

POLAND

How the far-right could be kingmaker in Poland's knife edge presidential election

COMMENTS

By Dariusz Kalan • last updated: 10/07/2020



Krzysztof Bosak, centre, of the far-right party Confederation, addresses a pre-election convention in Warsaw. - Copyright AP Photos

SHARE THIS ARTICLE

For Paweł Strzelec, a 26-year-old plumber from Niekłończyca, a village in northwestern Poland, the country's presidential election posed no dilemma for the first time in a long while.

In the first round on June 28, he wholeheartedly voted for Krzysztof Bosak, a far-right candidate, who ultimately ranked fourth.

"His economic ideas played a decisive role. He wants lower taxes and more money to stay in people's pockets," Strzelec told Euronews. "I also think I can better handle my own money than the state."

Mixing radical free-market ideas with hard-line nationalism, Bosak attracted more than 1.3 million voters, including those in the 18-29 age group, where he was the second most popular candidate.

Many, just like Strzelec, have long felt disillusioned with the two arch-enemies of Polish politics: right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) and the more liberal Civic Platform (PO), which for the last 15 years have taken turns to hold power or serve as the main opposition force.

Now, ahead of a presidential run-off on July 12, polls show it is Bosak's supporters who will likely swing the election in either direction and decide who will sit in the presidential palace: incumbent Andrzej Duda, backed by PiS, or Rafał Trzaskowski, Warsaw mayor and PO deputy chairman.

SPONSORED CONTENT

EV Charge: Electric mobility accessible wherever and whoever you are!

Ad by Total

For many of them, it's a choice between the lesser of two evils.



Contender in Poland's key presidential election runoff Sunday, liberal Warsaw Mayor Rafał Trzaskowski speaks to supporters during a campaign rally, in Raciąż, Poland. - AP Photos

Strzelec declared he will reluctantly vote for Trzaskowski due to "PiS propaganda in public media, the constant rise of taxes and buying voters with their own money", a reference to PiS' flagship social programmes. Although costly, they became immensely popular and are seen as one of the pillars keeping PiS in power.

What works in favour of both candidates is that Bosak's voters are as heterogeneous as the Confederation alliance that Bosak hails from. Established in late 2018, Confederation is a coalition between the paleolibertarian and Eurosceptic KORWiN party and the far-right National Movement, which traces its roots back to radical nationalist groups active in the interwar period.

Now, in order to appeal to Bosak's supporters, each candidate refers to values represented by the alliance: Trzaskowski says he shares KORWiN's views on free-market economies, low taxes and freedom of speech, while Duda seeks to attract the National Movement base, ramping up anti-LGBT rhetoric and accusing Germany and foreign media of meddling in the election.

By doing this, both contenders "broke the taboo of liberal democracy that one should not flirt with extremists," according to Tomasz Sawczuk, an editor at Kultura Liberalna, an online magazine. Yet, he admitted, they have so far flirted quite effectively.

- RELATED**
- [Poland presidential election: Pro-EU hopeful Rafał Trzaskowski neck and neck with incumbent Duda](#)
 - [Poland presidential election 2020: Who is Rafał Trzaskowski?](#)
 - [Analysis: What's at stake as Poland's presidential race heads to a run-off?](#)

One of those wooed by Duda is Jan Bodakowski, a 43-year-old Bosak voter from Warsaw. He considers himself a member of the electorate opposing "the fascist European Union, the rainbow revolution and murdering unborn children" while seeking a "sovereign and anti-communist Poland". Despite doubts, he backs Duda as seemingly more Catholic among the two remaining candidates.

The National Movement rebranded itself when it formed the Confederation alliance in 2018. Like many far-right movements in Europe, it sought to portray itself as being run by calculated political players rather than angry radicals.

As part of these efforts, it turned to 38-year-old Bosak for Poland's presidential elections. He is National Movement's deputy chairman and a long-term member of various far-right groups, who over the years have emerged as a youthful, suave and more likeable face of Polish nationalism.

Well-dressed and with an intense media presence, which includes participation in a local edition of the Dancing with the Stars show, Bosak "has gradually waltzed nationalists into the mainstream", Rafał Pankowski, the head of Never Again, a Warsaw-based anti-fascist association, told Euronews.

Their doctrine, however, remains the same.



President Andrzej Duda addresses supporters after voting ended in the first round of Poland's presidential election. - AP Photos

In his electoral manifesto entitled "A New Order", Bosak touts the Christianity-based concept of law, which would lead to banning abortion, civil partnerships and gender reassignments. He would also facilitate access to weapons, strengthen the prime minister and lift the obligation to register laws created by international institutions, like the European Court of Justice.

"He has played with the language pitching himself in a different way in liberal media and in the first right-wing channels on YouTube," Pankowski said. "For instance, in the first one, he no longer speaks of expelling minorities, but of 'cultural cohesion'."

Although closer to centrist Trzaskowski in economic issues, Bosak's support base, in the majority, is still considered more willing to pick Duda due to his social conservatism. What also works against PO, is the party's fierce criticism of controversial Independence Marches, yearly events organised by far-right groups in central Warsaw. They are popular among ordinary Poles but often turn violent.

Now, Trzaskowski reiterated that he would be ready to take part in the march. "This is one of few positives in his campaign," Bartłomiej Wróblewski, a PiS MP, said. "In all seriousness, Duda is strongly attached to traditional values and, regardless of our differences, this common ideological ground gets PiS and Confederation closer together."

But, PiS has long looked down on Confederation, something the alliance has held grudges over to this day. Economic libertarians grumble at PiS' distribution policy, while nationalists complain the ruling party keeps rejecting a near-total abortion ban and runs a submissive policy towards the US and heirs of Jews who were killed in the Holocaust and now claim property restitution.

"We decided we won't answer this question," said Confederation MP Artur Dziambor, asked whether he will back Duda or Trzaskowski. "We don't want to suggest anything to our voters nor become a side dish for neither PiS nor PO."

And, he admitted, staying at home and not voting at all is becoming increasingly tempting. "What the two candidates say and do in order to please us, insults our intelligence," he said with a smile.

Advertisement

US imports are helping to drive the 'silent extinction' of giraffes

Ad by euronews

See More

Sponsored

Tips For A Perfect Foundation Look From A Beauty Expert

Cosmopolitan UK for Too Faced

Early registration for the official Green card 2021 is now available. Check your eligibility!

U.S Green Card - Free Check

Advertisement

Some stories change us

DISCOVER >

euro news.