

## THE DYNAMICS OF VOTER TRANSFER BETWEEN ROUNDS OF THE 2025 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN POLAND

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**Abstract :** In 2025, Poland held presidential elections. These were crucial for all parties. A victory of the government's candidate, Rafał Trzaskowski, would allow for the continuation of the government's proposed reforms, whereas a victory of the opposition's candidate (PiS) could block the implementation of the government's proposed reforms. The aim of this research is to analyze the electorate flow between the first and second round of the presidential election and to identify the impact of turnout on the final election result. Data for the analysis of voter transfer were obtained from the National Electoral Commission and public opinion polls. The research utilizes analysis of spatial variation in results, supported by analyses of changes in voting preferences based on polls. The analyses show that the mobilization of voters opposing Rafał Trzaskowski, as well as support from right-wing competitors who did not advance to the second round were key to Karol Nawrocki's victory.

**Key words:** behavior, election, electorate, presidential election, Poland, transfer, voters

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### INTRODUCTION

Research in the field of electoral geography has always attracted considerable interest from politicians, local government activists, the media, and

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voters. Hence, the extensive literature on this topic in Poland presents analyses of electoral results from various perspectives: theoretical (Rykiel, 2011; Sobczyński, 2003;), geographical differentiation (Matykowski, 2007; Kowalski and Śleszyński, 2018), voting preferences (Zarycki 2000; Kowalski, 2000; 2003; Wendt, 2007), ideology, power, and democratization (Wendt, 2001; 2004; Kwiatkowska et al., 2016), and the decision-making process (Matykowski et al., 1995; Pysiak, 2006; Singh and Roy, 2014; Wielgosz, 2020; Boateng and Boateng, 2025). Similarly, many are dedicated to various elections, local government (Flis and Stolicki, 2015; Gendźwił, 2015; Kulas and Wendt, 2018; Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2020; Borkowski et al., 2022; Sieklucki, 2024), parliamentary (Krzemiński, 2009; Markowski, 2016; Skomski et al., 2017; Podemski, 2023) and presidential (Matykowski and Kulczyńska, 2010; Konarski, 2011; Mazurkiewicz, 2012; Falkowski and Cwalina, 2002; Wendt and Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2020; Domalewska, 2021; Wendt, 2021; Madej, 2023; Więckowska, 2023; Lisicki, 2024). Research covering various aspects of elections is of interest to political scientists, ethicists, lawyers, and political geographers, especially when election results may influence significant political, social, or economic changes, as is the case with the 2025 presidential election in Poland.

After two terms as President Andrzej Duda, representing Law and Justice (PiS), the 2024 parliamentary elections were won by PiS, but they failed to form a government due to their inability to form a coalition. After ten years in opposition, the Civic Platform (PO) and its coalition partners formed the government. Therefore, the 2025 presidential election promised to be exceptionally important for each of the two largest parties in Polish politics. Civic Platform, in coalition with the Polish People's Party, Poland 2050, and left-wing parties, needed a president who supported their program and whose vetoes would not hinder or even prevent the necessary changes, according to the ruling camp. Meanwhile, Law and Justice, which joined the opposition after losing power, saw only its victorious candidate as a defender of the changes implemented over the past ten years (e.g., in the judicial system). Another important issue was the reckoning with irregularities, erroneous decisions, violations of the law, and even abuses during the PiS government. With the right of veto, the Civic Platform (PO) president could facilitate these actions, while the PiS president could hinder or even prevent them. Therefore, the 2025 presidential campaign promised to be exceptionally fierce.

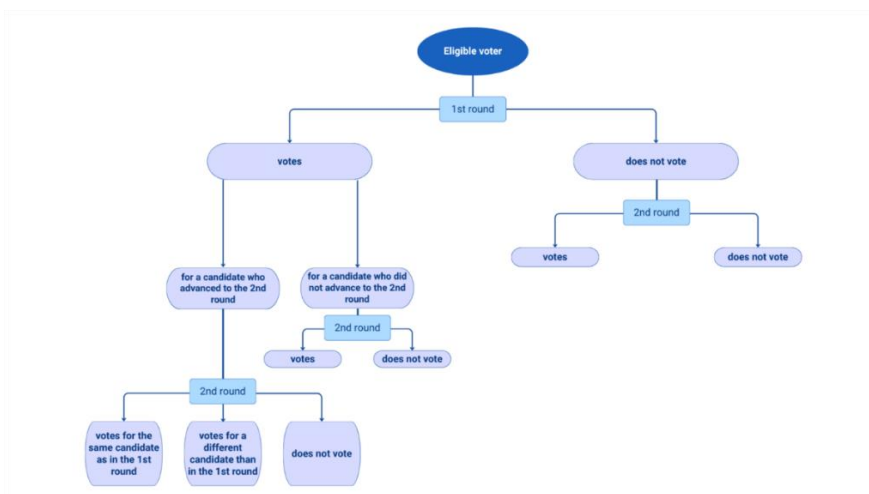
In internal primaries held by the Civic Platform (PO), Rafał Trzaskowski, Mayor of Warsaw, was chosen as the party's candidate, entrusting him with another run for president. The process of selecting the PiS candidate took longer, and from among the many potential candidates, PiS selected Karol Nawrocki, President of the Institute of National Remembrance, calling him a civic candidate. Szymon Hołownia, Speaker of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, ran as the candidate for Poland 2050. Left-wing parties fielded three candidates: Adrian Zandberg (Together party), Magdalena Biejat, and Joanna Szynszyn. Sławomir Mentzen, in turn, became the candidate of the Confederation of Freedom and Independence, while Grzegorz Braun represented the Confederation of the Polish Crown. Krzysztof Stanowski, a journalist who also runs a Twitter account, ran as a candidate on his own electoral committee. As the election results after the first round showed, the remaining four candidates,

Marek Jakubiak, Artur Bartoszewicz, Maciej Maciak, and Marek Woch, received nationwide votes ranging from 151,000 to 18,000, or between 0.77% and 0.09%.

According to the electoral calendar, the first round of the election was held on May 18, 2025, with a turnout of 66.91%. Rafał Trzaskowski won the highest number of votes, 6,147,797 (31.36%), while Karol Nawrocki finished second with 5,790,804 (29.54%). The battle for the presidency of Poland was decided between these two candidates in the second round, which took place on June 1, with Karol Nawrocki, supported by the Law and Justice party (PiS), winning. The winning candidate received 10,606,877 votes (50.89%), while his opponent, supported by the Civic Coalition (KO), received 10,237,286 votes (49.11%), for a turnout of 71.31%.

The purpose of this study, based on data presented by the National Electoral Commission (PKW, 2025), is to analyze the electorate's flow between the first and second rounds of the presidential election and to indicate, to the extent possible but limited by data availability and quality, the impact of turnout on the final election result. What decisions could voters have made? There are several scenarios of how voters decide. A person eligible to vote (presentation of voter behavior scenarios):

- A) did not vote in both rounds.
- B) did not vote in the first round but did so in the second.
- C) voted in the first round but did not vote in the second.
- D) voted in the first round for a candidate who did not advance to the second round and in the second round voted for a candidate who was close to that person's views.
- E) voted in the first round for a candidate who advanced to the second round and voted for him in the second round as well.
- F) voted in the first round for a candidate who advanced to the second round but in the second round voted for that candidate's opponent (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Diagram of scenarios for deciding by a person entitled to vote  
Source : own study

Each scenario carries consequences and influences the final outcome. Therefore, each scenario was analyzed. A limitation of the research, which deserves attention in this case, is the obvious lack of precise data. Therefore, we cannot precisely determine how many people made a given decision, which leads to an estimation analysis, which has as much explanatory value as the indicated research limitations allow. Analysis of possible voter behavior:

- A) In this case, the eligible voter only influenced voter turnout (lowering it).
- B) In this case, the voter voting in the second round increases support for one of the candidates in the second round, but due to the lack of precise data, we cannot determine exactly how many people did so.
- C) In this case, the voter had their candidate in the first round, but for some reason (possibly because none of the candidates who advanced were suitable for them) they did not vote in the second round. Because of this situation, this voter did not increase support for any candidate in the second round.
- D) The situation we are primarily considering in this article – the voter either voted in line with our thesis, meaning for a candidate who holds similar views to the candidate from the first round, or refutes our thesis and votes for the second possible candidate.
- E) In this case, the voter voted conventionally. This directly impacts the outcome of the candidate I vote for.
- F) This is a hypothetical case that seems unpopular, and we assume such votes were insignificant, but such cases, though rare, may occur in practice.

### **DATA, METHODS AND LIMITATION OF RESEARCH**

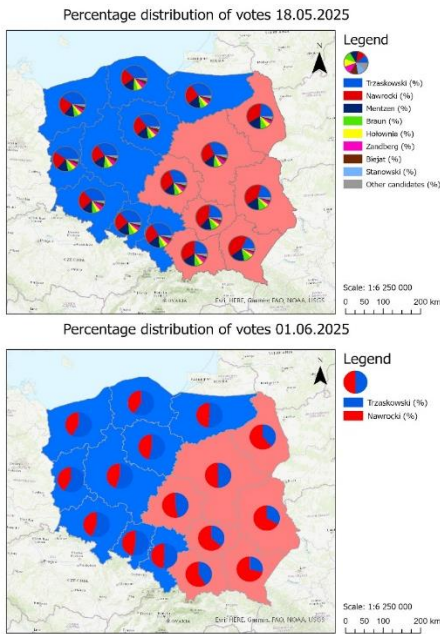
The aim of this research is to analyze the electorate flow between the first and second round of the presidential election and to identify the impact of turnout on the final election result. To achieve the aim of the work indicated above and in the introduction, data presented by the National Electoral Commission after the first and second round of elections (PKW, 2025) were used. The results of individual candidates were presented both on a national scale and spatially, divided into voivodeships and poviats, which allowed for the identification of differences in a geographical perspective (Wendt and Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2020; Wendt, 2021). The issue of unstable voivodeships was also interesting, as it was the case in Poland during the local elections (Kulas and Wendt, 2018) and subsequent parliamentary elections. The largest and smallest differences in the results of a given candidate between the election rounds were counted. Particular attention was paid to extremely large and extremely small differences. In the case of Rafał Trzaskowski, results higher than 20 percentage points and lower than 10 percentage points were taken into account. In the case of Karol Nawrocki, results above 30 and below 15 percentage points were taken into account. Various extreme differences were used because in the case of Karol Nawrocki, these differences were significantly higher due to the lower number of votes obtained by Rafał Trzaskowski in most regions during the first round, which constitutes another research limitation. An attempt was made to indicate the differentiation of electoral results depending on the urban-rural relationship and to indicate the impact of the level of urbanization on the final election result (Matykowski et al., 1995; Matykowski and Kulczyńska, 2010).

Obviously, and also contributing to the limitations of the research, only data provided by the National Electoral Commission (PKW) can be used in the analyses. However, this limited the possibilities of detailed analysis and interpretation of the results due to the fact that the PKW website only contains data on the percentage distribution of votes. With this in mind, it should be noted that due to the type of available data, it has been impossible to precisely determine the direction of vote transfer from candidates in the first round to candidates in the second round (Mazurkiewicz, 2012). To best reflect the process of transferring votes from candidates in the first round to those in the second round, data were needed with information on how each individual voter decided. In this case, data from CBOS polls (16.10.2025, CBOS Flash no. 24/2025) and studies (Cybulska, 2025a; 2025b) were used; from the report conducted by Ipsos for OKO.press, conducted on 27-28.05.2025, also from the Ipsos study (Danielewski & Pacewicz, (2025) and from the report of the National Research Group (OGB, 2025), conducted on 28-29.05.2025 for the Wirtualna Polska portal, together with a commentary (Ratajczak, 2025). The OGB survey was conducted using the CATI method on a representative sample of 1000 people, and the Ipsos survey for OKO.press was conducted using the mixed-mode method (CATI and CAWI) on 27-28.05.2025. The Ipsos survey was conducted on a nationwide A representative sample of adult Poles, N=1,000, was used. The number of interviews conducted by telephone and online was approximately 50% each. This should also be considered a research limitation, both due to the scope and method of the research. Given the limitations of data access and reliability, the ability to conduct analyses was limited, and an attempt was made to analyze the collected data and assess how voter transfers were shaping up.

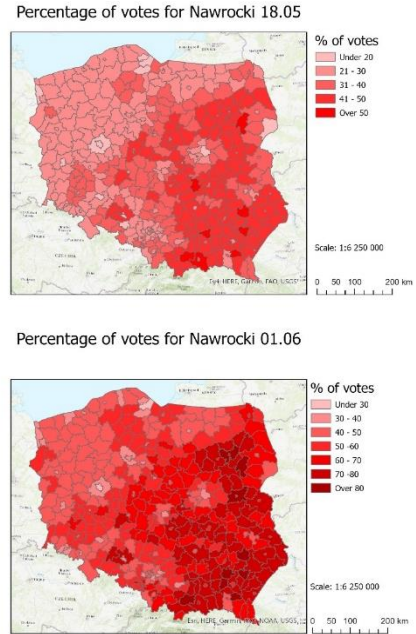
## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Rafał Trzaskowski and Karol Nawrocki, the candidates who placed first and second in terms of vote count in the first round, advanced to the second round. However, their respective votes reached 31.36% and 29.54% of the 19,603,784 valid votes cast, a difference of only approximately 370,000 votes in the first round. During the campaign between the two rounds, Rafał Trzaskowski and Karol Nawrocki courted the votes of voters of the remaining candidates who advanced to the second round. The analysis assumed that in most cases, voters of the first-round candidates voted in the second round for one of the two candidates who expressed similar views to their initial candidate. This is to some extent demonstrated by the results after the first and second rounds, broken down by voivodeship (Figure 2) and powiat. As shown by the results in both election rounds for Karol Nawrocki (Figure 3) and Rafał Trzaskowski (Figure 4).

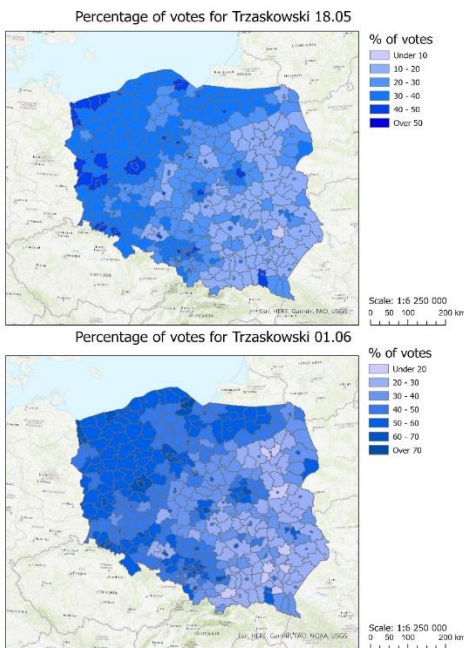
The analysis presented changes in support between the first and second rounds, as well as the potential vote flow from candidates who did not advance to the second round. The figures show that Rafał Trzaskowski recorded results below 20% in the second round in eight counties, including Janów, Łomżyce, and Brzozów. Karol Nawrocki, on the other hand, had support above 20% in each of the counties, although in Poznań, Sopot, and Gdańsk he received 27.27%, 27.48%, and 29.97%, respectively. This suggests that Karol Nawrocki's lowest ratings exceed 27%, while Rafał Trzaskowski achieved results below 30% in a total of 72 counties, representing 18.9% of all counties (Figure 5).



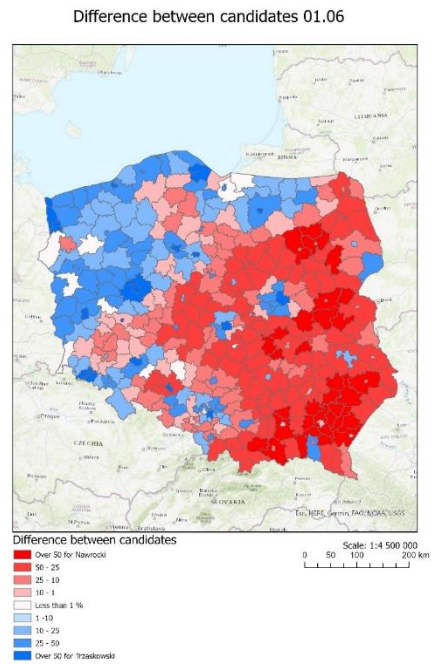
**Figure 2.** Percentage distribution of votes  
Source: own study based on data from the National Electoral Commission (PKW)



**Figure 3.** Percentage of votes for Nawrocki  
Source: own study based on data from the National Electoral Commission (PKW)



**Figure 4.** Percentage of votes for Trzaskowski  
Source: own study based on data from the National Electoral Commission (PKW)

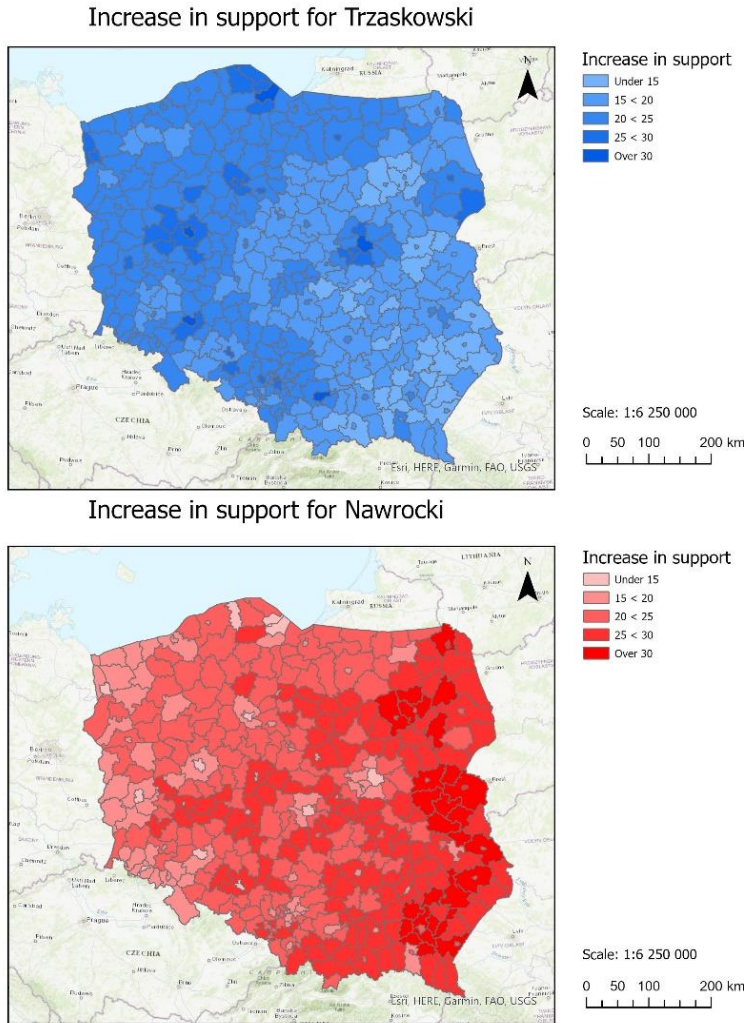


**Figure 5.** Difference between candidates  
Source: own study based on data from the National Electoral Commission (PKW)

A comparative analysis of the results of Rafał Trzaskowski's first and second round election reveals electoral districts experiencing a shift in support, known as the swing effect. This concept refers to a sudden shift in electoral preferences in specific territorial units, observed over a short period of time, leading to a shift in the balance of political power across the country. A similar effect occurs in unstable voivodeships in Poland (Kulas and Wendt, 2018), as well as in the presidential elections in the United States. This phenomenon occurred, among others, in Bolesław County (in the first round, the difference was 5.07% in favor of Rafał Trzaskowski, while in the second round it was 1.8% in favor of Nawrocki), and Wołów County (from 0.19% for the Civic Coalition (KO) candidate to a 7.54% advantage in favor of the PiS candidate). This indicates the swing effect, but in these cases, it is difficult to clearly identify the causes without additional in-depth research. Possible explanations include the disintegration of local communities or local political marketing activities. Previous support for candidates from other parties also played a significant role in this context. In places where we observe a shift in the lead in favor of a candidate from a more right-wing party, relatively high results can also be observed for Sławomir Mentzen (Confederation) and Grzegorz Braun (Confederation of the Polish Crown). Their significant advantage over more left-wing candidates (Szymon Hołownia, Adrian Zandberg, Magdalena Biejat) and Krzysztof Stanowski, as well as the difference in votes they received in the first round, is also evident. Similar changes can also be noted in Rawicz County, where the difference in votes changed by 8.74%, while the difference in the results between the remaining right-wing parties (25.24%) and the left-wing parties (15.6%) was 9.64%, which is not significantly different from the actual difference. The same situation likely occurred in Gliwice County, where the 6.67% difference between rounds 1 and 2 can be compared to a 7.32% difference between the candidates in round 2. This allows for a conservative assumption, beyond the intuitive feeling or the assumption commonly presented by politicians and the media, that the majority of voters for right-wing candidates in the second round supported Karol Nawrocki, while left-wing voters supported Rafał Trzaskowski.

This may also indicate increased mobilization of the right-wing electorate, who cast their votes differently in the second round than in the first due to their candidates' elimination. This may be due to the desire for negative voting, meaning voting not for the candidate they support most, but for the one they dislike the least. This is the effect of voting against a candidate who is less likely to meet voters' preferences than for their preferred candidate who did not advance to the second round. The results of the vote distribution by voivodeship in the first and second rounds of the election show a clear division of votes between the selected candidates (Figure 2). This reflects the division of Poland into two distinct mental and political areas, which, according to some researchers, may be due to historical conditions (Kowalski, 2000; 2003; Kowalski & Śleszyński, 2018). The western, more liberal and pro-European, and the eastern, which is decidedly more conservative and traditional. This clearly demonstrates the long-standing division in Poland, reminiscent of the borders of the former partitions. This may indicate how the process of cultural inheritance of electoral structures influences the contemporary preferences of the electorate.

As is well known, polls are not a perfect source of information, which was pointed out above as a significant limitation of research. They are not infallible and may be subject to various statistical errors, depending on the sample. Poll results vary depending on the sample and research methods used and therefore cannot be considered entirely reliable. However, it is possible to analyze several polls and pay attention to the estimated results, as they may indicate an emerging trend. The polls tend to show a shift in voters from supporters of more extreme parties towards candidates whose views more closely align with voters' preferences (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Increase in support for candidates compared to first round

Source: own study

According to a poll conducted by Ipsos for OKO.press, voters of the selected candidates in the first round will vote in the following percentage distribution (Ipsos):

- Rafał Trzaskowski voters - "100% of Rafał Trzaskowski's voters from the first round declare (definitely or probably) that they will participate in the run-off. Among those surveyed, 99% intend to vote for the Civic Coalition candidate again, and 1% are still considering it".
- Karol Nawrocki voters - "Among Karol Nawrocki's voters from the first round, 93% declare that they will participate in the run-off, of which 1% declare that they will vote for Trzaskowski, 98% for Nawrocki, and 1% are undecided".
- Sławomir Mentzen's Voters - "77% of Sławomir Mentzen's voters say they will vote on Sunday: 8% want to vote for Trzaskowski, 78% for Nawrocki, and 14% are undecided".
- Grzegorz Braun's Voters - "Only 45% of Grzegorz Braun's voters want to vote in the second round. Among them, 23% are Trzaskowski supporters (a surprisingly high number), 61% are Nawrocki supporters, and 16% are undecided".
- Szymon Hołownia's Voters - "Among Szymon Hołownia's voters, 70% say they will vote, with their support split as follows: 82% for Trzaskowski, 10% for Nawrocki, and 8% undecided".
- Adrian Zandberg voters - "In the second round, we can expect 80% of Adrian Zandberg voters, of whom 76% want to support Trzaskowski, 15% Nawrocki, and 9% don't know who yet".
- Magdalena Biejat voters - "In turn, as many as 99% of Magdalena Biejat voters declare they will participate in the second round, of whom 85% intend to support Trzaskowski, 10% Nawrocki, and 5% are undecided".
- Krzysztof Stanowski voters - no data available.
- Voters who did not vote in the first round - "Among those who did not participate in the first round, 48% intend to vote for Trzaskowski, 44% for Nawrocki, and 9% are still deciding".

According to a poll conducted by the National Research Group (OGB, 2025) for Wirtualna Polska, voters of the selected candidates in the first round will vote in the following percentage distribution:

- Rafał Trzaskowski's voters - "99.43% of Rafał Trzaskowski's voters declare they will support their candidate again in the second round, which demonstrates the very high loyalty of his electorate – only 0.57% of them are switching to Karol Nawrocki".
- Karol Nawrocki's voters - "Karol Nawrocki's electorate, in turn, appears to be completely unanimous – 100% of his voters from the first round intend to vote for him in the second round as well".
- Sławomir Mentzen Voters - "Among Sławomir Mentzen's supporters, the vast majority, 94.54%, support Nawrocki, while only 5.46% choose Trzaskowski, indicating strong support for Nawrocki among right-wing voters".
- Grzegorz Braun Voters - "Furthermore, 97.02% of Grzegorz Braun's electorate choose Nawrocki, while only 2.98% choose Trzaskowski".
- Szymon Hołownia Voters - "Szymon Hołownia's electorate votes for 92.75% of Trzaskowski, while 7.25% for Nawrocki".
- Adrian Zandberg Voters - "Among Adrian Zandberg's supporters, 94.61% support Trzaskowski, while 5.39% support Nawrocki".
- Magdalena Biejat voters - "Magdalena Biejat voters support Trzaskowski by 97.08%, and Nawrocki by only 2.92%".
- Krzysztof Stanowski voters - "Krzysztof Stanowski's electorate flows show that 65.17% support Nawrocki, and 34.83% support Trzaskowski".

• Voters who did not vote in the first round - "Among those who did not participate in the first round, 44.57% declare support for Trzaskowski, and 55.43% for Nawrocki".

According to a survey by the National Research Group (OGB, 2025), "Nawrocki is gaining decisive support among right-wing voters, particularly those associated with the Confederation and its sympathizers, such as voters of Mentzen, Braun, and Jakubiak. Trzaskowski, in turn, is consolidating support among centrist and left-wing voters, including supporters of Hołownia, Biejat, Zandberg, and Senyszyn, reflecting the profound ideological differences between these electorates. The results indicate that the mobilization of specific voter groups, especially in the context of political polarization, will be crucial for the outcome of the second round" (OGB). Furthermore, according to the conclusions of a poll conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center (Cybulska, 2025a; 2025b), voters of the selected candidates in the first round will vote similarly to the results of the other two polls (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Possible electorate flows from the first round of voting based on polls (CBOS)  
Source: Own study based on CBOS data

Electoral votes of candidates in the first round of the presidential election	Which candidate do you intend to vote for in the second round of the presidential elections? [%]			
	For Karol Nawrocki	For Rafał Trzaskowski	I don't know	I won't participate in the second round of the election
Rafał Trzaskowski	0	99	0	1
Karol Nawrocki	99	0	1	0
Sławomir Mentzen	58	12	10	20
Grzegorz Braun	86	2	5	7
Szymon Hołownia*	0	94	6	0
Adrian Zandberg*	6	82	9	3
Magdalena Biejat*	3	90	3	3
Pozostali kandydaci (łącznie)*	33	42	0	25
Niegłosujący w I turze wyborów prezydenckich	29	32	8	31

\*The results of Szymon Hołownia, Adrian Zandberg, Magdalena Biejat and the remaining candidates together (i.e. Krzysztof Stanowski, Joanna Senyszyn, Marek Jakubiak, Artur Bartoszewicz, Maciej Maciak and Marek Woch) should be treated with caution due to the small number of respondents declaring they would vote for them in the first round of the elections.

Based on the comparative analysis, it can be seen that Rafał Trzaskowski achieved the greatest percentage differences between rounds in cities (Table 2). Contrary to these results, Karol Nawrocki achieved the lowest percentage differences in cities and the highest in rural counties (Table 3).

**Table 2.** Percentage increase in support between the first and second round of elections for Trzaskowski in selected cities and counties

Source: own study based on data from <https://wybory.gov.pl/prezydent2025/pl/wynik/pl>

Counties	Trzaskowski I round (%)	Trzaskowski II round (%)	Difference
Poznań	44,16	72,73	28,57
Wrocław	39,67	67,09	27,42
Kraków	35,06	62,16	27,10
Gdańsk	43,33	70,03	26,70
Warszawa	42,27	68,21	25,94
poznański	43,64	67,49	23,85
Gdynia	46,67	69,94	23,27
hajnowski	33,31	55,83	22,52
gdański	39,42	61,83	22,41
Katowice	40,76	63,15	22,39
Sopot	50,30	72,52	22,22
Olsztyn	41,34	63,55	22,21
Pucki	36,03	58,18	22,15
Toruń	42,00	63,80	21,8
wrocławski	37,86	59,43	21,57
Chorzów	39,52	61,03	21,51
Siemianowice Śląskie	38,54	60,02	21,48
nowotomyski	35,04	56,18	21,14
Opole	46,81	67,89	21,08

**Table 3.** Percentage increase in support for Nawrocki between the first and second round of elections

Source: own study based on data from <https://wybory.gov.pl/prezydent2025/pl/wynik/pl>

Counties	Nawrocki I round (%)	Nawrocki II round (%)	Difference
łęczyński	39,54	73,48	33,94
siedlecki	46,97	80,84	33,87
strzyżowski	45,43	78,53	33,10
radzyński	43,08	76,12	33,04
lukowski	45,92	78,94	33,02
Biański	39,88	72,74	32,86
chełmski	41,35	74,16	32,81
Łosicki	45,43	78,16	32,73
łańcucki	43,84	76,25	32,41
ostrołęcki	44,31	76,34	32,03
ropczycko-sędziszowski	49,21	81,16	31,95
lubartowski	41,25	72,84	31,59
rzeszowski	43,57	75,14	31,57

suwalski	37,47	69,04	31,57
parczewski	38,47	70,00	31,53
lomżyński	48,93	80,34	31,41
moniecki	43,07	74,16	31,09
przeworski	45,99	77,00	31,01
przemyski	45,14	76,13	30,99

In the case of vote flow between candidates who made it to the second round and those who were eliminated, the phenomenon of "proximity voting" can be observed, i.e., choosing the candidate whose views are closest to the voter's (Singh and Roy, 2014). Significant polarization between right-wing and left-wing electorates is visible (Wielgosz, 2020). In many cases, this is not the first candidate a voter would have preferred, as strategic voting is very important in the Polish two-round electoral system. According to P. Pysiak (2006), strategic voting is a form of rational behavior by voters who make decisions based not only on their own preferences but also on predictions about the behavior of other voters and the election outcome. The goal is to vote not for the voter's candidate, but for a candidate with a chance of victory. Furthermore, it aims to prevent the voter from electing a candidate they disapprove of. Negative voting has a similar effect. In the case of a two-round system, in the second round, not only electoral preferences are crucial, but above all, voting "for the lesser evil"—not for the candidate who aligns most closely with the voter's views, but for one who is not their opponent, so that the opponent of a given viewpoint cannot win. This phenomenon is called negative voting (Więckowska, 2023).

In this election, as in previous ones, voters for the presidential candidate differed by place of residence, and here we are dealing with a classic "urban-rural" divide (Krzemiński, 2009). The better results of more liberal parties in cities are explained by the concentration of elites, traditions of the post-noble intelligentsia, greater spontaneity, and a high degree of socioeconomic development (Kowalski, 2000). Similarly, Matykowski (2010) pointed to the importance of the urban-rural divide. This phenomenon is also noticeable in the 2025 elections we analyzed, in which Rafał Trzaskowski, the Civic Coalition (PO) presidential candidate, achieved better results in cities than Karol Nawrocki. The situation is similar for Karol Nawrocki, except that the latter has significantly better support in small towns. This indicates a visible division between Poland A and Poland B, confirmed by T. Zarycki (2000) and M. Kowalski (2003), among others. The latter argues, and is reflected in literature and the media, that the division between Poland A and Poland B indicates not only economic and social differences but primarily different patterns of political behavior. Poland A is the area of larger cities and more developed regions, where liberal-progressive attitudes predominate, while Poland B comprises peripheral, rural, and post-industrial areas with a predominance of conservative attitudes (Kowalski, 2003). This division is also visible in the presidential election results (Figure 2).

### **What could be the reasons for the observed increase in the number of votes cast for candidates in the second round?**

There are many reasons for the increase in votes for both candidates. Primarily, due to the limitation of two candidates in the second round, voters

wishing to participate in the elections are forced to choose one of them or have their vote invalidated. The increase in voter turnout is due to increased turnout. Negative mobilization played a key role in voter engagement. However, as the campaign period between the two rounds demonstrated, voters were motivated by numerous campaigns to vote "against" the other candidate, which also influenced the turnout.

In the first round, turnout was 67.31%, and in the second round, 71.63%, making the difference in the total number of votes cast a significant 4.32%. This is likely due to the significant mobilization of voters by candidates who did not advance to the second round. The Internet, as has been the case for many years (Bógdał-Brzezińska & Gawrycki, 2003; Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2012), played a significant role in engaging voters in the campaign for each candidate (Owczarek et al., 2025). Currently, presidential campaigns have relied heavily on presenting their demands and views on social media. Millions of people (a significant portion of Polish society) were able to view the election manifesto online. Debates hosted on popular national television stations, which enjoyed high viewership, also played a significant role in mobilizing voters.

### **What mechanisms could have influenced the direction of voter migration?**

During the election campaign, each candidate presented their own platform. However, this campaign focused particularly on security, the state of healthcare, major infrastructure investments, foreign policy, migration, and the Ukrainian minority, which were also the subject of debates between the candidates.

Voter migration between rounds is therefore a result of many overlapping factors. A number of social, psychological, and political mechanisms influenced the decision-making of wavering voters. Concerns about potential armed conflict, the spread of the war in Ukraine, or other global threats (interestingly, the climate crisis was relatively insignificant compared to its importance) could have increased support for the candidate perceived by voters as capable of ensuring national security.

The issue of military and political aid for Ukraine was a polarizing factor. For some voters (especially conservative or nationalist voters), Poland's excessive involvement in this conflict could have been a reason to shift support to Karol Nawrocki. In turn, the more pro-European and pro-Solidarity electorate could have shifted its votes to Rafał Trzaskowski, who clearly supports Ukraine. Voter migration may therefore be a reaction to the candidates' stance on this issue, especially if the differences between them are clear.

A strong "anti-PiS" stance has been and continues to be one of the main mobilisers of the Polish electorate since 2023. Even if voters supported a different candidate in the first round, they could still vote for a candidate with a greater chance of defeating the PiS-backed candidate in the second round, simply to bring about a change of power in the presidential palace. This is a typical negative voting mechanism, which often generates large electoral shifts in the second round.

On the other hand, there is also an "anti-coalition" mechanism, meaning that some voters may fear a "solidification of power," leading to a president and prime minister from the same political party. For this reason, such a voter could

vote for a PiS-supported candidate in the second round, even though they had chosen a centrist or independent candidate in the first round. This is also a form of strategic voting, but on the other side of the political spectrum.

The shift in support could also result from specific programmatic proposals that the voter deemed most important at a given moment. These could include proposals to work on: increasing the tax-free allowance; increasing social assistance; changing housing policy; increasing public sector wages or healthcare policy.

Because the remaining candidates in the second round differed in their views on the issues mentioned above, some voters could switch their votes to the candidate whose program better suited their needs, regardless of their previous ideological preferences.

Issues such as LGBT rights, the role of the Church, sexual education, and the attitude toward traditional values had strong mobilizing and demobilizing potential. Conservative voters can mobilize en masse against a candidate perceived as too progressive, while liberal voters can do the opposite.

Some voters were guided primarily by ideological identification, so in the second round they could vote for the candidate who presented views closest to their own. For example, a Confederation voter could vote for neither of the two finalists, but could also, depending on their ideological emphasis, support one of them.

The state of the economy and the candidates' economic proposals were among the main rational factors influencing voter migration (Madej, 2023). While price increases, inflation, unemployment, mortgages, and financial support programs (e.g., the 800+ program, the thirteenth pension) did not significantly differentiate the two candidates, these are topics that directly affect the everyday lives of Poles. Therefore, voters chose based on whether they were more concerned about the crisis or more eager for reform. In this election, disinformation and polarization in the media's public debate had a significant impact on voters (Domalewska, 2021). Media involvement was evident in many ways, with media outlets clearly siding with one candidate rather than presenting information impartially. Foreign intelligence agencies and funds also intervened in the disinformation campaign.

## **CONCLUSION**

The official difference in the number of votes cast for the two candidates, as reported by the National Electoral Commission, was minimal: a mere 369,591 votes. Both candidates came close to winning the election. Ultimately, Karol Nawrocki won. The current President sits in the Palace thanks to millions of votes from people who didn't support him in the first round. His victory resulted primarily from the voters who believed there were better candidates in the first round. However, because their candidates didn't advance to the second round, they supported a candidate more congruent with their views. Karol Nawrocki didn't win because he was the best; he won to prevent Rafał Trzaskowski from winning. This mechanism also worked the other way around. In many cases, voters decided to participate in the second round solely to prevent Karol Nawrocki from winning. In the election, the majority of voters were voting for lesser evil, which fueled the campaigns of both camps and led to Nawrocki's ultimate victory. Nearly 370,000 votes were cast for lesser evil. More voters considered Karol Nawrocki a better candidate or the "lesser evil" than Rafał Trzaskowski.

The topic of electoral transfer between presidential election rounds is an extremely broad and complex topic, opening numerous research and analytical opportunities. Analyzing citizens' voting preferences between the first and second rounds of voting not only allows us to understand the mechanisms of voter decision-making but also provides valuable information on the effectiveness of election campaigns, the dynamics of candidate support, and the role of social, economic, and geographic factors in shaping election results.

Each of the aspects discussed in this analysis can be further explored and expanded. Detailed segmentation of the electorate is possible, for example, by age, gender, education, place of residence, or political involvement. This would enable more accurate identification of the social groups responsible for the transfer of support between candidates.

Spatial context is also an important and valuable complement to the analysis. Electoral data can be analyzed territorially. Analysis at the municipal level or even more detailed would be particularly interesting, as it allows for the identification of regional differences in voting behavior. Variations in support for individual candidates may stem from local socioeconomic conditions, political traditions, or the effectiveness of campaign campaigns in a given area. Further research would be particularly interesting to focus on local analysis, focusing on specific regions where significant shifts in support or unusual patterns of voting behavior have been observed. Such an approach would not only allow for a better understanding of local specifics but could also point to broader trends occurring across the country. This type of analysis could also provide a basis for modeling future electoral behavior and designing more effective electoral strategies.

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