including medical staff, can face up to two years in prison. The Your Movement party agitated throughout 2014 for the removal of the so-called conscience clause in Poland's abortion legislation, which permits Catholic doctors to refuse an abortion to a qualifying patient provided they refer her to another clinic.

In March, about 8,000 people took part in the ninth annual March for the Sanctity of Life in Warsaw, an event organized by Catholic and conservative groups. Demonstrators also carried banners protesting "gender ideology," a term used to designate radical feminism, sex education, and other ideas or practices seen as threatening to traditional family values.

Domestic violence against women remains a serious concern, as does trafficking in women and girls for the purpose of prostitution.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)