

# Poland's centrist experiment ends as new far-right force gains ground

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**The centrist Third Way alliance, part of Poland's government, has collapsed after the leaders of its two component parties confirmed they will run separately in the next parliamentary election, a split that boosts the prominence of a right-wing radical in national politics.**

Though the government stays intact, the divorce marks the formal end of a project that once aimed to reshape the country's political middle. It comes as Third Way's support, once over 14%, has slipped to single digits in the polls.

As the alliance fragments, its two members—Polska 2050 and the Polish People's Party (PSL)—now trail the far-right Confederation of the Polish Crown, led by radical right-winger Grzegorz Braun.

## Origins and intentions

Third Way was created in early 2023 as a tactical electoral alliance aimed at offering an alternative to the dominant Law and Justice (PiS) and Civic Platform (PO) blocs.

Polska 2050, led by former TV host Szymon Hołownia, positioned itself as a moderate, socially conscious centrist party focused on technocratic reform. PSL, Poland's historic agrarian party, brought a moderately conservative rural base.

The goal was to capture the political center, especially swing voters disillusioned with both the Law and Justice nationalist right and the Civic Coalition liberal mainstream.

Polska 2050 and PSL coordinated on four successive elections: parliamentary, local, European and presidential.

The alliance entered the Sejm, the lower house, in 2023 with over 14% of the vote, securing 65 seats and a pivotal role in the ruling coalition. It also posted a solid result in the 2024 local elections.

But in the 2024 European Parliament race, Third Way failed to clear the 8% threshold needed by coalitions to secure representation, and in 2025 their joint presidential candidate, Szymon Hołownia, received only 4.99%.

These setbacks exposed internal fractures and stalled momentum. The alliance struggled to define a common program and never fused the two party structures.

## How the split happened

The first public confirmation of the split came from Hołownia. On Tuesday night, the lower house speaker and leader of Polska 2050 posted on X that he accepted "with understanding and gratitude" a reported decision by PSL's National Council to end the Third Way alliance.

"We agreed to four joint elections. That commitment has now been fulfilled," Hołownia wrote, adding that the prospect of running separately gave him "a sense of political joy."

After overnight denials from PSL MPs, on Wednesday morning Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, deputy

prime minister, defense minister and PSL chairman, confirmed in a radio interview that PSL had indeed decided to go solo.

Kosiniak-Kamysz framed the decision as the natural conclusion of a tactical alliance. “Third Way was an electoral project. From the start we had separate parliamentary caucuses, not one party structure,” he said. “We committed to four elections. That’s now behind us.”

The split was not a shock. Rumors had been persistent of an eventual split since the poor result in the European Parliament elections last year.

Since then, neither party has polled above the 5% threshold required for solo entries into the Polish parliament.

The most recent IBRiS and CBOS surveys put both PSL and Polska 2050 below that mark, while Grzegorz Braun’s Confederation of the Polish Crown polls at 6 to 7%.

### **Collapse of center**

Behind the collapse lies the erosion of the political center itself. As members of the coalition government, both PSL and Polska 2050 struggled to deliver clear legislative wins. Flagship social proposals, including liberalization of abortion laws, were blocked or diluted due to the veto powers of the conservative president, Andrzej Duda.

In May, Kosiniak-Kamysz said on the TVN24 channel that returning to Poland’s pre-2020 “abortion compromise” was still on the table, adding: “I am willing to submit such a bill to the president as soon as possible.”

But these moves came too late, and voters interpreted the delays as weakness. “If you campaign on abortion rights and then hesitate, you lose everyone,” said political scientist Anna Materska-Sosnowska in an interview with the Rzeczpospolita daily.

Meanwhile, the cultural terrain tilted rightward. PiS spent its eight years in power, from 2015 to late 2023, embedding conservative narratives through public broadcasters, school curricula and national institutions.

“PiS succeeded in creating a cultural and political atmosphere in which its narratives set the tone, even for its opponents,” said sociologist and commentator Rafał Pankowski.

In trying to speak to both sides, the alliance ended up connecting with neither.

### **Gap filled by extreme nationalism**

What is filling the vacuum is the nationalist fringe. Grzegorz Braun’s Confederation of the Polish Crown now consistently polls at 6 to 7%, positioning it ahead of both PSL and Polska 2050.

Though long dismissed as a provocateur, Braun has capitalized on nationalist, anti-Ukraine and anti-liberal sentiment, gaining traction particularly in Poland’s southeastern regions.

His campaign style blends far-right ideology with theatrical disruption, from destroying an LGBT exhibition in the Sejm to dousing Hanukkah candles with a fire extinguisher.

“In an era of professionalized politics, Braun plays the notes others won’t touch,” said Professor Rafał Chwedoruk of the University of Warsaw. “That makes him visible, especially to voters who feel ignored or sidelined.”

Braun's rise also taps into the political aftershock of the war in Ukraine. Discontent over migration, agricultural imports and military support has grown, particularly in border regions where Confederation's anti-Ukrainian rhetoric finds an audience.

His fourth-place finish in the first round of Poland's presidential elections in May, with over 6% of the vote, confirmed that the radical right is no longer just noise.

### **Flirting with right-wingers?**

Inside PSL, that warning has triggered quiet maneuvering. In early June, reports surfaced that the party had circulated an internal questionnaire to its local leaders asking about potential future coalitions, including with Law and Justice (PiS) or even Confederation.

According to broadcaster Polsat News, one scenario floated was a government in which PSL leader Kosiniak-Kamysz could serve as prime minister.

The backlash was immediate. PSL spokesperson Miłosz Motyka moved to contain speculation, insisting that only a minority supported such an idea.

"The majority of our activists clearly oppose cooperation with PiS. These questions were part of a routine internal survey, not a political signal," he said.

However, rumors that PSL is flirting with the right-wing opposition persist. With support now below the threshold for parliamentary representation, PSL faces a dilemma: defend the center and risk irrelevance, or play the kingmaker in a rightward coalition.

Third Way promised a path between extremes. It now serves as the warning sign marking the edge of no-man's land.

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