

## **Background information to the podcast**

Election process in Poland was not expected to bring any surprises until Covid-19. In a [political trends forecast for 2020 published in January](#) Visegrad Insight expected a polarised campaign and slightly higher changes of the incumbent president. Nevertheless, as of autumn 2019 we have been signalling the importance of that vote for the future direction of Poland. In [Illiberal Twilight analysis \(Oct 2019\)](#) Visegrad Insight compared local election results in Hungary and Poland stating that: *PiS will be extremely exposed on both left and right flanks until May 2020, when the next presidential election is scheduled. The Polish constitution provisions a peculiar balance of legislative power between the presidential office and the parliament. The president's veto on any act passed by the Sejm can be overruled only by 60 per cent of votes of those present.* And yet, [Are We Sovereign? \(Dec 2019\)](#) analysis on information sovereignty of Poland ahead of 2020 elections, reported next to zero efforts of the government to secure vulnerable information space, assessing that there are *grounds to assume that disinformation strategies will also be used in the Polish campaign – and if any of the parties to the political dispute believes that they can be used only for their own benefit, they may experience a big surprise.*

Visegrad Insight re-opened the topic of elections after the pandemic broke out. As of April 2020 we alarmed about excessive increase of powers that went beyond saving lives. Power grabs [analysis of electoral code changes](#) provided an initial assessment. In another text [Kaczynski vs the People \(Apr 2020\)](#) Visegrad Insight provided an explainer of PiS ruling party motivations to push forward with elections and provided possible political scenarios that also highlighted international security context. In a policy article that followed shortly we also highlighted [the key problems with the electoral campaign and concluded with recommendations for NATO and EU partners](#). A day after election day we provided [short commentary that outlined possible results of no-vote and political trajectories](#).

## **Visegrad Insight Zoom events on Polish elections**

As of 16 March all our community events (a series of off-the-record meetings titled [Visegrad Insight Breakfasts](#), our CEE network chats with authors, editors and fellows, as well as conferences) were instantly moved online to Zoom. List of events which discussed Polish Presidential election:

- 31 March, 9:30AM CET, Free and Democratic Institutions in Lockdown, Edit Zgut, DemocraCE fellow at Visegrad Insight from Hungary, Daniel Smilov, Program Director at the Bulgarian Centre for Liberal Strategies, and Ann Cathrin Riedel, Chairwoman of LOAD e.V. (Visegrad Insight Breakfast)
- 27 April, 4PM CET, Visegrad Insight on the Polish presidential election, with Łukasz Lipiński, Editor-in-Chief, Polityka.pl, Marcin Zaborowski, Editor-in-Chief, Res Publica Nowa (Visegrad Insight Network video-chat)
- 8 May, 4PM CET, What has happened with the Polish election? with Helena Chmielewska-Szlajfer, Assistant Professor at the Department of International Management at Kozminski University, and Spasimir Domaradzki, Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Relations at Lazarski University (Visegrad Insight Network video-chat)

## **Comments on election by Visegrad Insight to other outlets**

- 22 April, EUObserver, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/148133> op-ed elaborated further in Visegrad Insight "Kaczynski vs the People" article
- 27 April [FT.com](#) Poland plans presidential poll in midst of pandemic, <https://www.ft.com/content/107700e1-f857-4954-9891-9d5318a35c5a>, "If the opposition had the presidency, it would be more or less a draw [between them and Law and Justice]," said Wojciech Przybylski, head of Visegrad Insight, a think-tank. "It would be difficult for the country because there would be a lot of conflict . . . But at the same time, no decision could be made without compromise, and that would be healthy."
- 13 May ICWA podcast "Ghost elections" <https://www.icwa.org/the-cable-podcast-polands-ghost-election/>
- 13 May ICWA <https://www.icwa.org/poland-ghost-election-lessons-for-democracy/> "It's not about whether the mail-in vote is less or more dangerous, it's about changing the rules and bending the roles according to one's immediate political needs," Wojciech

Przybylski, editor-in-chief of the Warsaw-based journal Visegrad Insight, told me via phone the week before the "ghost" election. "It's a little bit like gerrymandering, but with a pandemic... you play with electoral processes in order to secure yourself an electoral win."