Politics



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Poland Analysis: Risk of anti-government protests to persist amid PM Tusk's judicial reform attempts, following tensions at TK in Warsaw on October 30-31

Current Situation

- Hundreds of right-wing protesters, primarily supporters of the right-wing opposition Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc (PiS) party, gathered outside Trybunał Konstytucyjny (TK), Poland’s Constitutional Tribunal, in Warsaw during the evening (local time) of October 30. The protest followed the reported suspension of TK President Bogdan Swieczkowski and Vice-President Bartlomiej Sochanski.
- PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski addressed the demonstrators, who accused PM Donald Tusk’s government of staging a “coup d’etat” by attempting to take control of the court unlawfully. Some protesters chanted anti-government slogans, including “Tusk traitor”, while others displayed Catholic religious symbols.
- Tensions escalated as demonstrators attempted to breach security barriers and enter the TK grounds. Police reported that protesters threw objects at officers and detained three people who entered the court complex by crossing the perimeter fence. Riot police were deployed around the building to secure the premises and prevent further incursions.
- Police were deployed following concerns raised by TK judge Anna Korwin-Piotrowska about potential threats to the safety of judges and staff and the risk of public disorder. Justice Minister Waldemar Zurek also requested police intervention. Seven judges elected by parliament in 2026 were reportedly escorted into the TK grounds by the State Protection Service, further

intensifying the confrontation.
- The unrest remained concentrated around the TK premises, with attempts to breach security barriers and confrontations with police. Available reporting indicates localized unrest rather than sustained, widespread violence across Warsaw.
- Polish President Karol Nawrocki cut short his official trip to Senegal and returned to Warsaw late on October 30 and entered the TK building in the early hours of October 31, accompanied by presidential officials and security personnel. Video footage showed him pushing past individuals attempting to block his entry, triggering a heated verbal confrontation with Judge Anna Korwin-Piotrowska and other judges elected by the current parliamentary majority. Nawrocki rejected their claim to judicial office, while Korwin-Piotrowska maintained that she was leading the Tribunal following the suspension of its president and vice-president.
- The confrontation prompted competing accusations of physical aggression and unlawful obstruction. Government legal adviser Maciej Berek accused Nawrocki of physically pushing Korwin-Piotrowska and other judges, while the president's spokesperson accused those inside the building of unlawfully obstructing the president. Police remained deployed around the premises as the dispute over the Tribunal's leadership continued.

Source: NotesfromPoland

Background

- The escalation follows a prolonged dispute between Tusk's government and President Karol Nawrocki over the composition and functioning of the TK. The current government has challenged the Tribunal's legitimacy, citing irregularities in judicial appointments under the previous PiS government, which governed Poland from 2015 to 2023.
- In March 2026, parliament began filling vacant TK positions, electing six judges on March 13. Four took their oaths in parliament on April 9 after Nawrocki, who is backed by PiS, declined to invite them to the presidential palace, while another took the oath at the palace in July. Parliament subsequently elected two more judges, bringing the total to eight. Nawrocki refused to administer the oath to five, citing concerns over their qualifications and selection. These judges instead took their oaths in parliament and submitted the relevant documents to the president's office.
- The dispute centers on whether the president can block elected judges by refusing to administer their oaths. The government-backed judges argue that he has no such discretion, while Nawrocki and the incumbent TK leadership maintain that judges sworn in without his presence cannot exercise their functions. TK President Bogdan Swieczkowski, appointed under the previous PiS government, refused to admit the five judges. In May, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) issued interim measures requiring Polish authorities not to obstruct four judges from assuming their duties, but Swieczkowski rejected the court's authority.
- Tensions intensified in October. On October 14, Maciej Berek became the fifth judge to take his oath in parliament without Nawrocki's presence. On October 16, all eight judges elected in 2026 called for measures to restore the Tribunal's lawful functioning and accused its leadership of arbitrarily restricting their access.
- On October 30, judge Anna Korwin-Piotrowska, one of the judges elected in 2026 but not sworn in by Nawrocki, announced the one-month suspension of Swieczkowski and Vice-President Bartlomiej Sochanski and declared that she was taking charge of the Tribunal. Justice Minister Waldemar Zurek separately requested the lifting of their judicial immunity to enable criminal proceedings. Swieczkowski rejected the suspension as a "coup d'etat". The disputed legality of the suspension and competing claims to control the TK triggered protests by PiS supporters and a police deployment around the premises in Warsaw.

Assessments & Forecast

Swieczkowski's suspension marks notable progression in Tusk's judicial reform attempts, which is likely to escalate already heightened tensions with President Nawrocki

1. The development marks a notable escalation in PM Tusk's attempts at enforce judicial reforms, aimed at mainly aimed at reversing the changes introduced by the previous PiS government. Indeed, judicial reforms have remained a prominent and divisive political issue in Poland, with the PiS government's judicial changes drawing sustained criticism from the European Union (EU) over concerns about political influence on the judiciary and the rule of law. The EU launched legal proceedings against Poland, withheld funding, and initiated an Article 7 procedure in response.
2. Reforms to the TK remain particularly contentious because the court reviews the constitutionality of legislation and its composition can directly affect the government's ability to implement its agenda. For example, in 2024, erstwhile Polish President Andrzej Duda referred Tusk's proposed reforms to the National Council of the Judiciary to the TK for review, delaying their implementation. The Tribunal has also played a significant role in contentious social policy, including its 2020 ruling, delivered when PiS was in power, which effectively imposed a near-total ban on abortion. Since taking office in December 2023, Tusk's government has sought to restore judicial independence and address the EU's concerns. However, resistance from PiS and President Nawrocki, backed by PiS, has hindered these efforts and prolonged the dispute over judicial appointments and the TK's composition, leading to the latest escalation.
3. Additionally, the latest developments reinforce already heightened tensions between President Nawrocki and Tusk's government, which extend beyond judicial reform. Nawrocki has repeatedly obstructed the government's legislative agenda, vetoing 45 laws during his first year in office and arguing that several proposals threaten Poland's constitutional order, national interests, or traditional values. Recent disputes include Nawrocki's veto of legislation enabling Poland to access approximately EUR 43.7 billion in EU defense loans, which he argued would increase national debt and dependence on Brussels, and his July 2026 veto of civil partnership legislation that would have introduced legal protections for unmarried couples, including same-sex partners. He has also signaled opposition to proposed abortion law changes approved by parliament in October 2026.
4. **FORECAST:** The stand-off is expected to persist, as the governing coalition lacks the three-fifths majority required to override a presidential veto. Nawrocki is therefore likely to continue blocking legislation, prolonging disputes over the government's policy agenda. Despite these heightened tensions, impeachment proceedings against Nawrocki are also unlikely, as formally indicting the president requires a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, which the governing coalition lacks.

Heightened tensions to prompt recurring protests in coming days and weeks, carrying elevated risk of unrest

1. **FORECAST:** Against the backdrop of entrenched political tensions, recurring protests by both pro- and anti-government groups are expected in Warsaw and other major cities, including Krakow, Wroclaw, Poznan, Gdansk, Katowice, Lodz, Szczecin and Lublin, over the coming days and weeks. This is supported by the fact that on October 31, the opposition PiS party called for a major demonstration outside the TK headquarters at 12A Aleja Jana Szucha in Warsaw. While the exact timing of the protest is not announced, PiS is urging supporters to travel to the capital and help arrange transportation. Turnout is expected in the low to mid-thousands, with potential for higher attendance given PiS's strong mobilizational capacity and the immediate political significance of the dispute.
2. **FORECAST:** The polarizing nature of the issue increases the potential for counter-protests by pro-government groups, although no such demonstrations had been announced as of writing. Given heightened political tensions, clashes during the October 30 demonstration and the potential for competing groups to converge near the TK, there is a risk of localized unrest at this protest. This is

likely to manifest as verbal confrontations, attempts to breach police cordons, physical altercations between opposing demonstrators, and clashes between protesters and police.

3. **FORECAST:** The risk of escalation in protest activity and associated unrest is likely to increase if further unilateral decisions concerning the TK's leadership are announced in the coming days, or if the October 31 demonstration results in significant unrest, particularly if police use force against protesters. Beyond TK headquarters, potential flashpoints for short-notice or spontaneous protests include the Presidential Palace, the Sejm (Polish Parliament), the Prime Minister's Chancellery, and prominent public squares such as Plac Zamkowy and Plac Bankowy.

Russian disinformation operations likely to intensify, fueling public distrust and fears of institutional breakdown and political instability

1. **FORECAST:** Separately, against the backdrop of Poland's heightened security posture amid persistent Russian espionage, sabotage and information operations, the potential for Moscow to intensify efforts to exploit the current political confrontation remains elevated. Russia is likely to exploit the dispute through information operations intended to deepen political polarization, undermine public confidence in Polish institutions and portray the country as politically unstable. This aligns with Moscow's established hybrid warfare tactics, with similar campaigns documented elsewhere in Europe, including France, Germany, Moldova, and the Baltic countries, among others, during periods of heightened political tension.
2. **FORECAST:** Russian-linked accounts are expected to amplify footage of clashes, competing claims of a coup and allegations of constitutional violations to reinforce narratives of institutional breakdown and intensify divisions between supporters of Tusk and Nawrocki. This is evidenced by the fact that in July 2026, Polish security officials warned that Russian information operations were using trolls and bots to amplify domestic divisions, while authorities also reported detaining individuals accused of organizing demonstrations among Ukrainian refugees as part of a Russian influence operation.
3. Such activity is likely to intensify public distrust, reinforce competing claims of political illegitimacy and increase the potential for further mobilization by opposing political groups. By amplifying provocative or misleading accounts of confrontations, Moscow is also likely to complicate the government's efforts to manage the crisis and weaken public confidence in Poland's democratic institutions.

Recommendations

1. Those operating or residing in Poland are advised to keep abreast of political developments and announcements concerning judicial reforms, given the elevated potential for associated protests.
2. Maintain heightened vigilance near protest locations due to the elevated risk of unrest and confrontations with police. Exercise caution near the Constitutional Tribunal, Presidential Palace, Sejm, and Prime Minister's Chancellery, where demonstrations and associated security measures can occur on short notice in the coming days and weeks.
3. Monitor announcements by opposition parties and political leaders for indications of further demonstrations or counter-protests, particularly in Warsaw and near key government and judicial institutions.
4. Remain vigilant against misleading information circulating online about the confrontation, particularly unverified claims of violence or institutional breakdown, which are likely to intensify political tensions.
5. For further information on the threat environment, security risk assessments, travel security or organizational security planning, contact intel@max-security.com.

6. If you haven’t yet received our updates and other reporting amid the current escalation, or would like to receive more details, join our WhatsApp community