Analyzing an election: A shift in Polish politics

1. Political landscape

Discuss these questions with a partner:

- What do you know about the political system in Poland or other European countries?
- In your country, what are the main roles of the President and the Prime Minister? Do they share power?
- What are some of the key political issues in Europe at the moment?
- How can a presidential election in one country affect its neighbors or the wider European Union?

2. Vocabulary: The language of politics

Match the political terms on the left with their definitions on the right. These words will appear in the video.

1. **Pivotal**	a. To prevent someone from making progress
2. **Setback**	b. The person who currently holds an official position

3. **Incumbent**	c. Eager to argue or fight
4. **To stymie**	d. Making laws or rules less strict
5. **Veto**	e. Of crucial importance in relation to the development of something
6. **In the ascendancy**	f. A problem that delays or prevents progress
7. **Liberalizing**	g. The power to reject a law passed by a legislative body
8. **Combative**	h. Becoming more powerful or popular

3. Video: A new president for Poland

> Watch the news report about the Polish presidential election and answer the questions below.

1. Who won the election and what is his profession?
2. Why is the result described as a "major setback" for the prime minister, Donald Tusk?
3. Even though the president's office is "largely ceremonial," what important power does the holder of the office have?
4. What two examples of pro-EU legislation has the incumbent president, Andrzej Duda, blocked?
5. According to the correspondent, how will this election result likely re-energize the main opposition party?
6. What is the new president's stance on Ukraine joining NATO and the EU? Why does he hold this position?
7. How is the new president expected to interact with the EU in Brussels?

Watch the video on YouTube

4. Post-listening: Political phrases

> The correspondent uses several idiomatic phrases. What do you think they mean in the context of the report? Discuss with a partner.

- "There are no question marks about how tight it is..."
- "...cementing its place in the European mainstream..."
- "...flew during the campaign for basically a thumbs up photograph..."
- "...he'll be much more pushy in terms of his relationship with Brussels..."
- "A more combative relationship with Brussels is to be expected."

5. Grammar focus: Hedging and speculation

When analyzing politics, commentators often use **hedging language** to speculate about future events or to report information cautiously. This avoids making absolute statements about things that are not yet certain.

Common hedging techniques include:

- **Modal verbs:** *will likely, may, could, might* (e.g., "His victory **will likely** re-energize his supporters.")
- **Adverbs:** *reportedly, allegedly, apparently, probably* (e.g., "He **reportedly** supports continued assistance to Ukraine.")
- **Verbs of speculation:** *seems, appears, tends to, is expected to* (e.g., "A more combative relationship **is to be expected**.")
- **Distancing phrases:** *According to sources, It is said that..., There is a sense that...*

Rewrite these definitive statements using hedging language to make them sound more like political analysis.

1. The new president will block all government legislation.
   → The new president _____ all government legislation.
2. Poland is moving away from the European mainstream.
   → It _____ that Poland is moving away from the European mainstream.
3. The opposition party will win the next parliamentary election.
   → The opposition party _____ the next parliamentary election.
4. His relationship with Brussels will be difficult.
   → There is a high _____ his relationship with Brussels will be difficult.
5. This result changes the political direction of the country.
   → This result _____ change the political direction of the country.

6. Useful phrases for political analysis

Here are some useful phrases for discussing election results and their consequences. Categorize them under the correct headings below.

The result is a major setback for...

This is a clear win for the opposition.

In the short term, we can expect...   This paves the way for...

The key takeaway is that...   Looking ahead, this could lead to...

This signals a significant shift towards...

The government will be stymied by...

Describing the result:

- _____
- _____

Explaining the immediate impact:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Predicting future consequences:

- _____
- _____
- _____

7. Role-play: Political commentary panel

Imagine you are on a political news program discussing the Polish election results. Work in groups of 3-4 and take on the following roles.

Roles:

- **News Anchor:** Leads the discussion, asks questions, and keeps the conversation moving.
- **Analyst 1 (Pro-government):** Tries to downplay the severity of the election loss for Donald Tusk's government. Argues that cooperation is still possible.

- **Analyst 2 (Pro-opposition):** Views the result as a major victory and a sign that the country wants a change in direction. Is optimistic about the opposition's future.
- **EU Affairs Expert:** Focuses on the implications for Poland's relationship with Brussels, Germany, and France, as well as the war in Ukraine.

Discussion points:

1. What does this result mean for day-to-day politics in Poland?
2. How will this affect Poland's standing within the EU?
3. What are the potential consequences for European support for Ukraine?
4. What does this election signal about the mood of the Polish voters?

Try to use the vocabulary, phrases, and hedging language from today's lesson in your discussion.